

Service-Learning and Its Importance on Teaching Secondary Students

Civic Responsibility and Community Awareness

by

Michael Lee Grassel

A MASTER'S PROJECT

For

ED 7999

Introduction

The goals of public education have changed dramatically over the past 30 or so years. What once was a system designed to educate students to become better citizens through increased knowledge of civics, politics, humanities, and the rest of the social studies curriculum, has instead evolved into a No Child Left Behind (NCLB) headed monster whose primary mission now seems to be only to raise scores on standardized tests. The bottom line intentions of NCLB are unquestionably noble and genuine, and it would be difficult for even the strongest opponent to argue otherwise. Still, the stresses of raising test scores have put an increased emphasis on math and science, and have taken away much of the social studies focus on educating our students to become good honest solid citizens. Instead, public education is becoming more and more focused on raising test scores, producing technical-savvy students who are the key to a solid workforce, and preparing those students for higher education. That is appropriate to a point, but disregarding the original ideals of our founding fathers who wanted to primarily educate people to become more informed and engaged citizens is dangerous. For our democracy to remain strong and stay the cornerstone of our country, we must produce citizens who understand civic and political responsibility and want to be engaged in these processes.

Service-Learning is a relatively new teaching method that links classroom academic studies to solving real world community problems, and is designed to have a positive impact on student academic achievement, civic engagement, and personal and social development. Research shows this increasingly popular teaching method can indeed lead to better citizenship among those who have had a meaningful experience through participating in a community based service program, or service-learning project.

The following pages provide many thoughts and research findings that will offer testimony and evidence to support the value of a quality service-learning program in today's secondary public education. The information has been grouped together so that the reader gains a great deal of knowledge in the basic fundamental concepts of service-learning, the academic advantages of student participation, and the effect service-learning has on public education's ability to help foster a greater sense of citizenship among students, thus creating a more knowledgeable and engaged citizen.

Annotated Bibliography

Fundamental Concepts of Service-Learning

Wren, D. J. (2004). Reaching out, reaching in. *Principal Leadership*. 5(1), 28-33.

Wren begins by defining service-learning as a way for students to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, critical thinking, and judgment in real world situations to fill needs within their communities. He credits Bandura, Mischel, and others for the original service-learning concepts that required a student's reciprocity with their personality, behavior, thought process, and environment. He outlines four steps to a quality service-learning program, which are preparation, activities, reflection, and celebration. A successful service-learning experience leaves students with increased abilities to handle stressful and unusual situations due to an increased sense of confidence.

Billig, S. H. (2002). Support for k-12 service-learning practice: A Brief Review of the Research. *Educational Horizons*. 80(4), 184-89.

Billig begins this article by explaining how rapidly service-learning is growing as a teaching strategy across the United States. He states, according to the Nation Center for Education Statistics, that over one-third of all U.S. schools are practicing some form of service-learning methodology. He then proceeds to give a very good definition of service-learning and outlines the most common types of service activities, complete with statistics. Why teachers use service-learning is also examined, and another set of statistics are thrown in to give a clear picture as to what teachers are hoping their students get out of these exercises. He then takes the reader through the benefits students have received through

service-learning, including increased personal/social development, improved academic achievement, and a keener sense of career awareness.

Shackelford, R., & Griffis, K. (2006). Communication project uses service-learning to support our troops. *Tech Directions*. 66(1), 16-21

Shackelford and Griffis state that a teacher's job is to provide effective learning experiences so that student's needs are met while still teaching required content. This, they say, is often through a community based service-learning exercise. These exercises are centered on real world situations and provide a valuable service to someone in need. They use an example in which secondary students performed technology related tasks to create greeting cards that could be mass produced and sent to U.S. troops overseas so that those service members could use them to write home. The military servicemen and women enjoyed having that support, and the students gained insight to the war, and to the people who were volunteering their very lives to support and defend their country.

Smith, M. C. (2008). Does service-learning promote adult development? Theoretical perspectives and directions for research. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*. (118), 5-15.

