



BRING LEARNING TO LIFE: SERVICE-LEARNING IN ACTION

SERVICE-LEARNING IN ACTION is designed for teachers who are integrating service-learning into their classrooms to strengthen and enhance academic development. This resource may also be helpful for the application of service-learning in less formal educational environments such as after-school programs and youth groups. In these settings, staff find meaningful opportunities to infuse the experience of helping in the community with an acknowledgment of what is also being learned.

Simply put, service-learning connects the academic curriculum with the inherent caring and concern young people have for their world—whether on their school campus, at a local food bank, or in a distant rainforest. Results are memorable lifelong lessons for students that foster a stronger society for us all. When this becomes part of a school culture repeated in a variety of classes affording a range of experiences and opportunities, students gain the intrinsic motivation to participate in community. With service-learning, students become emerging leaders, as teachers engage and involve them in developing plans and ideas that they transform into action.

Can teachers meet academic standards through service-learning? Absolutely. Academics become relevant as students develop and practice skills through research, social analysis, reading fiction and nonfiction, interviewing, documenting, and otherwise applying content knowledge in a real life context. Along with the external change made by reading aloud to children, assembling food packages for hurricane evacuees, restoring a wetland – students change. They collaborate with others, experience persistence, learn responsibility, and participate in civic life. This occurs when learning and service connect, and the teacher is the model of this process.



When service-learning is applied with structured intent that connects classroom content, literature, and skills to community needs, students:

- apply academic, social, and personal skills to improve the community
- make decisions that have real, not hypothetical, results
- grow as individuals, gain respect for peers, and increase civic participation
- Develop an appreciation of school and the value of an education
- experience success no matter what their academic ability level
- gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their community, and society
- develop as leaders who take initiative, solve problems, work as a team, and demonstrate their abilities while and through helping others.

These important and documented academic and social results have helped validate service-learning as valuable, respected, and widely employed in K-12 classrooms. Service-learning can be

defined as a teaching method where guided or classroom learning is deepened through service to others in a process that provides structured time for reflection on the service experience and demonstration of the skills and knowledge required. As John Dewey said, “Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.”



RESOURCES: This guide to the basics of service-learning for K-12 practitioners is a companion piece to the Learn and Serve America video, *Bring Learning to Life*. Across America, service-learning is helping students perform better in school while improving their communities through service. By connecting classroom lessons with community service projects, service-learning engages students and brings learning to life! Learn and Serve America is a program of the federal agency the Corporation for National and Community Service. Created by Congress and the President to promote service-learning, Learn and Serve America engages more than one million young people from kindergarten through college and is the largest supporter of service-learning in the United States. To obtain a copy of the video, *Bring Learning to Life*, or to find out more about service-learning, contact Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse toll-free at 1-866-245-SERV (7378) or visit www.servicelearning.org.

THE FOUR STAGES OF SERVICE-LEARNING

PREPARATION

With guidance from their teacher, students:

- ⊙ identify a need.
- ⊙ draw upon previously acquired skills and knowledge.
- ⊙ acquire new information through a variety of means and methods.
- ⊙ analyze the underlying problem.
- ⊙ collaborate with community partners.
- ⊙ develop a plan that encourages responsibility.
- ⊙ recognize the integration of service and learning.
- ⊙ become ready to provide meaningful service.
- ⊙ define realistic parameters for implementation.

ACTION

Through direct service, indirect service, research, or advocacy, students take action that:

- ⊙ has value, purpose, and meaning.
- ⊙ uses previously learned and newly acquired academic skills and knowledge.
- ⊙ offers unique learning experiences.
- ⊙ has real consequences.
- ⊙ offers a safe environment to learn, to make mistakes, and to succeed.

REFLECTION

During systematic reflection, the teacher or students guide the process using various modalities, such as role play, discussion, and journal writing. Participating students:

- ⊙ describe what happened.
- ⊙ examine the difference it made.
- ⊙ discuss thoughts and feelings.
- ⊙ place experience in a larger context.
- ⊙ consider project improvements.
- ⊙ generate ideas.
- ⊙ identify questions.
- ⊙ receive feedback.

