Service-Learning: From Concepts to Contexts

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Guiding Questions

- What is service-leaning? What is it not?
- What elements are critical to successful service-learning programming?
- What learning outcomes can be expected from service-learning projects?
- Does service-learning belong in our current educational environment?

What is Service-Learning? Some definitions...

A method under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs, that [are] integrated into the students' academic curriculum or provide structured time for [reflection, and] that enhance what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community..." (Corporation for National and Community Service, 1990)

Another definition...

Service learning is a form of experiential education that combines structured opportunities for learning academic skills, reflection on the normative dimensions of civic life, and experiential activity that addresses community needs or assists individuals, families, and communities in need (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

One More...

A teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities (National Service Learning Clearing House, 2005).
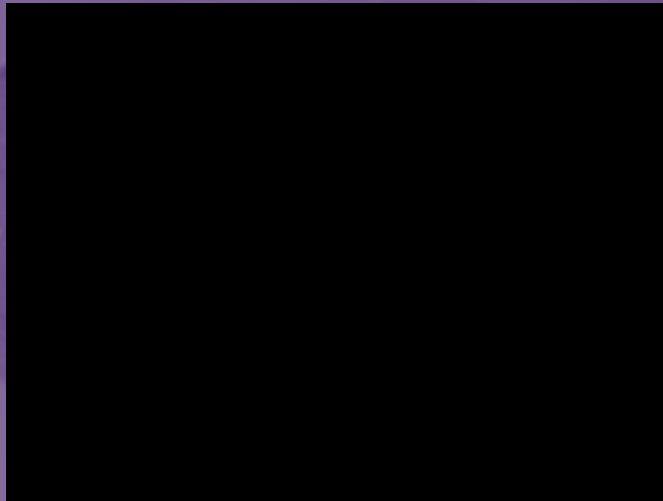
Service-Learning Wordle

Non-Definitions

- Internship
- Volunteerism
- Community Service
- Charity Work

A Video From Learn and Serve America

Elements of Success Service-Learning Projects/Programs

1. Balance between SERVICE and LEARNING
2. Direct link to curriculum with clear learning objectives
3. Teacher training, preparation, and delivery
4. Student voice
5. School, family, and community partnerships

Proven Service-Learning Outcomes

Research shows that service-learning can:

- Increase student engagement
- Incorporate research on effective instruction
- Increase academic performance, even on standardized tests
- Improve higher-order thinking skills
- Initiate deeper personal and social skill development (Social and Emotional Learning Standards)

Additional outcomes:

- Improve ties to schools, communities, and society
- Invite meaningful career exploration
- Increase community involvement in schools
- Improve overall school culture and environment
- Invigorate teachers and students in new and exciting learning opportunities

Does Service-Learning Belong in Our Current Educational Environment?

- There is still only weak scientific evidence that links service-learning and student academic achievement.
  - Gains are being made yearly
  - The issue is in methodology (Michigan example)
  - Definitional issues and overemphasis on program descriptions
  - Seeking a place in the "What Works Clearinghouse"

Does it belong... (cont.)

- What about NCLB?
  - Repeated provisions for service-learning in NCLB (but there's a catch):
    - Innovative programs
    - Gifted and talented
    - Drug and violence prevention programs
    - At-risk children (mentoring)
    - Character education
    - Small learning communities
    - Community Learning Centers (CLC's)
    - Civic education
    - Consumer, economic, personal finance ed.

  Adapted from Gent (2007)

Some Personal Examples:

C&I 401—Teaching in a Diverse Society:

Community Experience Project

East Central Illinois Refugee Mutual Assistance Center (ECIRMAC)

- Provides services to immigrants (limited and non-English speaking)
  - Assistance with life needs
  - Preparation for citizenship testing
  - Advocacy for children in schools

ECIRMAC Needs Assessment:

- Citizenship preparation (mid-week)
- Children's tutoring (Saturdays)
- Public Relations/Media (website, video, print, etc.)
- Fundraising (state budget woes)

Resulting Projects

Another Personal Example:

- Service and Community Course / Senior Service-Learning Project
  - A small rural high school near C-U (under 200 students)
  - All juniors take a semester-long course where they:
    - Analyze social problems and their personal reactions to them
    - Explain and critique the responses of service organizations and governmental agencies to these social problems
    - Apply academic knowledge, personal skills, and social skills to addressing a recognized need in their community
    - Develop a senior service-learning project

Just One More (only for sake of time)

- Community Reads…Read It, Love It, Share It, Pass It
  - Jefferson Elementary School (Charleston)
  - The Project:
    - Each year, a work of children's literature which addresses social problems, community service, and selflessness is selected by teachers and read by all students in every classroom
    - A Service-Learning committee (one student from each class) proposes whole school community service projects that mirror the issue(s) addressed in the book.

Just One More (cont.)

- The Project (cont.)
  - 300 to 500 copies of the book are purchased and distributes by the students throughout the community (read it and pass it on).
  - All books are accompanied by a questionnaire that asks community members to identify related community needs and how Jefferson students can help to address these problems.
  - Students engage in a media blitz to promote their reading initiative and the resulting service project that emerges
  - Three intense periods of student reflection occur (while reading, after media blitz, after performance of service project)

Resources

- National Service-Learning Clearinghouse: (http://servicelearning.org)
- ISBE Service-Learning Resources: (http://www.isbe.net/curriculum/service_learning/html/resources.htm)
- International Consultant, Cathryn Berger Kaye: (http://www.abcdbooks.org/)
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