Smith contends that service-learning is one of the most popular and effective innovations in teaching methodology to come along in the last twenty years. The ability to connect schooling with community service has been a big reason for the success in fostering civic responsibility among students. In this article, Smith looks at service-learning in three ways when studying the affects on adult development of the students. They are cognitive growth, moral development, and psychosocial development. He states that there are

numerous research findings that support the theory that service-learning can indeed improve adult development in all three areas.

McDonald, J., & Kromer, T. (2005). Service-learning: a way to connect science to the community. *Science Scope*. 28(7), 46-48.

McDonald and Kromer state that learning occurs best when student's education is linked to social responsibility. Using a teaching and learning method that combines community service, academics, personal growth, and civic responsibility is the key. They suggest all students have the capability to contribute to their community, and would benefit academically and socially if given the opportunity. The teacher acts as a facilitator, while the student responds to real world needs in their own community. The authors relate service-learning and its benefits to their primary niche, science.

Louie-Badua, L. J., & Wolf, M. (2008). The spiritual nature of service-learning. *New Directions for Youth Development*. 118, 91-95.

Louie-Badua and Wolf explain the benefits of service-learning through a more spiritual perspective in which students experience a sense of interconnectedness with others and their environment, learn to open their hearts to others, and become more empathetic through self and group reflection. Further, they state that the service-learning experience encourages a deeper and more authentic connection between student's inner lives and outer actions. They agree with other researchers who say that service-learning outcomes lead to greater overall tolerance of diversity and increased community awareness.

Andrews, C. P. (2007). Service-learning: applications and research in business. *Journal of Education for Business*. 83(1), 19-26.

Relating service-learning to business is the focus of this article by Christine Andrews. She begins by passing along descriptors of service-learning as given by researchers. She has found they (the researchers) praise service-learning as “an ideal way to integrate experiential education into coursework while meeting community needs and imbuing students with civic responsibility”. She states that her research verifies the evidence in favor of using service-learning to increase knowledge of business course concepts and improving student external environment awareness. She does stipulate that service-learning may work best when it deals with business situations that deal with extensive interaction with community business users.

Perkins-Gough, D. (2009). Can service-learning keep students in school? *Educational Leadership*. 66(8), 91-92.

Perkins-Gough recommends every secondary school, especially high schools, adopt a policy that requires an in-place service learning-program. He says research suggests that students who are ages 16-25 and do not have a diploma or are registered in school want the type of learning experiences that service-learning programs offer. He also suggests that had these students been offered these types of programs, they may still be in school. Avoiding the downfalls of not graduating, such as being unemployed, going to jail, or needing government assistance, is the primary purpose of initiating systems, particularly service-learning systems, which encourage students to stay in school.

Academic Advantages of Student Participation

Jensen, S. V., & Burr, K. (2006). Participation and Learning Relationships: A Service-Learning Case Study. *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education*. 43(3), 6-28.

Jensen and Burr begin with a comparison of traditional classroom learning techniques and service-learning methodology. Under the traditional method, students walk into class, find their seats and begin taking notes from lecture. They may, the authors suggest, for no other reason than variety complete a worksheet or workbook. The motivation to the students is simply to get a good grade. With service-learning, students arrive already motivated to learn because they know they must gain subject matter knowledge in order to effectively complete their service-learning project, which is helping the community in some way that is significantly more important than just getting a good grade. They also cite Brewster and Fager (2000) in stating that student disengagement from classroom learning becomes more increased and more pronounced the older the student gets, thus the need increases for service-learning projects that will help offset that apathy towards traditional learning methods.

Smith, D. B. (2005). Accountability for academics and social responsibility through service-learning. *Middle School Journal*. 36(4), 20-25.

Smith contends that the teacher's role is one of developing a student's broad scope of basic skills and cognitive concepts. Further, he says teachers are also responsible for helping students develop social consciences, which is a very difficult task because students in this age group are at their most egocentric time period of social development. He presents

several service-learning projects that require the students to prove a mastery of basic skills while showing social growth in their local communities.