DEMONSTRATION

Students demonstrate skills, insights, and outcomes to an outside group. Methods used might include:

- ⊙ reporting to peers, faculty, parents, and/or community members.
- ⊙ writing articles or letters to local newspapers regarding issues of public concern.
- ⊙ creating a publication or Web site that helps others to learn from the students' experiences.
- ⊙ making presentations and performances.
- ⊙ creating visual art forms, such as murals.



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SERVICE-LEARNING: KNOWING THE TERMS

Service to others takes many forms and has many names and connotations. In a school context, examining different types of service helps to clarify and define service-learning as a teaching method.

- ⊙ **Volunteer:** One who contributes time without pay.
- ⊙ **Community service:** Helping the community by choice or through court requirement; may or may not be associated with academics, curriculum, or reflection.
- ⊙ **Service-learning:** A teaching method that:
 - enables students to learn and apply academic, social, and personal skills to improve the community, continue individual growth, and develop a lifelong ethic of service.
 - focuses on both the service and the learning.
 - is appropriate for all students and all curricular areas.
 - encourages cross-curricular integration.
 - helps foster civic responsibility.
 - provides students with structured time to reflect on the service experience.

THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

INTEGRATED LEARNING

Students **learn** skills and content through varied modalities; the service informs the content, and the content informs the service.

MEETING GENUINE NEEDS

Students **identify** and **learn about a recognized community need**. Student actions are **valued** by the community and have **real consequences** while offering opportunities to **apply** newly acquired academic skills and knowledge.

YOUTH VOICE AND CHOICE

Students experience **significant age-appropriate challenges** involving tasks that require thinking, initiative, and problem solving as they demonstrate **responsibility** and **decision making** in an environment safe enough to allow them to make mistakes and to succeed.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Students participate in the development of **partnerships** and **share responsibility** with community members, parents, organizations, and other students. These relationships afford **opportunities to interact** with people of diverse backgrounds and experience, resulting in mutual respect, understanding, and appreciation.

RECIPROCITY

Student benefits evolve through **mutual teaching and learning, action, or influence** between all participants in the learning and service experience; this reciprocity extends to relationships between institutions as well as relationships between people.

CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY

When young people have a role in improving society, working for social justice, and caring for the environment, then they truly understand the **concept of democracy**. Students recognize how participation and the ability to respond to authentic needs improves the quality of life in the community, which may lead to a lifelong **ethic of service and civic engagement**.



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BENEFITS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Who benefits from service-learning? Students, teachers, the school population as a whole, and the community benefit from well-designed service-learning programs. Benefits vary depending on program implementation and on what occurs through preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration. These lists have been compiled by school and community stakeholders based on their service-learning experiences.

THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAMS:

STUDENTS MAY:

- ⊙ increase motivation and desire to learn.
- ⊙ think critically, make decisions, and solve problems.
- ⊙ improve academic knowledge and performance, including writing and communication skills.
- ⊙ cultivate responsibility and self-perception.
- ⊙ develop ability to work well with others.
- ⊙ experience reciprocity.
- ⊙ replace stereotypes with respect for others.
- ⊙ interact with adults who have different roles in society.
- ⊙ be exposed to careers options including public service.
- ⊙ become more knowledgeable about community re-sources available for them and their families.
- ⊙ experience civic responsibility.
- ⊙ begin to develop a lifelong commitment to public service and learning.

TEACHERS MAY:

- ⊙ observe students' enthusiasm for learning.
- ⊙ improve communication and understanding among students.
- ⊙ increase the relevancy of education for students.
- ⊙ develop curriculum through collaboration with other teachers and community partners.
- ⊙ learn about many different community organizations and how they serve the populace.
- ⊙ identify resources to enhance educational opportunities for students.
- ⊙ bring the classroom and community together.
- ⊙ feel inspired professionally and personally.
- ⊙ participate in professional development and become mentors for other teachers.

SCHOOLS CAN:

- ⊙ combine academic development with civic and social responsibility.
- ⊙ strengthen career outreach programs.
- ⊙ develop community partnerships.
- ⊙ publicize educational opportunities available for students.
- ⊙ involve more parents.
- ⊙ give students a sense of the practical importance of what they are learning.
- ⊙ develop a more inclusive, cooperative school climate and culture.
- ⊙ invite students to become active community members.
- ⊙ increase confidence in the school system.
- ⊙ improve public relations.

