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SERVICE LEARNING – FACILITATING ACADEMIC LEARNING AND
DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS

by
Kathleen E. White

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
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Approved by

Professor

Date Approved

April 21, 2002

Abstract

Kathleen E. White

Service Learning – Facilitating Academic
Learning and Development of Social Skills
2002

Dr. Ted Johnson
Supervision and Curriculum Development

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a service learning project in raising the civic responsibility, social skills, and academic skills of special education students, while meeting the needs of homeless individuals living in Callalily County, New Jersey. Service learning provided an opportunity for student growth. Students learned to be dependable, solve problems, and learned cooperation and teamwork, while increasing their academic skills.

The study involved three classrooms of special education students; one elementary class of students with behavioral disabilities, one middle school class of students with behavioral disabilities, and one high school class of students with multiply disabilities. Pre and post surveys were given to the students to measure their attitudes toward community service, civic responsibility, and academic coursework. Results from the pre and post survey were compared to determine the effectiveness of the project. Qualitative data analysis was used to organize the information from both surveys into categories and data reduction was completed using a coding process. The report was descriptive in nature.

Major findings of the study concluded that service learning was a viable and useful educational method used to enhance and improve the civic, social, and academic skills of special education students.

Mini Abstract

Kathleen E. White

Service Learning – Facilitating Academic
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2002
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This study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a service learning project in raising the civic, social, and academic skills of special education students.

The findings of this study revealed service learning to be a viable method that does assist students in improving their academic, social, and civic responsibility skills.

Acknowledgments

I would like to first thank my two children, my son Nick and my daughter Julie, for supporting all my efforts in completing this project, and for helping me get through many a tiring day. I would also like to thank my sister Mary Ann, my special friend Walter, and my many other friends, who encouraged me to continue when times got difficult. I would also like to thank my field mentor, Cathy, who gave me her time, her support, and her advice. Lastly, I would like to thank my university mentor, Dr. Ted Johnson, for his support, guidance, and most of all, for his caring and calm manner while leading me through this project.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the Study

Service learning combines service to the community with classroom studies that can improve student learning and strengthen the community. This project was of special interest to Callalily County Special Services School District. It was the goal of the district to have students address the needs of the homeless in Callalily County where the school was located.

The service learning project involved thirty special education students; nine middle school students with behavioral disabilities, nine elementary students with behavioral disabilities, and twelve high school students with multiple disabilities. These students all attended Magnolia Regional School, which was part of Callalily County Special Services School District. These students had great difficulty in recognizing and meeting their personal needs and the needs of others. They also had great difficulty getting in touch with and expressing their feelings in appropriate ways. Service learning was a method that benefited these students by improving their academic learning and personal skills while providing a much-needed service to the community. The students had the opportunity to learn by preparing, leading, and reflecting upon their service experiences. The students had the opportunity to get in touch with their feelings while engaging in academic subject matter.

The Callalily Special Services School District also reaped many benefits from the project. The project built and enhanced student-teacher relationships, improved teaching

methods, and improved public relations between the district and the community. The concept of service learning was also integrated into the curriculum. The service learning project was definitely a win-win situation for everyone involved.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a service learning project in raising the civic responsibility, social skills, and academic skills of special education students, while meeting the needs of a homeless population in Callalily County.

Definitions

Service Learning – A method by which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service.

Behavioral Disabilities – An educational classification used to identify students that have difficulty meeting academic standards, display continuing inappropriate behaviors, and are consistently unmotivated and uncooperative learners with low self-esteem and ineffective social skills.

Multiply Disabilities – An educational classification used to identify students that display academic and social skills below age appropriate levels, usually due to some type of brain injury, or birth defect.

Survey Research – Research that deals with the incidence, distribution, and relationships of educational, psychological, and sociological variables in nonexperimental settings.

Coding – Process of organizing data, specifying designations and symbols as appropriate. The process usually results in data reduction.

Limitations of the Study

Using pre and post surveys, data was collected that measured student attitudes toward community service, civic responsibility, and academic coursework. The limitation of the study was the selection procedure. Sampling bias occurred because of the way in which the sample was selected, in this case in a nonrandom manner.

