

What is Service-Learning?

Service-learning is a teaching method where guided/classroom learning is deepened through service to others in a process that provides structured time for reflection on the service experience and evaluation of the skills and knowledge acquired.

Simply put, service-learning connects school based 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. The results are memorable, lifelong lessons for student and foster a stronger society for us all.

Service-learning can be defined in part by what it does for your students. When service-learning is used in a structured way that connects classroom content, literature, and skills to community needs, students will:

- 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
- Experience success no matter what their ability level
- Gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their community, and society and
- Develop as leaders who take initiative, solve problems, work as a team, and demonstrate their abilities while and through helping others

How Service Learning Works

Service-learning is a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of preparation and planning, action, reflection, celebration and demonstration. Working with others, students acquired knowledge and skills and apply what they learn in community settings as they try to meet community needs. They experience consequences, both literal and emotional.

When the process of service-learning is broken down, four essential and interdependent stages emerge:

1. **PLANNING & PREPARATION:** All service-learning begins with preparation. In this process of active learning and critical thinking, students grown to understand the underlying problem as well as related subject matter. Investigation, discussion, and analysis lead to plans for action.

2. **ACTION:** Action is the direct result of preparation. During the action stage, students continue to develop knowledge and resources as they meet new people and interact with their environment in meaningful ways. Transforming plans into action enables young people to use what is inherently theirs: ideas, energy, talents, skills, knowledge, enthusiasm, and concern for others and their natural surroundings.
3. **REFLECTION:** Reflection is a vital and ongoing process in service-learning that integrates learning and experience with personal growth and awareness. To really work, reflection must go beyond students simply reporting or describing what they are doing or have done. Reflection may occur before, during, and after implementation through the use of different approaches and strategies. In all cases, feedback from adults helps students use reflection to elevate their ability to observe, question, and apply their accumulated knowledge and other situations.
4. **CELEBRATION & DEMONSTRATION:** Celebration is a time to recognize students for their hard work and contributions as well as provide closure to the service activity. Celebrating accomplishments and good work is definitely valuable and when planned with thought, celebration can benefit service learning. The important aspect to keep in mind is that youth should be celebrated for their commitment to service.

Demonstration provides evidence of what students have gained and accomplished through their community involvement. It is a significant achievement for students to demonstrate what they have learned clearly and publicly.

Successful Service-Learning

In order to maximize the value and benefits of each stage of the service-learning process, certain elements need to be present. These elements can even be used as criteria for creating successful activities and projects. Experience has shown that when all the elements are present—the criteria are all met—there is a much greater impact on the students and the community.

Challenges found in service-learning are, not surprisingly, very much like real-life challenges. When students work through these situations, they learn to create options, as well as to develop resiliency, problem-solving skills, persistence, and the concept of having a plan “B”—an important and practical concept.

Service-learning experiences :

- Are typically positive, meaningful, and real
- Involve cooperative rather than competitive processes, thus promoting skills associated with teamwork and interdependency
- Address complex problems in complex settings rather than simplified problems in isolation
- Offer opportunities to engage in problem-solving by requiring students to gain knowledge in specific contexts rather than drawing upon generalized or abstract knowledge
- Are more likely to be personally meaningful and to generate emotional consequences

Facilitating Service-Learning

Would you like to learn more or incorporate service-learning in your classroom?

Please contact:

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