COMMUNITIES CAN:

- ⊙ increase resources to address problems and concerns.
- ⊙ lend expertise in a particular issue area.
- ⊙ become more knowledgeable about school programs and needs.
- ⊙ collaborate in planning service-learning projects.
- ⊙ participate in student learning.
- ⊙ publicly acknowledge the contributions of young people.



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ESTABLISHING CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS: POINTS OF ENTRY

1. IDENTIFY AN EXISTING PROGRAM OR ACTIVITY TO TRANSFORM INTO AUTHENTIC SERVICE-LEARNING.

- ⊙ Select an activity or project already existing on campus.
- ⊙ Examine it for cross-curricular learning opportunities that meet or enhance academic standards.
- ⊙ Exchange resources and ideas with teachers, students, and community partners.

Example, Canned Food Drive: Before students brought in cans of food, classroom activities included studying nutrition, visiting the receiving agency to identify needed foods, and reading related literature. Students led peer discussions of social issues, replacing stereotypes with an understanding of hunger in their community. Graphs of food collected and articles on impact and continued need were printed in school and community newspapers.

2. BEGIN WITH STANDARD CURRICULUM, CONTENT, AND SKILLS, AND FIND THE NATURAL EXTENSION INTO SERVICE.

- ⊙ Identify the specific content and skill areas to be addressed.
- ⊙ Select an area of emphasis that supports or adds to classroom learning and addresses learning standards.
- ⊙ Look for additional learning opportunities in other subject areas.

Example, Learning History through Discussion with Elder Partners: To be better informed about current events and improve listening and communication skills, students met weekly with elders at a senior center. Shared experiences included studying news events, learning about aging, interviewing, collaborating on oral histories and photo essays, and displaying results in the school and public library.

3. FROM A THEME OR UNIT OF STUDY, IDENTIFY CONTENT AND SKILL CONNECTIONS.

- ⊙ Begin with a broad theme or topic, often with obvious service implications.
- ⊙ Identify specific content and skill areas.
- ⊙ Select a service application.

Example, The Individual's Role in Society: While learning about the individual's role in society, teachers encouraged students to consider options for civic participation. Curriculum included reading nonfiction stories of adults and young people contributing to their communities, researching local agency needs, providing regular assistance to an agency, and publishing an informative pamphlet on the agency for young people.

4. START WITH A STUDENT-IDENTIFIED NEED.

- ⊙ Identify student skills, talents, and interests.
- ⊙ Students define a problem, a need, and solutions.
- ⊙ Students lead implementation as teacher facilitates, adding learning opportunities.

Example, Transform an Empty Lot into a Community Garden: A student initiated a conversation about starting a community garden in an empty lot near school. With teacher guidance, academic standards were met as students communicated with a government agency regarding property use, conducted Internet research to find funding sources, partnered with special needs youth to maintain the garden, and donated the harvest to a local shelter.

5. START WITH A COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED NEED.

- ⊙ Community requests assistance, perhaps through an agency that has worked with the school before.
- ⊙ Teacher, students, and community partners identify learning opportunities.

Example, Tutoring/Literacy: Responding to a request to participate in a city-wide book collection to benefit local youth, teachers in several grades collaborated on cross-age projects: older students helped younger children write and illustrate bilingual books on mutually agreed upon themes. Books were donated to youth clubs, hospitals, and day-care facilities. Student representatives served on a city committee to plan future literacy activities.

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TAKING ACTION IN OUR COMMUNITY

STEP 1: THINK ABOUT THE NEEDS IN OUR COMMUNITY. MAKE A LIST.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY WHAT YOU KNOW.

- ⊙ Select one community need:

- ⊙ What is the cause?

- ⊙ Who is helping?

- ⊙ What are some ways we can help?

STEP 3: FIND OUT MORE.

- ⊙ What do we need to know about this community need and who is helping?

- ⊙ How can we find out?

STEP 4: PLAN FOR ACTION.

- ⊙ To help our community, we will:

- ⊙ To make this happen, we will take on these responsibilities:

Who	Will Do What	By When	Resources Needed