

SERVICE-LEARNING

In support of *This We Believe* characteristic:

- School-initiated family and community partnerships
- Students and teachers engaged in active learning
- Curriculum that is relevant, challenging, integrative, and exploratory

Service-learning is a teaching and learning method that connects meaningful, community service experiences with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility (Shumer & Duckenfield, 2004). Learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection, which may occur through reading, writing, speaking, listening, and drawing, among other activities (Dewey, 1938; Eyer, 2001; Kolb, 1984). Service-learning extends the classroom to the community, where young adolescents apply their knowledge in a safe, collaborative, developmentally responsive environment (Fertman, White, & White, 2002; Leming, 2001; Pate, 2005; Scales & Blyth, 1997; Schine, 1997). Students, faculty, school, community organizations, or special events most often initiate community involvement. Unlike volunteering, service-learning involves active learning of content knowledge and skills while helping others (Astin & Sax, 1998; Epstein, 2005; Eyer & Giles, 1999; Furco, 2002).

Academic achievement

Service-learning connects the personal and intellectual as it helps students understand their world (Eyer & Giles, 1999). "Service-learning involves students in solving community problems, and at the same time, helps them learn and apply reading, writing, math, science, and social studies" (Fiske, 2002, p. 4). Numerous studies indicate that participation in quality service-learning experiences positively impact students' engagement and academic learning (Akujobi & Simmons, 1997; Billig, 2004; Billig & Klute, 2003; Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Klute & Billig, 2002; Melchior, 1999). Based on his study of more than 1,000 sixth graders, Scales (1999) indicated that at least 30 hours of service- and connected-learning supported by intentioned preparation, integration, and reflection by informed service-learning faculty resulted in significant benefits to young adolescent learning and behavior. However, service-learning's impact on course grades was mixed (Astin & Sax, 1998; Vogelgesang & Astin, 2000). Quality of orientation and supervision of students at the service-learning site greatly influences its effect (Eyer & Giles, 1999). Kielsmeier, Scales, Roehlkepartain, and Neal (2004) reported that 8 of 10 principals in schools that offer service-learning indicate a positive impact on academic achievement, teacher satisfaction, school climate, school engagement,

and the community's view of youth as resources. Strage (2000) suggested that service-learning groups demonstrated increased ability on essay questions, perhaps due to the journal keeping and more explicit reflective connections to community contexts. One national dropout prevention report (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Wulsin, 2008) indicated that service-learning demonstrates potential for addressing the dropout problem due to its focus on engagement in authentic contexts.

Civic Responsibility

Civic responsibility is strengthened by participation in service-learning in middle school, high school, and college (Morgan & Streb, 2001; Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2005; Shumer, 1994). Students engaged in service-learning demonstrate increased understanding of community needs (Melchior, 1999) and cultural and racial diversity issues (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyer & Giles, 1999; Theriot, 2006). Service-learning provides a strategy, as articulated in *Turning Points 2000: Educating Adolescents in the 21st Century*, to "involve parents and communities in supporting student learning and healthy development" (Jackson & Davis, 2000, p. 24). Students are more apt to vote and become politically active if they participate in service-learning activities (Morgan & Streb, 2001). In *Growing to Great 2008*, Billig and Weah (2008) reported that in schools where service-learning is present, 86% of these principals cite its positive effect on the larger community's view of youth as resources, and 92% of principals cite its positive impact on civic engagement.

Personal Development

Engagement in service-learning impacts the way students see themselves and others. Studies show positive effects on at-risk students in danger of failing (Follman, 1998) and in reducing teen pregnancy (Kirby, 2001; Melchior, 1999). Service-learning promotes students' engagement in further service to their communities and demonstrates a reduction in middle school student arrests and absenteeism (Melchior, 1999; Morgan & Streb, 2001). Middle school students gain a sense of responsibility and self-identity as they collaborate with team members and positive adult role models in service activities (Leming, 2001; Scales et al., 2000). Students involved in service-learning demonstrate increased self-esteem and self-efficacy (Scales et al., 2000).



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Middle Grades

Service-learning in the middle grades includes: (a) preparation as students, teachers, and community collaborate; (b) service activities that respond to real, meaningful, community needs; (c) reflection that occurs continuously and connects service activities and learning outcomes; and (d) celebration and assessment of students' academic, personal, and civic growth (Fertman et al., 2002). These service activities address young adolescents' need for connection and feeling valued (Scales et al., 2000). Many state departments of education institute service-learning in middle schools. One example is the Maryland Student Service Alliance (2004), which created *The Middle School Service-Learning Instructional Framework*.

