Best Practices Service Learning

Description

Service-learning is initially a difficult concept for people to understand. That is because people immediately think of volunteerism. People need to understand the distinction between community service and service-learning. Service-learning is a method of teaching which connects classroom content to the community in a way that is helpful to others. The primary emphasis is on enriching the learning that happens as students apply their knowledge to a community context. *By contrast, the primary purpose of youth community service is to provide service to the community and to foster citizenship and an ethic of service*.

Aberdeen Service Learning Project, Northern State University

Research on at-risk youth is beginning to identify those factors that enable people (even in the worst conditions) to make positive choices as a young person and later as an adult. Among those factors is the involvement in meaningful activities and assuming roles of responsibility and real consequence, such as service-learning.

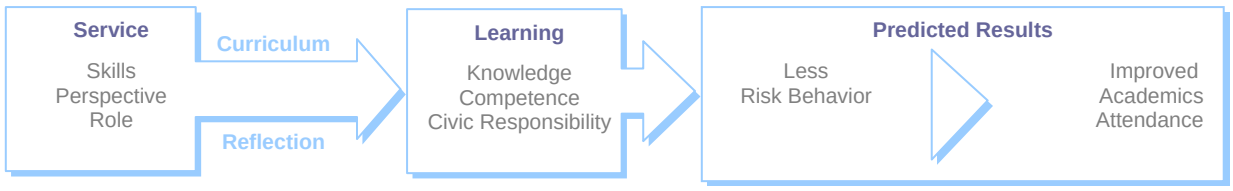
Service-learning engages young people in problem-solving activities; in structured and guided environments that have real consequences. Preventionalists support the notion of youth participation in socially valued tasks as perhaps the most critical protective factor in preventing social problems like substance abuse.

(Bernard, 1990)

Others believe that educators, prevention professionals, parents, and communities in general must provide the opportunities for youth to be the resources they truly are and not the problems we think them to be. (Levine, 1983) Emmy E. Werner, a professor and child psychologist at the University of California at Davis, conducted a study of children who have overcome great odds. She found that more competent adults had in their teenage years taken on responsible, needed positions, including paid and part-time work, caring for siblings, or managing a household for an incapacitate parent. Such acts of required helpfulness are key elements of effective intervention programs. For more information on At-Risk Youth, Juvenile Justice, Violence Prevention, Youth Courts and Service-Learning: Check out http://servicelearning.org/lib_svcs/bibs/at-risk/index.php

Strategy

What are the other connections between service-learning and prevention? Consider some other components of prevention:



Research

Service-learning approaches used in K-12 schools have been found in many studies to have positive impacts on students' academic achievement, civic engagement, career aspirations, and social/personal development. A comprehensive summary of the impacts from 1990-1999 may be found in Billig, S. (May 2000), Research on K-12 School-Based Service-Learning: The Evidence Builds, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 81, 9, pp. 658-664 and from 1980-1989 in Conrad, D. and Hedin, D. (1991), School-based Community Service: What We Know From Research and Theory, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 72, 10, pp. 743-749.

Outcomes

Below is a summary of service learning outcomes that have been demonstrated through research in the 1990s.

The Impact on Youth Personal and Social Development

- Service-learning has a positive effect on the personal development of public school youth.
- Students who participate in service-learning are less likely to engage in "risk" behaviors.
- Service-learning has a positive effect on students' interpersonal development and the ability to relate to culturally diverse groups.

The Impact on Civic Responsibility

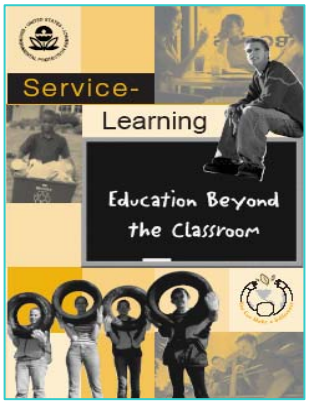
- Service-learning helps to develop students' sense of civic and social responsibility and their citizenship skills.
- Service-learning provides an avenue for students to become active, positive contributors to society.

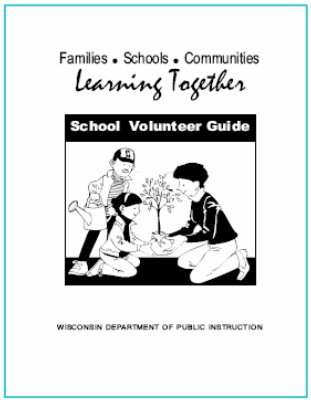
The Impact on Academic Learning

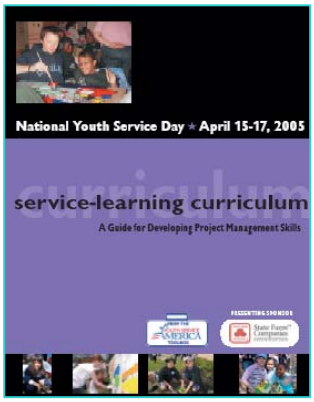
- Service-learning helps students acquire academic skills and knowledge.
- Students who participate are more engage in their studies and more motivated to learn.
- Service-learning is associated with increased student attendance.

Other outcomes of service learning include improved respect of teachers and students, improved overall school climate, more positive perceptions of school and youth by community members.

Service-learning Impacts on Youth, Schools, and Communities: Research, Shelly H Billig, 2000
Available at www.learningindeed.org or call (202) 778-1040.







Download The Above Free Resources

Service Learning Education Beyond the Classroom **PDF**, Learning Together **PDF**, Service Learning Curriculum **PDF**, Students in Service to America **PDF**.

Contacts

The Wisconsin National and Community Service Board, http://www.servewisconsin.org/
National Service-learning Clearinghouse http://servicelearning.org/index.php
Corporation for National and Community Service www.nationalservice.org
National Dropout Prevention Center www.dropoutprevention.org

For information on Wisconsin sites utilizing this best practice, contact the Wisconsin Clearinghouse for Prevention Resources