

Research Brief

Service-Learning

Question:

What is service-learning and how can students and community benefit from it?

Summary of Findings:

In a Nutshell

With the pressure of covering all of the content, passing tests, meeting standards and making AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress), how is it realistically feasible to make learning more meaningful so that students are able to take it and utilize it in real life? There is no panacea, however, one way to help support students in this is through service-learning.

There is a tradition in the United States of making substantive contributions to the community dating back to the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corps) from the 1930s. With President Kennedy's inspiring words, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country," and the implementation of the Peace Corps, many Americans made service to the local and global communities a priority. Under President Johnson and the introduction of VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), the National Teacher Corps and the Job Corps, the practice of service continued. More recently under President George Bush, the Points of Light Foundation and from President Clinton's administration, the Corporation for National and Community Service, were put into action. As recently as 2005, the youth of America had contributed 1.3 billion hours of service to communities (*What is Service-Learning?*).

The goal of service-learning is to logically connect the curriculum to a service activity where students are actively engaged in a complex and meaningful project. In turn, this project involvement demands that they take the content information and apply it to a real-life problem and/or issue.

Research has found that benefits from service-learning include: 1) improvement in grades, 2) higher attendance rates, 3) lowers drop-out rates, 4) development of personal and social responsibility, 5) builds positive and collaborative relationships between students and teachers and students and the community, 6) reverses student disengagement, 7) provides more motivation for learning, 8) develops a sense of civic and democratic awareness and responsibility, 9) fewer behavior problems, 10) exposure to different careers, and 11) crosses cultural and class barriers. Studies also found that students with higher GPAs were more likely to participate in school-service programs than those with lower ones; students in private schools were more likely to contribute time to service than those in public schools; and those who participated in service programs and came from low SES backgrounds, tended to make higher grades and had smaller achievement gaps than their non-participating peers (*Educating for Active Citizenship: Service-learning, School-based service, and Civic Engagement*).

Successful service-learning programs have the following characteristics:

- link content and standards
- part of a course of study and school day
- students help determine and meet the community needs
- reciprocal for the school, students and community
- solve complex and meaningful problems
- cooperative
- sustained duration, about 40 hours over a school year
- reflection on what will be done, how it was done and personal responses to the work

Service-learning is not:

- unrelated to content
- periodic volunteer program
- an add-on requirement
- must do it in order to graduate
- 1 sided
- competitive

Getting started:

- solicit buy-in from all stakeholders, including staff, teachers, students and community
- talk with community about their needs, problems and ideas then form partnerships
- motivate and educate students as to the benefits of service-learning
- provide on-going training and support for staff
- set goals and establish curriculum
- establish how goals will be assessed
- obtain financial support

Some ideas of service-learning projects:

- interview and document life histories of older adults in the community
- create and maintain a service-learning website for the school
- develop a monthly e-newsletter about the school's service-learning programs
- deliver groceries to local people who are shut-in
- establish mentor programs such as seniors mentor freshman and/or seniors are mentored by college students and provide training in mentoring skills
- conduct environmental studies (i.e. measure pollutants in water, etc.)
- design a community area (i.e. skate park, flower garden, etc.)

Resources:

- About service learning
This piece provides a brief overview of what service-learning is.
http://www.service-learningpartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=SL_index

- Educating for active citizenship: Service-learning, school-based service, and civic engagement
This is a fact sheet from data gathered about student participation in school-based service and service-learning activities.
http://www.nationalservice.org/pdf/06_0323_SL_briefing_factsheet.pdf
- Environmental service-learning programs in Florida high schools and colleges: Nature, status, effects as determined by a statewide census
These “authors describe environmental service-learning (SL) programs in Florida high schools and colleges through a statewide program...”
http://firstsearch.oclc.org/WebZ/FTFETCH?sessionid=fsapp8-36698-fcnogyso-rkfldy:entitypagenum=8:0:rule=100:fetchtype=fulltext:dbname=WilsonSelectPlus_FT:rcno=4:resultset=2:ftformat=PDF:format=BI:isbillable=TRUE:numrecs=1:isdirectarticle=FALSE:entityemailfullrecno=4:entityemailfullresultset=2:entityemailftfrom=WilsonSelectPlus_FT:
- Getting started. Teaching resources
This is part of the National Service-Learning Partnership site and offers tips for getting started in this area.
http://nslp.convio.net/site/PageServer?pagename=TR_gettingstarted
- History of service learning
A brief overview of the history of service learning and its importance are given in this article.
http://www.service-learningpartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=sl_history
- How Learn and Serve American can help
A few suggestions about the types of service-learning projects that can be done and their relationship to the curriculum are provided in this piece.
http://www.learnandserve.org/for_organizations/how/index.asp
- Learn and Serve Clearinghouse
A list about community service and available tool kits is provided.
<http://www.servicelearning.org/index.php>
- Learn and Serve make a difference
This is a fact sheet about results of student participation in service-learning projects.
http://www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/lisa_and_service_facts_rev.pdf
- Learning in deed
This is a full report on service-learning sponsored by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation that provides a description of service-learning programs and results of different service-learning programs.
<http://learningindeed.org/slcommission/report.html>

- Service learning
This is a brief overview of what service learning is.
http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/service_learning/front_service.htm
- Service learning: Bringing together students, parents, and community to create a better world
This piece provides some suggestions and ideas about service-learning projects.
http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/service_learning/schoenfeld.htm
- Service learning is ...
A rich description of service-learning along with a list of characteristics of what it is and is not, is given in this piece.
http://www.servicelearning.org/what_is_service-learning/service-learning_is/index.php
- Service learning project examples, high school
A few specific service learning projects that were done by high school students are described in this article.
<http://www.nylc.org/objects/DiscoverSL/HighSchoolProjects.pdf>
- Service learning resources for beginners
This is a list of resources with contact information.
<http://www.nylc.org/objects/DiscoverSL/BeginnerResources.pdf>
- Students in service to America
This is an extensive guidebook on purposes of service learning, its characteristics and descriptions of projects that have been done.
<http://www.studentsinservicetoamerica.org/download/guidebook.pdf>
- Service learning set for 3 years
A description of a district wide service learning project is given.
http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4176/is_20060908/ai_n16718913/print
- What is Learn and Serve America?
This is a brief overview of this organization. Ways in which they are available to provide support are given.
<http://www.learnandserve.org/about/lisa/index.asp>
- What is service learning?
A brief outline that defines service learning is given in this piece.
http://www.learnandserve.org/about/service_learning/index.asp

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