No. 11, 1998-1999

# BEST PRACTICE BRIEFS

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

USE SERVICE-LEARNING

- to build assets in youth
- as a community resource

EFFECTIVENESS INVOLVES

- close link to academics
- reflection
- faculty-student interaction

OUTREACH PARTNERSHIPS

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

## SERVICE-LEARNING: A WAY TO BUILD ASSETS - 1

*High school students work with a Watershed Council to improve a river… College students learn composition by writing for community agencies… College students in a cultural diversity class have a first-hand experience with minority children… These are all examples of Service-Learning: enabling students to make a contribution to communities while enhancing their academic work. Service-Learning provides a unique opportunity to build assets in youth through community-school/university partnerships.*

### OVERVIEW OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Service-Learning is a model of teaching that integrates academic material with student involvement in the community; i.e., as part of their academic course work, a teacher makes available to students the opportunity to become actively involved with individuals or situations reflective of community needs—an experience that illuminates the issues and skills under study. In this educational model, students of all ages are viewed as capable of making a contribution to the betterment of the community.

**DEFINITION**[1]

Service-Learning differs from other forms of experiential learning in its close connection to current academic work. To meet the criteria for Service-Learning, the service experience must:

- be planfully utilized to enhance academic learning.
- involve students in meeting actual community needs—contributing to the well-being of an individual and/or the resolution of a community issue.
- include opportunities for structured and disciplined reflection about the linkages between the experience and the academic content.

[1] Adapted from the U.S. National Community and Service Act of 1990.

Students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences in the community that

- enhance what is taught in school, extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community.
- provide a student with opportunities to apply newly acquired skills and knowledge in real life situations in their own communities.
- help foster the development of a sense of caring and civic responsibility.

Not included in this **BRIEF** on Service-Learning is the experiential learning that involves elementary and secondary students in the betterment and use of the school itself as a community, e.g., *organizing the school as a community with a bank, store, court, etc., or kindergartners improving the school by organizing a lost and found.*

## OTHER FORMS OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

**Community Service:**

Volunteer contribution of time and skills to meet community needs, but without a link to academic learning. *Tutoring elementary school students. Participating in a community clean up.*

**Field Experience:**

A learning experience through a project outside the classroom, but without a connection to meeting community needs. *Identifying the contents of a pond or measuring water quality in a science class. Observing a mother and infant for a child development class.*

**Internship:**

A required placement for a novice professional under the general supervision of an experienced supervisor.

**Year Abroad:**

Immersion in another language and culture.

**Work Study:**

Placement in a work site related to career interests, with a primary purpose to earn money.

## DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS RELATED TO SERVICE LEARNING

**Empowerment**

- Community values youth
- Youth seen as resources: given useful roles in the community
- Service provided to others: one hour or more per week

**Boundaries and Expectations**

- High expectations: adults encourage youth to do well

**Commitment to Learning**

- Youth actively engaged in school

**Positive Values**

- Caring: youth places high value on helping other people
- Equality and social justice: youth places high value on promoting equality and reducing poverty
- Responsibility: youth accepts and takes personal responsibility

**Social Competencies**

- Planning and decision making: youth knows how to plan ahead and make choices
- Interpersonal competence: youth has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills
- Cultural competence: youth has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds

**Positive Identity**

- High self-esteem
- Sense of purpose

*—From Search Institute, 40 Developmental Assets (in Community Reports).*

### DIMENSIONS

The Service-Learning approach is being used with elementary, middle, and high school, community college, college, and university students. Service-Learning in primary and secondary schools generally involves all students in the class, and each semester may be part of a multi-year project. At the post-secondary level, participation may be voluntary or required and is generally confined to the course work of a single semester.