Setting of the Study

The community setting for the study was Callalily County. Callalily County Special Services School District was a receiving district for the county and offered services to all students from Callalily County. Callalily County was founded in 1686 and was an agricultural, industrial, and residential area. Its land area was 325 square miles and there were 783.6 persons per square mile. As of the 2000 U.S. Census, there were 254,673 people living in Callalily County, racially broken down as follows; White 87.1%, Black 9.1%, American Indian and Alaska Natives 0.2%, Hispanic or Latino 2.6%, and other races, or two or more races 2.2%. The median household income was \$49,279. There were 7.4% persons below poverty. The occupation with the greatest percentage was administrative support, including clerical, and the occupations with the smallest percentages were the farming, forestry, and fishing industries. The industry that employed the most people was the manufacturing of non-durable goods, and the industry that employed the least amount of people was mining. There were 61,760 persons 3 years of age and over enrolled in school as follows; 5,455 in preprimary, 40,767 in elementary or high school, and 15,538 in colleges. There were 41 public schools in Callalily County. Politically, there was 95,483 registered voters, 52% Democrat, 33% Republican, and 15% other and/or non-partisan. The Callalily County had a Board of

Chosen Freeholders consisting of the Director, the Deputy Director, the Education Liaison, the County Administrator, and 4 additional members.

The participants in the study received services from the Callalily County Special Services School District. The role of the school district was to provide a wide range of services that met the needs of public and nonpublic students in Callalily County. A variety of special education programs, remedial programs, and health programs were offered, as well as related services and administrative support options. There were 7 members on the Board of Education. Per the Quality Assurance Annual Report, dated October 17, 2001, there were 30 classrooms with a total student enrollment of 354. There were 30 classroom teachers, and 48 educational services personnel. Of the 78 faculty, 75% held a BA/BS, and 25% held a MA/MS. There were 7 administrative staff. The budget for the 2001-2002 school year was \$14,565,142.

The specific location for the project was the Magnolia Regional School. The primary purpose of this facility was to educate children from Callalily County who had special needs and required training that was not available in their local school districts. The school had 32 classrooms that accommodated 350 children with special needs from kindergarten through high school. The facility was comprised of three separate campuses. The East Campus served behavioral disabilities and multiple disabilities students in grades K to 5. The South Campus served secondary multiple disabilities students in grades 6 to 12. The North Campus served secondary behavioral disabilities students in grades 6 to 12. There was also a Therapeutics Services Department that was comprised of professional psychologists, clinical nurse practitioners, and social workers that worked collaboratively with school and community agencies to address the needs of

the students, their families, and the community. The curriculum consisted of SRA Direct Instruction, Corrective Reading, Reading Assist, Math Their Way, hands-on social studies and science series, and a life skills component. Specials included music, art, physical education, horticulture, work-studies, building trades, library, and a computer center. All goals and objectives were aligned with the NJ Core Content Standards.

Significance of the Study

Service learning provided a great opportunity for student growth. Students learned to be dependable, solve problems, care for and focus on the needs of others, learned cooperation and teamwork, and learned to take pride in an accomplishment. The project also helped to meet the needs of the homeless, strengthening the relationship between the community, the students, and the school district.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 2.....	Review of Literature
Chapter 3.....	Design of the Study
Chapter 4.....	Presentation of the Research Findings
Chapter 5.....	Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The focus of this review was to define service learning and to discuss the benefits a service learning project can provide to students, especially those students identified as having behavioral disabilities. In conclusion, a link between service learning, school reform, and the infusion of service learning into the school curriculum was discussed as ways to assure continuance of those benefits to students.

A review of the literature divulged similar definitions for service learning. As a broad definition, the National and Community Service Act (NCSA) of 1990 defined service learning as a “method under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs” (Hinck, Brandell, 1999, p. 16). Most definitions emphasize the combining of academics with a community service, and thus separating service learning from volunteerism. Service learning is a method that combines service to the community with classroom studies that can improve student learning and strengthen the community. It is “the accomplishment of tasks that meet genuine human needs in combination with conscious educational growth”(Tai-Seale, 2001, p. 14). Students work together with other students, teachers, and community members to meet a community need while increasing their skills and learning more about math, science, English, social studies, and other subjects. Service learning ties what is being learned in the classroom to helping

others. The community becomes a learning laboratory, where students can apply subject matter learned both in and out of the classroom to community concerns.