Lewis, A. C. (2004). Washington commentary: from school to rewarding work. *Phi Delta Kappan*. 85(7), 483.

Lewis examines an American Youth Policy Forum event that focused on the research justification for supplementing academic goals with community service and civic education. He finds there is plenty of evidence to support this integration, but that the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, with its “hell-bent” attitude of raising test scores, continues to be a barrier to further success in this area. He states that subjects such as art, career education, and social studies are in danger of being lost in the shuffle of frantically trying to improve math and science standardized test scores. While the truest philosophical ideal of NCLB is unarguably good, it unintentionally is causing some students to dislike the entire education process because of the strict and rigid methods used to increase standardized test scores.

Bridgeland, J.M., Dilulio, J.J., & Wulsin, S.C. (2008). *Engaged for success: Service-learning as a tool for high school dropout prevention*. Retrieved from <http://www.civicerprises.net/pdfs/service-learning.pdf>

The authors suggest that service-learning could not only stem the tide of increased dropout rates, it could also be a key factor in preparing students for college and even more importantly create a new generation of youth who exhibit a strong sense of civic responsibility. They state that students want service-learning programs, but just do not have the access to them as much as they should. Their research suggests that service-

learning can improve almost every aspect of learning and has a direct affect on graduation rates.

Frey, L. M. (2003). Abundant beautification: an effective service-learning project for students with emotional or behavioral disorders. *TEACHING Exceptional Children*. 35(5), 66-75.

Laura Frey puts a twist on the typical service-learning journal article. She does this by connecting two usually separated subjects, service-learning and special needs students. She explains how service-learning programs can affect emotionally and behaviorally challenged students. A program was implemented at the Therapeutic Learning Center (TLC) in Missouri, a center-based school for students with emotional impairments (EI). The program introduced students to a senior citizen's center in the community, where they teamed up for a beautification project. The classic service-learning game-plan of preparation, activities, reflection, and celebration was followed just as it would be for general education students. The result of the completed project for the students was an increase in student civic awareness and a more positive outlook on school, themselves, and their community.

Creating a More Knowledgeable and Engaged Citizen

Croddy, M. (2006). The civic mission of schools. *Leadership*. 35(3), 30-32.

According to Croddy, the United States has been educating students to become civic minded citizens as a primary mission of our education system for well over two hundred years. This has changed in the past quarter century because of the higher stresses schools have to teach reading and math. This has led to a dwindling number of youths and young adults who are interested in political action and civic duty, such as voting. He then outlines the findings of CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement). They stressed 4 goals of civic education and 6 approaches to reach these goals. The end result would be a well rounded, community aware, politically savvy citizen.

Berman, S. H. (2004). Teaching civics: a call to action. *Principal Leadership*. 5(1), 16-20.

Berman begins with an admonishment of today's public school system's eagerness to put aside civics education in order to focus strictly on raising test scores. He lectures that the original purpose of public education was in fact to teach civics in order to produce better citizens that were more aware of political and civic responsibility and to fail in that mission would be paramount to our country in the loss of our democratic principles and democracy itself. He says service-learning is a great way to bring curriculum to life and to link authentic applications of schoolwork with the needs of the community. Making the connections between subject matter and the greater needs of the "larger world" is the key to an effective service-learning program.

Agard, K. A. (2004). Learning to give. *Principal Leadership*. 5(1), 43-46.

In this article, Agard describes the importance of not only the service-learning experience for students, but also how important it is for students to fully understand why they should

perform community service, why they should be a part of their community, why they should act for the common good, and how this all fits in with civic duty and democratic participation. She examines the Learn to Give (LTG) program created by the Council of Michigan Foundations; a program designed to provide a curriculum for service-learning and philanthropy and created by teachers. She also outlines several service-learning ideas for various grade levels so that readers can further grasp the types of activities the Council is advocating for. By implementing the service-learning strategy and integrating a very deep democracy component to the lessons, students will learn not only how to become good citizens, but also why it is important to do so.