There is no one model for Service-Learning: programs vary depending on the academic course and the opportunities presented by the community. The opportunities for Service-Learning at the elementary and secondary level can involve classes in natural science, languages, social science, communication skills, and vocational training. The opportunities for Service-Learning at the post-secondary level can occur in many areas of study:

- Courses where the theory and skills learned by students can have a direct application to the tasks undertaken by community agencies:
  - social work, education, public administration, urban affairs, health care
  - horticulture
  - engineering, architecture
  - creative writing
- Courses where the concepts and information taught can be illustrated through community examples:
  - human ecology, psychology, sociology, political science
  - natural science
  - philosophy
  - history

## NUMBERS OF STUDENTS INVOLVED IN SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE UNITED STATES

| | |
|---|---|
| Middle school students | almost 2.5 million |
| High school students | almost 3 million |
| Public 4-year institutions | over 350,000 |
| Private 4-year institutions | over 1.5 million |

*—National Service-Learning Clearinghouse estimates for 1996-97*[2]

Service-Learning is a means of preparing students to be good citizens; the experience encourages them to be active participants in their community. Thus, Service–Learning emphasizes the purpose of education in a democracy, demonstrating how an educated person can serve society.

Service-Learning derives from a long history of educational thought that promoted experiential learning. The educational philosophy for Service-Learning includes the following concepts:[3]

- Experience is necessary for learning.
- Learning is for the purpose of some end beyond itself.
- Thinking and acting are connected by reflection.
- Inquiry-based and project-based methodologies motivate student learning.
- Education is the primary means for social transformation.

## DOES SERVICE-LEARNING MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

### Benefits of Service Learning

Service-Learning is designed to change the participants by providing a transformational experience. Depending upon the character and effectiveness of the service experience and the effectiveness of the academic-service linkage, Service-Learning can have multiple benefits for each of the participants:

- **The student** changes through exposure to real life experiences that expand and modify perceptions and values.
- **The instructor** moves from a directive style of teaching to facilitating the provision of experiences that accomplish academic goals.
- **The individual served** receives added resources and personal attention that can result in enhanced skills and changed perceptions.
- **The community agency** receives student help to accomplish agency objectives.
- **The community** changes in those instances in which Service-Learning activities modify the physical environment or provide new information or change practice.

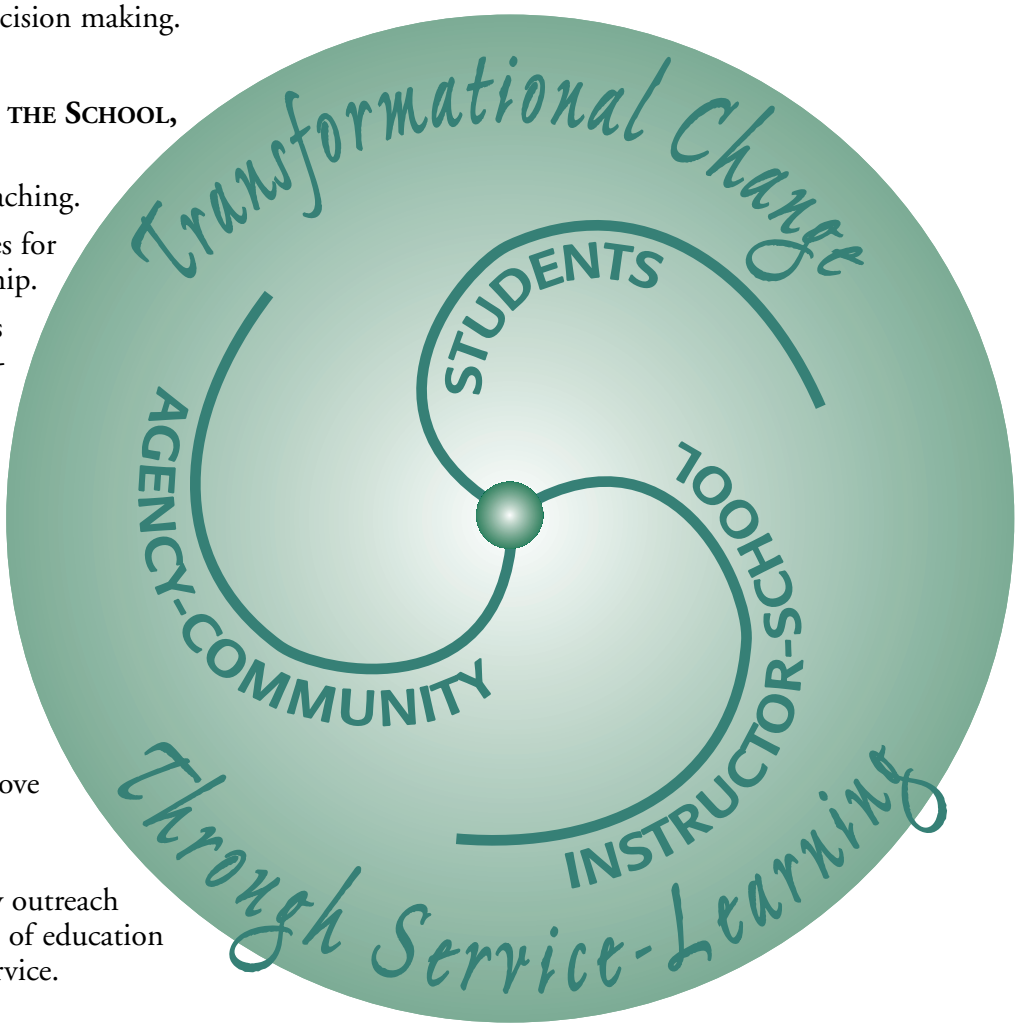
2 R. Shumer & C. Cook, (1999), *The Status of Service-Learning in the United States: Some Facts and Figures,* National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.
3 J. Kendall, (1990), *Combining Service and Learning: A Resource Book for Community and Public Service,* Raleigh, NC: National Society for Experiential Education.