“In contrast to community service or volunteerism, service learning focuses on the development of the service provider, that is the student” (Gray, 2000, par. 1). The benefits gained by students participating in a service learning project are many and can have a positive impact on students’ personal and interpersonal development. There is “the potential for all young people to develop character, citizenship, and knowledge through service learning” (Des-Marais, Yang, Farzanehkia, 2000, p. 678).

Areas of positive character development can include “(1) responsibility and self-control, (2) cooperation and teamwork, (3) respect and appreciation of adversity, (4) trustworthiness, (5) fairness and justice, and (6) caring” (Muscott, O’Brien, 1999, p. 376). Students can be challenged to exercise leadership and responsibility by solving real life problems. They learn cooperation, teamwork, and trust by working with peers, teachers, and the community to solve real life problems. Service learning provides students with the opportunity to experience and develop a respect for diversity within the school setting and the community and to have “a greater appreciation of other cultures” (Hinck, Brandell, 1999, p. 16). Students experience social growth and development by “understanding and gaining an appreciation of, and ability to relate to, people from a wider range of backgrounds and life situations” (Kinsley, McPherson, 1995, p. 6). Students can learn to care for others by recognizing the needs of others and by trying to help others meet those needs. Students learn that young people can make a difference in the lives of others. Students can see themselves as effective change agents. Service learning also provides the opportunity for citizenship development. Citizenship is not an

inborn quality. It is a virtue that must be learned. “By teaching young people the joys of service to others, we make good citizenship a vital, transforming, and continuing aspect of our national character” (Powell, 1998, p. 18). The development of good citizenship skills in students is vital to our society, if our society is to continue as a democracy. According to Shumer, (2000), to be productive citizens, students must possess the willingness and ability to participate in politics at local, national, and international levels, the willingness to resolve conflict in a non-violent manner, and have the ability to think in a critical and systematic way. Service learning can help to accomplish those goals.

Students also improve academically. “In a study of more than 2,000 K-12 students from 24 schools, University of Wisconsin researchers found “service learning had a positive effect on students’ grades and attendance” (Hinck, Brandell, 1999, p. 18). Similar studies also found improvements in conduct, thinking skills, the motivation to learn, and application of learning, insight, and basic academics. Results from the Learn and Serve Programs that ran from 1994 – 1997 indicate “The Learn and Serve programs had a positive effect on participants, educational attitudes and academic performance, with significant impact on school engagement and math grades” (Hinck, Brandell, 1999, p. 19). Students that improve academically have increased self-esteem and are motivated to continue self-improvement and self-fulfillment.

Students receiving special education can benefit from service learning in ways that are unique to their learning needs. The benefits are especially important to students with special needs, “who frequently experience lower self-esteem and problematic peer status” (Jennings, 2001, p. 475). According to Kluth, (2000), in the early 1970’s, community-referenced instruction became popular for special education Students were brought out of

segregated schools and classrooms and received instruction in the community with the hope that community based instruction would increase academic and personal skills. This concept became the basis for using service learning as a tool to improve the skills of students with behavioral disabilities, “who have failed or been failed by the education system” (Meyers, 1999, p. 115). “Service learning activities can supplement the academic remediation that at-risk students often require” (Schine, 1997. p. 173). Students with behavioral disabilities need motivators to remain in and finish school. Service learning can increase their academic achievement by involving the students in hands-on learning, problem solving, and applications of academic knowledge in real settings. Service learning can help at-risk students by providing “the potential to develop a sense of power rather than helplessness, create worthiness rather than worthlessness, and provide opportunities for giving instead of dependency” (Muscott, 2000, p. 347). Research is limited on the effects of service learning for at-risk students, but educational researchers have found that, “when young people participate in service learning they develop problem-solving skills, social competence, and a sense of purpose, decision-making, collaboration, writing and thinking skills, and critical job readiness and pre-employment skills” (Meyers, 1999, p. 115). Although research is limited, review of the literature identified several acknowledgements of success of service learning programs involving students with behavioral disorders. The oldest report (1983), from Starr Commonwealth Schools, “indicated that the students educated there made significant gains in self-esteem, locus of control, and educational achievement” (Muscott, 2000, p. 351). A program based in Pinellas County, Florida (1997) concluded, “students’ attendance increased, behavior problems decreased, and grades improved” (Muscott,

