

# Keeping Youth In School - How Service-Learning Can Help!

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# What is Service-Learning?

- Cleaning up a river is service.
- Sitting in a science classroom, looking at water samples under a microscope is learning.
- Students taking samples from local water sources, analyzing the samples, documenting the results and presenting scientific findings to a local pollution control agency is service-learning.

*National Youth Leadership Council*



# National Community Trust Act of 1993

service-learning is defined as a method:

- Under which young people learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs that are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community;
- Is integrated with specific learning objectives and provides structured time for youth to think, talk, or write about what they did and saw during the actual service activity;
- Provides young people with opportunities to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities;
- Enhances what is taught in school by extending student learning beyond the classroom and into the community; and
- Helps foster a sense of caring for others.



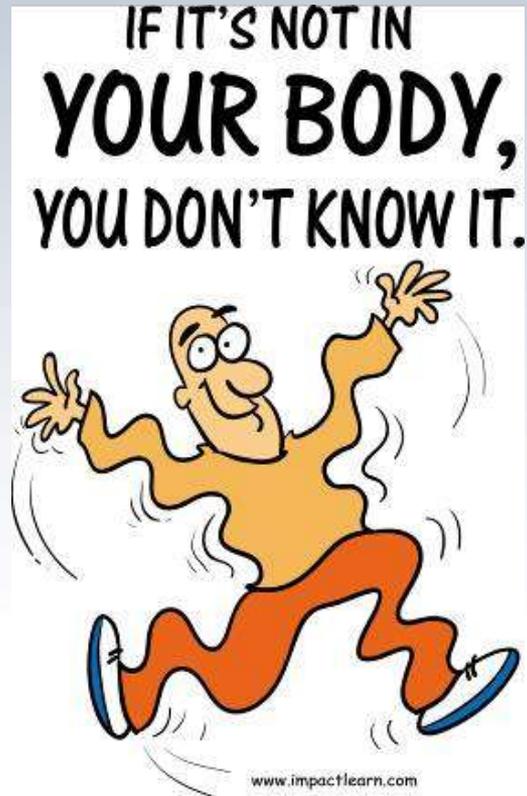
# As an Instructional Strategy

## Service-Learning

- Engages students in problem solving
- Creates authentic, real-life applications of skills
- Encourages teamwork
- Is interdisciplinary
- Motivates students to learn



# In other words...



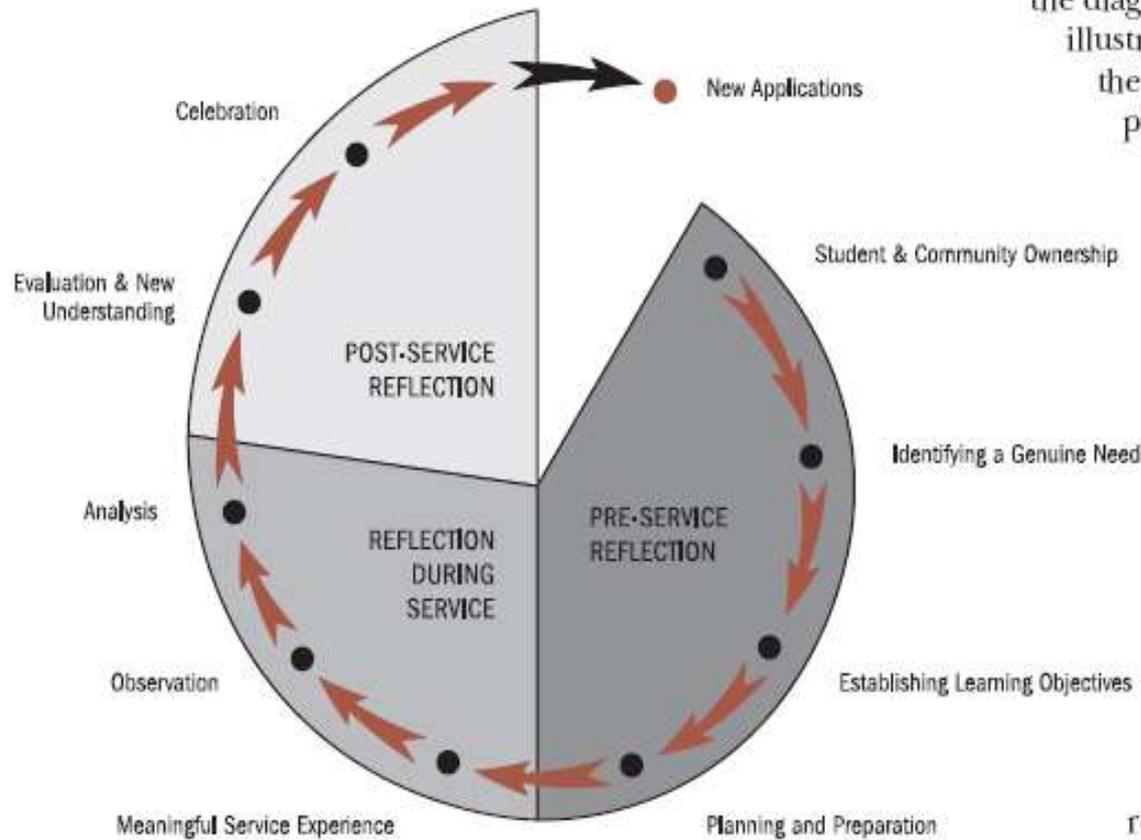
*"Service-learning is made up of activities that connect serving the community with the learning already being done in a school, program, or organization. Service-learning provides a hands-on application of knowledge and skills to real life community needs."*