**For Students, Service-Learning can**

- enrich the learning of course material.
- promote active learning, demonstrating the relevance of academic work for career choice.
- increase awareness of societal issues as they relate to the academic area.
- provide access to persons different from themselves, broadening their perspective on diversity issues and increasing tolerance.
- improve interpersonal skills.
- develop initiative, independent thinking and learning, more complex critical thinking and problem-solving skills.
- increase self-confidence and self-esteem.
- develop civic and social responsibility through active community involvement.
- provide opportunity to explore values and ethical issues.
- provide practice in decision making.

**For the Instructor and the School, Service-Learning can**

- enrich and enliven teaching.
- create new possibilities for research and scholarship.
- increase opportunities for professional recognition and reward.
- apply an educational process to exploring human problems and community concerns.
- extend school/university resources into the community.
- build reciprocal partnerships with the community and improve school/community relations.
- support the university outreach mission and the value of education for citizenship and service.




**For the Agency and the Community, Service-Learning can**

- provide additional resources to meet educational, human, and environmental needs of local communities.
- contribute the energy and enthusiasm of students to meet community needs.
- prepare tomorrow's volunteers and civic leaders by fostering an ethic of service and civic participation in students.
- provide opportunities for participation in teaching and in joint grant-seeking with educational organizations.

## A SERVICE-LEARNING SCHOOL

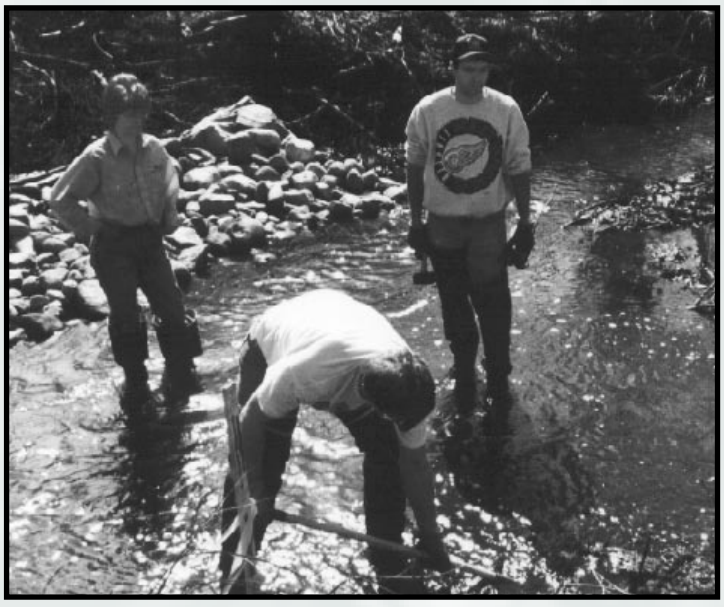
ACE High School, Stambaugh, Michigan

When the Corporation for National Service recognized ACE High School as a 1999 National Service-Learning Leader School, this alternative school located at Stambaugh in Michigan's Upper Peninsula was the newest and smallest school in the U.S. to win an award. The awards were given this year for the first time to 70 U.S. schools that have developed exemplary models of Service-Learning. At ACE High School, Mary Mower, school coordinator/principal, has integrated Service-Learning into all facets of the curriculum. The thirty-six students selected the environment and early childhood/adult education as the foci for their Service-Learning.

ACE students decided to take an interest in the Iron River–a trout stream located within walking distance of the school. They are working on clean-up projects and creation of a new trail adjacent to the river, for the science curriculum that focuses on watersheds and relevant issues. Students learn the characteristics of the stretch of river where they will be working, for example, width, depth, velocity. They also learn how to publicize the river clean-up activities through the media and how to evaluate their efforts. Twice a year they conduct the Rapid Bioassessment Protocol for the Iron River Watershed Council, sampling and monitoring the water and the riparian zone (along the banks of the river) for cleanliness. They provide information to the community about the status of river cleanliness. As a result of these activities, ACE students serve on the Iron River Watershed Council and the Iron County Heritage Trail Council, a community collaborative board that is developing a 36-mile trail of historical and cultural sites within the county.