More recent efforts involving focus groups with faculty, students, administrators, and community partners from across the nation have resulted in the National K–12 Service Learning Standards for Quality Practice (Billig & Weah, 2008). These standards call for (a) meaningful service; (b) link to the curriculum; (c) reflection; (d) diversity; (e) youth voice; (f) partnerships; (g) progress monitoring; and (h) duration and intensity (pp. 8–15).

Challenges

Possible challenges to incorporating service-learning in classrooms may include time and effort required to establish community partnerships and to change course strategies. Also, some individuals express concern that time spent integrating service-learning may detract from covering core material. Finally, the uncertainty about depth and breadth of academic advantages of service-learning cause concern with some beginning practitioners (Hill et al., 2003).

Conclusion

National calls for creating an informed citizenry (Boyer, 1994; National Middle School Association, 2003) and various national legislative initiatives have brought service and service-learning to national attention. In particular, the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 created national agencies to focus on the integration of service-learning and volunteering at all levels of education and the many community agencies. The recent Serve America Act of 2008 expands volunteer opportunities for Americans of all ages and supports non-profits and private groups that serve. As service-learning increases in popularity in our nation's schools and communities, there remain calls for increased rigor in quantitative and qualitative research to add to the research literature. Finally, while service-learning programs have the capacity to enhance academic achievement, personal development, and social responsibility, school and local community climate and dynamics are vital in creating successful educational experiences (Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2005).

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Campus Compact. (2003). *Introduction to service-learning toolkit: Readings and resources for faculty* (2nd ed.). Providence, RI: Author.

This revised edition of *Introduction to Service-Learning Toolkit* is an essential resource for faculty and administrators in higher education. It brings together the best, most up-to-date writing and resources on service-learning, from learning theory and pedagogy to practical guidance implementing service-learning in the classroom.

Eyler, J., & Giles, D. (1999). *Where's the learning in service-learning?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This seminal volume initiated the study of service-learning as a pedagogical model addressing rigorous learning outcomes. It raises practitioner awareness of learning expectations necessary in service-learning experiences and aligns these with personal and interpersonal development. The authors present the transformative results of student involvement in community engagement, reflective practice, and critical thinking, as well as data, which supports strengthening the place for academic service-learning as part of the academic mission of higher education.

Kielsmeier, J. C., Neal, M., Schultz, N., & Leeper, T. J. (2008). *Growing to greatness 2008: The state of service-learning project*. St. Paul, MN: National Youth Leadership Council. Retrieved June 24, 2009, from http://www.nylc.org/objects/publications/8030548_Body.pdf

These reports are an annual forum for compiling and disseminating research regarding the value of service-learning and the impact of successful implementation strategies. The value of youth to society is emphasized, state descriptions of service-learning activities are presented, and national organizations are profiled.

Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning. Available at www.umich.edu/~mjcsl

Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning (MJCSL) is a national, peer-reviewed journal consisting of articles written by faculty and service-learning educators about research, theory, pedagogy, and issues pertinent to the service-learning community. This journal provides current research on development, implementation, and refinement of academic service-learning, campus-community partnerships, and engaged scholarship. It also seeks to support and increase the sophistication of practitioners' work and can provide middle grades faculty and administrators with insight, teaching strategies, and research support for implementing academic service-learning at their middle school.



RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Campus Compact website. <http://www.campuscompat.org/>

Campus Compact is a national coalition of nearly 1,200 college and university presidents. Its purpose is to promote community service, civic engagement, and service-learning in higher education. The site contains model syllabi, lesson plans, research resources, avenues for publishing regarding service-learning, and strategies for sustaining partnerships and communities of engagement.

The Corporation for National and Community Service website. <http://www.nationalservice.gov/>

The corporation sponsors two websites with valuable information for teachers of service-learning. The first website, <http://www.learnandserve.org>, offers information on service-learning and classroom resources, Students in Service to America Guidebook, and funding sources among many other resources. The second website, <http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/>, links to building blocks for practitioners of effective service programs filled with online resources, publications, and effective practices for projects.

Kaye, C. B. (2004). *The complete guide to service learning: Proven, practical ways to engage students in civic responsibility, academic curriculum, & social action*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

A practical teacher resource that addresses answers to integrating service-learning in the curriculum, cross-curricular activities, a general resource list, and much more.

Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse website. <http://www.servicelearning.org/>

NSLC is the nation's most comprehensive service-learning resource. It contains fact sheets, project descriptions, implementation strategies, list of publications, among many other resources for service-learning practitioners.

National Youth Leadership Council website. <http://www.nylc.org>

National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) is one of the oldest organizations in the nation to advocate for youth service-learning and community service. This website offers teaching resources and information about NYLC's annual national conference and professional development opportunities for teachers. Additionally, middle school faculty interested in integrating service-learning can find K-12 National Standards for Quality Practice.

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CITATION

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