*Institute for Global Education and Service Learning, 1998*



# The Service Learning Cycle

Service-learning is best thought of as a cycle, where each step in the process leads to the next. As the diagram of the Service-Learning Cycle illustrates, the process doesn't end with the completion of the service activity. A project may be completed, but service-learning is a transformational process, where young people, practitioners, and communities continue to grow.



Every part of the cycle is rich with learning and growth opportunities, many of them happening as young people are guided through the process of identifying, planning, and carrying out service activities. It's important for practitioners to recognize the learning potential in each phase of the process and get students reflecting so that real learning takes place.

**WHAT? • SO WHAT? • NOW WHAT?**

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# The Service Learning Cycle – Pre-service

## Identifying a Genuine Need

A “genuine need” is one that’s important to the young people and the community. To identify the need, young people must recognize relevant issues, assess resources, and seek out the thoughts and concerns of those being served.

## Establishing Learning Objectives

Clear learning objectives distinguish service-learning from community service. When students make the connections between their service activities and studies, it deepens their understanding of the curricular material, how it’s used, and why it’s important.

## Planning and Preparation

No project succeeds without careful planning and preparation, and service-learning projects are no exception. Be sure to assess needs, collect all relevant information, engage in the necessary training, build vital partnerships, and develop an action plan.



# The Service Learning Cycle – Service

## Meaningful Service Experience

By investing themselves fully in service activities that address genuine community needs, young people find meaning in the project and grow to understand its value.

## Observation

To truly understand the impact of the service, young people should take time to observe the impact of the project on different participants. This process may involve exchanging ideas with peers and community partners, looking at the implications of cultural and diversity issues, or viewing the project in civic or political terms.

## Analysis

As young people use their observations to recognize the significance of the service experience, they assess their own learning and the impact of the project on the community being served.

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# The Service Learning Cycle – Post-service

## **Evaluation and New Understanding**

Evaluating their learning and the results of the project allows young people to discover new and different perceptions of themselves and the world around them.

## **Closing Reflection / Celebration / Demonstration**

All involved should enjoy the fruits of their labor and respect the accomplishments of other participants. This reinforces the positive achievements, sense of accomplishment, and personal growth attained through the service-learning experience.

## **New Applications**

The project may be completed, but participants continue to use their new knowledge and skills to make decisions, solve problems, and grow as caring, contributing members of their communities.



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# Ongoing throughout the service learning cycle...

