

What is Service Learning?

Service-Learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.

An exciting, hands-on approach to education, service-learning is taking place in a wide variety of settings: schools, universities, and community-based and faith-based organizations throughout the country. The core concept driving this educational strategy is that by combining service objectives and learning objectives, along with the intent to show measurable change in both the recipient and the provider of the service, the result is a radically-effective transformative method of teaching students.

Community members, students, and educators everywhere are discovering that service-learning offers all its participants a chance to take part in the active education of its youth while simultaneously addressing the concerns, needs, and hopes of their community.

Examples of Service-Learning:

- **Elementary children in Florida** studied the consequences of natural disasters. The class designed a kit for families to use to collect their important papers in case of evacuation with a checklist, tips about rescuing pets, and other advice to make a difficult situation easier, which students distributed to community members.
- **Middle school students in Pennsylvania** learned about the health consequences of poor nutrition and lack of exercise, and then brought their learning to life by conducting health fairs, creating a healthy cookbook, and opening a fresh fruit and vegetable stand for the school and community.
- **Girl Scouts in West Virginia** investigated the biological complexity and diversity of wetlands. Learning of the need to eliminate invasive species the scouts decided to monitor streams, presented their findings to their Town Council to raise awareness of the issues concerning local wetlands.
- **University students in Michigan** looked for ways to support struggling local non-profit organizations during difficult economic times. Graduate communication students honed their skills while providing a wide variety of public relations services with community partners, including developing press kits and managing event coordination.

If school students collect trash out of an urban streambed, they are providing a service to the community as volunteers; a service that is highly valued and important. On the other hand, when school students collect trash from an urban streambed, then analyze what they found and possible sources so they can share the results with residents of the neighborhood along with suggestions for reducing pollution, they are engaging in service-learning.

Through service-learning, students are providing an important service to the community and, at the same time, learning about water quality and laboratory analysis, developing an

understanding of pollution issues, learning to interpret science issues to the public, and practicing communications skills by speaking to residents. They may also reflect on their personal and career interests in science, the environment, public policy or other related areas. In these ways service-learning intentionally combines service with learning, a combination that is transforming both communities and students.

This is not to say that volunteer activities without a learning component are less important than service-learning, only that the two approaches are different activities with different objectives. Both are valued components of a national effort to increase citizen involvement in community service at every age.

Each of the examples above shows how service-learning is integrating meaningful community service with instruction and reflection in order to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen our communities. Because it is such an effective teaching and learning strategy, service-learning is often linked to school and college courses; however, it can also be organized and offered by community organizations. Whatever the setting, the core element of service-learning is always the intent that both providers and recipients find the experience beneficial, even transformative.

For more information, you may view a power point or video online here:
<http://www.servicelearning.org/what-service-learning>