At other times, ACE students are involved in early childhood education projects, writing and reading stories and doing art projects about the environment with preschoolers in Head Start, Iron County's Early Childhood Education Program, and children in elementary schools. Other students work on inter-generational issues, receiving training to teach computer skills to older adults, including word processing, use of specialized software, and use of the Internet.

Mower emphasizes that before the high school students begin a Service-Learning experience, they must thoroughly understand the academic subject matter. In addition, planning meetings are held among the students, teachers, administrators, and members of community groups. Reflection about these projects occurs through journal writing and "fishbowl circle discussions" in class. As a way to encourage higher order thinking, when a project is completed, students compare their views to what they had originally thought about the issue, and students and teachers have an opportunity to develop some explanations and conclusions.



## "WRITE FOR YOUR LIFE"

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

From the Writing Center at Michigan State University, Janet Swenson and Patti Stock have seeded the "Write For Your Life" (WFYL) approach to improving the lives of at risk-youth in urban, suburban, rural, high-, middle-, and low-income communities in Georgia, Massachusetts, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin. Development of this Service-Learning model has been underwritten by the Bingham Trust and Michigan State University.

A collaboration between universities and K-12 schools, WFYL involves adolescents in a unique Service-Learning effort that combines language arts with personal development and reduction of health risks. Although each site's WFYL curriculum takes into account the particulars of the local context, in general, WFYL students work through a series of interlinked activities in which they are

- reading fiction and non-fiction accounts of adolescent lives
- composing narratives and analyses based on important times in their own lives
- discussing their evolving understanding of the concerns of adolescents locally and nationally in order to identify risks to adolescent health and well-being in their particular communities
- researching the dynamics, consequences, and potential solutions to adolescent health risks through firsthand and library research, using such diverse resources as local interviews and professional highly technical reports, brochures, and monographs
- framing community service projects intended to reduce or eliminate the adolescent health risks they have chosen to research
- drafting grant proposals, working with local businesses and agencies
- conducting and evaluating the effectiveness of their projects.

Because of their vested interest in the subject matter, students are generally able to handle reading, speaking, and writing assignments previously well beyond their academic reach. Students are invited to conduct some of their research on the campus of the sponsoring university; contacts with the university and with faculty who serve as expert sources enhance the likelihood that students will continue their education. Often parents become involved in the project work.