## Reflection

**Pre-service** - Students get the most out of the service experience when they carefully examine their prior knowledge of and opinions on issues raised by the project.

**During service** - This is a chance to discover where young people are in the learning process, and give them a chance to voice concerns and share feelings.

**Post-service** - Young people take time to assess the meaning of the service experience; integrate their new understanding; and propose further action, projects, or enhancements to the current project.

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# Ongoing throughout the service learning cycle...

## Youth Voice & Ownership

**Pre-service** - The project belongs to the participants. Young people should work together to identify and explore community needs, connect with community partners, create project timelines and budgets, and plan service activities.

**During service** – Young people should have the opportunity to make meaningful contributions to the project selected. Their participation should reflect their passions, skills, and interests while actively engaging them in the service experience.

**Post-service** – Assessing mastery of learning objectives and evaluating program impacts are some of the ways young people can continue to demonstrate ownership of the project once the actual service is complete. Finding ways to share the project with others and determine future areas for action further promotes youth voice and leadership.



# Why the Service-Learning Process Is Good Brain-Based Learning...



Increase intrinsic motivation



Increase apathy and resentment

## Choices

Vs.

## Required

Provide choices: content, timing, work partners, projects, process, environment, or resources

Directed 100%, no participant input, resources restricted – for example, working alone

## Relevant

Vs.

## Irrelevant

Make it personal: relate to family, neighborhood, city, life stages, love, health, and so on

Impersonal, useless, out of context, and done only to pass a test or meet requirement

## Engaging

Vs.

## Passive

Make it emotional, energetic, make it physical, use learner imposed deadlines and peer influence

Disconnected from the real world, low interaction, lecture, seatwork, or video

Eric Jensen, *Teaching With the Brain In Mind*



# Why Service-Learning Is A Dropout Prevention Strategy

**Service-learning enhances academic performance.**

- A variety of teaching strategies are used.
- It's not boring.
- Relevance - the connections with the curriculum begin to make sense.



Source: Duckenfield, M. & J. Wright, *Pocket Guide to Service Learning*,  
National Dropout Prevention Center, Clemson University, 2001



# Why Service-Learning Is A Dropout Prevention Strategy

## **Service-learning helps make connections for students.**

- It provides the sense of belonging that is so desperately needed by adolescents.
- Solving problems with peers can bond these students together and provide the support base so needed by these young people.



Source: Duckenfield, M. & J. Wright, *Pocket Guide to Service Learning*,  
National Dropout Prevention Center, Clemson University, 2001



# Why Service-Learning Is A Dropout Prevention Strategy

**Service learning promotes real success.**

- The opportunities for growth in self-esteem are enormous in service-learning.
- To actually live the act of being helpful to another person is to gain in self-esteem.



Source: Duckenfield, M. & J. Wright, *Pocket Guide to Service Learning*, National Dropout Prevention Center, Clemson University, 2001



# Why Service-Learning Is A Dropout Prevention Strategy

## **Service learning empowers students.**

- By becoming involved in projects that are addressing real problems, students become problem solvers.
- By working with other students to solve these problems, they become team players.
- By working with adults in service situations, students develop communication and social skills.



Source: Duckenfield, M. & J. Wright, *Pocket Guide to Service Learning*,  
National Dropout Prevention Center, Clemson University, 2001



# Mike's Story



# What is Resilience?

- Relationships
- Independence
- Competence
- Creativity
- Optimism



From *Bouncing Back: Strengthening Resilience Through Service-Learning*, National Dropout Prevention Center (2008)



# What can you do to build resiliency through service-learning?

- Involve youth in the planning process.
- Allow students to generate potential projects.
- Provide varied and ongoing opportunities for program reflection.
- Ensure diversity in all aspects of the service-learning initiative.



Institute for Global Education & Service  
Learning

[www.igesl.org](http://www.igesl.org)

Richland School District 2  
Youth Action Council (YAC)

[www.youthactioncouncil.org](http://www.youthactioncouncil.org)

Service Learning Clearinghouse

[www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org)