Martin, L. A. (2008). Elementary and secondary teacher education students' perspectives on citizenship. *Action in Teacher Education*. 30(3), 54-63.

Martin begins by stating that the goal of many educators is citizenship preparation. Thus, he wanted to find out what “citizenship” meant to teacher education students, since their own concepts and perceptions of good citizen attributes would directly influence their teaching. His research showed that these educators valued community engagement more than political engagement in terms of what “good citizens” would be more involved with. An example of a good citizen, according to the teacher education students and based on Martin’s research, is one that helps others and follows the laws.

Reich, R. (2005). Service-learning and multiple models of engaged citizenship. *Journal of Education*. 186(1), 23-27.

Reich says that a recent survey of incoming college freshman shows that 80% of those students volunteered for community service projects while in high school. He raises the

point that while community service among young people is on the rise, political interest and involvement is on the decline. He suggests that many service-learning programs have become substitutes for civic and political engagement. He offers a remedy that service-learning projects be geared directly to increasing civic involvement and political engagement, and not just mere relief to the needy.

David, J. L. (2009). Service learning and civic participation. *Educational Leadership*. 66(8), 83-84.

This article points out the goal of service-learning is to couple community service to school curriculum. David states the targeted result of service-learning is to enhance character ability and academic performance across the spectrum of secondary academic subjects, and if done correctly can motivate students of all grades to be excited about facing tough civic challenges in and out of the classroom. He suggests that research shows a greater outcome for programs that stress active citizenship instead of community service only type experiences. The key, David says, is for teachers to have access to training and civic service-learning opportunities for their students.

Berman, S. H. (2008). A superintendent's systemic notion of civics. *School Administrator*. 65(9), 29.

Berman, a superintendent for 15 years in Massachusetts and Kentucky, explains how he has made civic engagement a cornerstone of school reform. From the earliest of students in preschool and kindergarten all the way up to seniors in high school, Berman suggests it takes a systematic approach to teach students about civic engagement and responsibility. He also suggests that if this system is followed, students will be able to better understand complex issues, the challenges of political change, and why it is necessary to act for the

common good. This, he states, will motivate students to learn in all aspects of school because they will find relevance and importance in what they are learning.

Vonde, D. A. S., Maas, P., & McKay, T. (2005). Teaming up to create leaders. *Principal Leadership*. 5(8), 41-44.

The authors insist that schools require the help of local community agencies and leaders to prepare students to become effective leaders in society. Partnerships with local business and political leaders offer schools the chance to expose their students to a variety of support and mentorship opportunities. The idea is to have students create a vision for community service projects, and have the local professionals contribute their support and knowledge to ensure success. The students gain servant leadership qualities and a broader scope of community awareness.

Taylor, J. A., & Trepanier-Street, M. (2007). Civic education in multicultural contexts: new findings from a national study. *Social Studies*. 98(1), 14-18.

University of Michigan Dearborn professors Julie Anne Taylor and Mary Trepanier-Street take a strong look at how the Jumpstart program contributes to the multicultural education of college students as well as the civic education that service-learning focuses on.

Jumpstart is a program that provides extra attention to at-risk preschoolers to help them gain the basic academic and social skills required to be successful in the early years of elementary education. The students who provided these services were surveyed prior to and after they completed their service-learning experience concerning many aspects about how they felt handling multicultural situations and diverse populations. An overwhelming percentage of students reported their confidence in engaging with a multicultural diverse population had increased significantly.

O'Connor, J. S. (2006). Civic engagement in higher education. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*. 38(5), 52-58.

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities started what was to be a three year initiative named the American Democracy Project. Twenty schools were to provide service-learning opportunities to their students as a way to increase civic engagement. It has done just that, states the author. 183 schools have joined the project since its inception, providing ample evidence of the growing popularity of service-learning as a primary teaching methodology that is spreading across middle schools, high schools, and college campuses throughout the United States. O'Connor finishes by stating that even with all this going on, there is still so much more that could be done for students to become fully engaged.