2000, p. 351). A project that was part of Arizona's K-12 Learn and Serve America reported that all 13 students involved in the project "improved in basic skills performance on standardized tests" (Muscott, 2000, p. 353). Perhaps the most impressive statement of success is from the Resolving Conflict Creatively program, because the reports are given from the students and the teachers involved. The 30-week program was piloted with more than 150 at-risk students in eight elementary schools from Alaska to New York, throughout the 1997-98 school year. "The students' self-reports revealed they learned conflict-resolution and anger management strategies and improved their listening skills and ability to share with others. Classroom teachers reported that the at-risk students exhibited more positive attitudes toward school, an increased willingness to cooperate with peers and teachers, and increased self-esteem" (Muscott, 2000, p. 354). From all accounts, service learning can be a facilitator in helping at-risk students improve academically, socially, and civically.

To ensure the benefits of service learning continue through useful projects, a link must be made between school reform and service learning, and service learning should be infused into the curriculum. According to Riley and Wofford, (2000), an important step in linking service learning to school reform was made in 1995 when approximately 500 people participated in a meeting entitled "School Improvement: Strategies for Connecting Schools and Communities". From that meeting, The Declaration of Principles was established. The six principles that emerged from that meeting are instrumental in implementing the link between service learning and school reform. The article by Riley and Wofford, (2000), describes those six principles as follows:

Principle 1: All children can achieve higher levels of academic success while learning

to serve if they are provided challenging standards and given the opportunity to reach them; Principle 2: By solving real-life problems, students engaged in service learning are challenged to exercise leadership and responsibility; Principle 3: Teachers engaged in school improvement and service learning require continuing professional development and training; Principle 4: Improving our school requires parent and community involvement; Principle 5: Improving our schools requires the participation of the private sector and a full range of resources from every community, and; Principle 6: School improvement and service learning build on the realization that ours is a nation of diverse cultures.

These principles will bring about school improvement and student achievement by creating closer ties between the students, the school, and the community. Service learning also provides teachers with an active role in school reform by replacing “rote learning with authentic learning, using activities that enable students to apply content information and skills to complex and real situations” (Kinsley, McPherson, 1995, p. 7). Since service learning projects are so heavily involved in citizenship education, and since today’s American schools need to be recognize the importance of citizenship education, service learning can help ensure that education by being incorporated into the curriculum. It is important that students and teachers realize “that partnering with our communities is valued; that drawing connections between facts in the classroom and life outside of it is respected” (Masucci, Renner, 200, p. 45). Finally, integrating service learning into the curriculum connects the content standards with the curriculum. “The relationships between service learning and students achievement of content standards make service

learning an important link in the current educational reform movement” (Schukar, 1997, p. 182).

More research in several areas is needed to fully ascertain the benefits to students of service learning. In an article by Carpini, (2000), several questions are raised. What is the impact on short and long term gains in knowledge? What kinds of service projects enhance learning? At what age is service learning most effective? Review of the literature does support further research, but it also supports the concept of service learning as an effective and valuable tool in raising academic skills, producing civic awareness, and improving social skills in students, especially students with disabilities.

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

Research Design

This project was a case study of the effects of a service learning project on the academic and social skills of special education students. The students all attended school at a countywide special education school district that was designed to meet their academic needs as well as their emotional needs.

The study involved qualitative research. Qualitative research allowed the perceptions of the students to be summarized in words by the intern and also allowed the intern to understand the social phenomena of service learning and its effects on the population participating in the study. Data was gathered by use of the survey research procedure. Data was collected interactively by the intern before the project began and at the conclusion of the project. The length of time between the initial data collection and the final data collection was eight months. Data analysis began soon after data collection was complete. The qualitative data analysis required organization of the information into categories and data reduction, using a coding process to organize words and phrases that appeared with regularity. The report of the research was descriptive in nature, with emphasis on describing the context of the study. Variables considered were the age differences of the students, the intellectual differences of the students, and the behavioral concerns that can possibly affect their learning.