*"Adolescent health, literacy attainment, and preparation for participation in a community's civic life are three of the most complex societal issues of our time,"* says Swenson. *"WFYL brings together persons from different disciplines and professions in a unique attempt to address these concerns."*

## SERVICE-LEARNING TESTS PHILOSOPHICAL VALUES

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

With a Michigan Campus Compact grant for curriculum development, Stephen Esquith, Department of Philosophy at Michigan State University, is incorporating Service-Learning into two courses:

- Students in "Introduction to Philosophy" will work in advocacy organizations concerned with abortion, animal rights, and the death penalty after course reading that examines the ethics involved in these issues. Student assignments will include developing a web site and presenting a forum at the end of the semester. *"People sometimes hold these issues somewhat unreflectively,"* says Esquith. *"The course will help students reflect on the practical value of the philosophical concepts and theories they read in class in light of their work with community organizations."*
- Students in the course on "Genocide, Justice, and Reconciliation" will develop an appropriate curriculum on this topic for use with secondary school students.

## Evaluation

The evidence for the effectiveness of Service-Learning rests primarily on the anecdotal experience of teachers and students. Students who choose to participate in Service-Learning opportunities differ from those who do not volunteer in many of the attitudes and skills that Service-Learning is designed to impact. Nonetheless, there is evidence that a Service-Learning experience enhances these attitudes and skills.

- A study that examined Service-Learning in a political science course showed that students in the Service-Learning sections were more likely than their peers in control sections to report that they had performed up to their potential in the course, had learned to apply principles from the course to new situations, and had developed a greater awareness of societal problems.[4]
- A study by the Higher Education Research Institute comparing service-learning college level participants with non-participants showed that participation in community service positively influenced every one of the 35 measured student outcomes, which fell into broad categories of academic development, civic values and life skills.[5]
- A study across 20 universities and colleges, comparing students who participated in Service-Learning as a part of a semester course versus those who did not select that course option, found that Service-Learning predicted growth in students'
  - assessment of their political participation skills and tolerance for others.
  - confidence in personal effectiveness in their community, connection to the community, belief in volunteering, and effectiveness of community in solving problems.
  - seeing problems as systemic policy change as a better approach than targeting individuals, social justice as a societal priority, and ability to see things from the perspective of others and to be open to new ideas.

  There was no significant shift and no impact of service on students' assessment of their critical thinking, issues identification, or communication skills.

  The study also analyzed the impact of faculty-student interaction on these changes. Faculty-student interaction was an independent predictor of all changes except for the following: valuing a career helping others, connectedness to the community, and conceptions of social justice.[6]

"**THE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS** that well-designed Service-Learning programs have an impact not only on how much is learned, but the motivation to learn, the confidence that one can learn, and the development of the capacity to contribute and the commitment to do so."

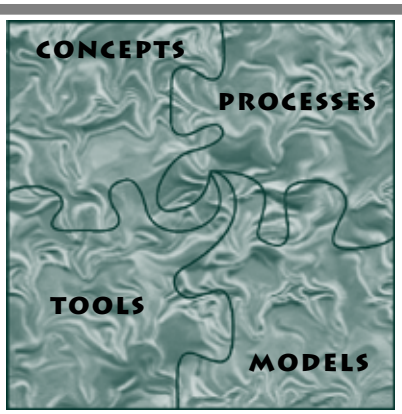
***—National Service-Learning Clearinghouse***

**In Conclusion,** Service-Learning is a unique and under-utilized resource for building assets in youth, making education relevant, and contributing to community betterment. The next issue will discuss various considerations in implementing Service-Learning.

4 G. Markus, J. Howard, & D. King, (1993), Integrating Community Work and Classroom Instruction Enhances Learning: Results from an Experiment, *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* 15(4) 410-419.

5 A. Astin, G. Markus, L. Sax, & J. Avalos, *Long-term Effects of Volunteerism During the Undergraduate Years,* Higher Education Research Institute, University of California-Los Angeles.

6 G. Frieden, D. E. Giles, Jr. & J. Eyler, (1997), *Assessing the Impact of Service Learning on College Students' Social and Cognitive Development.* Nashville,TN: Vanderbilt University.

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