Lee, S.-Y., Olszewski-Kubilius, P., Donahue, R., & Weimbolt, K. (2007). The effects of a service-learning program on the development of civic attitudes and behaviors among academically talented adolescents. *Journal for the Education of the Gifted*. 31(2), 165-197.

The authors examine how participating in service-learning projects affect students who have been previously identified as academically gifted across three primary targeted areas: civic responsibility, civic behavior, and leadership skills. 230 students from that classification were chosen to perform service-learning projects. After the projects were complete, three surveys were given to the students, one for each targeted research area. The findings were that there was increased civic responsibility reported from the students with an increased awareness of civic issues and a deeper commitment to their communities. No substantial differences were noted in the areas of civic behavior or leadership skills.

The authors do say that further research with specific types of service-learning projects would be required in order to fully determine the kinds of service-learning projects that would target more positive outcomes in these areas.

Prentice, M. (2007). Service-learning and civic engagement. *Academic Questions*. 20(2), 135-145.

Mary Prentice from the Educational Management and Development Department, New Mexico State University, Las Cruces, New Mexico, states that outside work can enhance in-school lessons under the right circumstances and can be beneficial to both the student and the community. She suggests that service-learning programs can increase civic engagement and add a new dimension of learning to that of which goes on in the classroom. She qualifies her statement several times by defining civic engagement as more than just political action. Community service projects that are not political in nature have the most benefits for the community, and increase civic engagement the most.

Conclusion

After careful review of these articles including testimony and evidence concerning the basic fundamental concepts of service-learning, the academic advantages of student participation, and the effect service-learning has on public education's ability to help foster a greater sense of citizenship among students thus creating a more knowledgeable and engaged citizen, one can see that service-learning is an effective teaching pedagogy that tasks students to use their academic abilities and physical skills to make their school, local community, and world better. Further, it helps students build skills that will not only produce a prepared workforce, but also a civically engaged citizenry. The typical service-learning model employs a four step process that involves preparation, meaningful activity, reflection, and celebration. Often, another aspect of service learning is the requirement for diversity which further connects students to a broader community than they may have previously been a member. Aside from producing stronger citizens which impact all of society, service-learning can also make parents very happy on a more personal level. Research shows parents can expect to see long term results from service-learning experiences in their child in terms of improved academic grades, better school attendance, and enhanced development of personal and social responsibility.

The importance of teaching students community service is really community preservation. A community depends on the involvement or engagement of its citizens to maintain that cohesive bond that ties people together in a way that produces a feeling of responsibility for each other, not only as individuals but also collectively as a group. One's actions should always consider the *greater good*, referring to what is best for all citizens in a community. Service-learning reinforces those values and stresses using one's knowledge, skills, critical thinking, and judgment to serve others in ways that meet the needs of individuals, specific groups, and society in general.

Successful service-learning projects also impact the student as well as those they help. According to several studies, self-confidence, multicultural and diversity awareness, and improved knowledge and skill levels are all important benefits of participating in a well-organized service learning project. So we see a reciprocity to service-learning that is not always apparent in other teaching and learning methodologies.

Public education's original goal of producing informed and engaged citizens can still be met. Service-learning programs provide us with great tools to accomplish this end. There is a strong need in this country for young people to see themselves as part of the local, regional, national community and as contributors to democracy. Through service-learning activities, students can learn the importance of respecting the heritages, diversity, and interests of others. They can learn to appreciate the mutual give and take of civil engagement and the importance of continued participation without animosity when things do not go their way. Service-learning participants will take away from the experience increased knowledge of civic life, politics, and government. They will better understand the roles of citizens within the local and global communities. And finally, they will become better, more informed and engaged citizens, the type of citizens public education intended to create. This is why teaching secondary age students civic responsibility and community awareness is so very important.