Research Instruments

The intern developed pre and post survey questionnaires after a review of the literature on service learning identified areas of research that would measure student attitudes and perceptions toward community service, civic responsibility, and academic coursework. Two pre survey and two post survey questionnaires were developed and administered. The same pre survey (see appendix A) and post survey (see appendix B) was given to the high school multiple disabilities students and the middle school behavioral disabilities students. A different pre survey (see appendix C) and post survey (see appendix D) was given to the kindergarten behavioral disabilities students. Comprehension and reading levels were taken into consideration in developing the questions for all surveys. Each question on all surveys also consisted of one concept and was designed to be clear and unambiguous. The pre survey for the middle school and high school students consisted of 10 open-ended questions. The open-ended questions allowed the respondents the freedom to openly reveal feelings and information. The questionnaire for the kindergarten students included three selected response items because they required less concentration and time on task. Two questions were open-ended. The students in the kindergarten class dictated their open-ended responses to the staff and were assisted by the teachers and assistants in writing their responses. All questionnaires were answered anonymously.

The middle school and high school pre survey had 10 questions. The responses to the questions were used to measure student knowledge of the homeless and how the students felt toward academic and cooperative learning. The responses were also used to identify community service the students may have completed, and to gain knowledge of student

career interests. The kindergarten pre survey had five questions that focused on similar areas, but were modified to meet the comprehension levels of the students. The middle school and high school post survey questionnaire had nine questions that were used to measure the following areas; a positive increase in student feelings toward community service, student interest in a service-related career, an increase in their general knowledge of the homeless, an increased interest in academic learning and how their life goals may have been influenced by the project. The students were also asked to critique the project and to make suggestions that would improve the project. The kindergarten post survey was used to measure an increase in student interest in helping people, in academic learning, and an increased interest toward service related occupations. The kindergarten students were also asked to critique the project.

Sampling Technique

A variation of purposeful sampling, typical case sampling, was used to select students. Typical case sampling takes the “middle road” approach by selecting samples that are considered typical of the occurrence under study. The sample used consisted of 9 kindergarten students with behavioral disabilities, 9 middle school students with behavioral disabilities, and 12 high school students with multiple disabilities. The students selected to participate in the project were considered typical and representative of the Magnolia Regional School’s population and age range. The students selected provided enough variation in the data to develop a comprehensive description of the research topic.

Data Collection Approach

Access to the research subjects was automatic and unobtrusive because the study was conducted in the intern's own educational institution. Data collection was interactive and included the use of pre and post survey questionnaires. The intern administered the questionnaires to each student group in their respective homerooms. The intern read each question to the group and assisted students with clarification of words and/or phrases they did not understand. The students were given time to think about and write their responses before proceeding to the next question. The intern collected the questionnaires immediately following their completion. The intern administered pre and post questionnaires in the same manner. The pre questionnaire was administered before the students were exposed to any information concerning the homeless. The post questionnaire was administered after eight months of extensive service learning and academic activities involving and related to the homeless.

Data Analysis Plan

The pre questionnaire data was measured against the post questionnaire data to provide the intern with evidence to support the theory of using service learning as a viable approach to improving academic skills, civic responsibility, and the social skills of special education students. The pre questionnaire was administered to the students without any knowledge given to them on the project or on the subject matter of the project. This was done to give the intern a database that consisted of student knowledge, attitudes, and concepts related to the project, prior to participation. The post questionnaire was given after extensive activities related to the project so that the intern would have a strong database from which to form conclusions about the project.

The post data on academic learning was used to prove the theory that learning new skills while engaging in a meaningful project increases higher level thinking skills such as open-mindedness, problem solving, and critical thinking. The intern wanted to know if the students learned to have more insight, better judgment, and an increased understanding of the subject, and if the students were more motivated to learn because the content of the lessons and the skills learned were directly related to the project.

The data was also used to measure an increase in civic participation and social responsibility. The students were asked in the pre and post questionnaires about any interest in a service related career. The project provided the students with the chance to experience a heightened concern for the welfare of others, which can lead to an exploration of a service-related career, as well as an understanding of others' life situations. Growth and development were difficult factors to measure. Gaining knowledge of student interest in the servicing the community, before and after the project, helped to evaluate student growth and development.

Service learning is authentic learning because it enables students to apply content information and skills to real situations. The pre and post questionnaires asked the students how they felt about learning new things and if the project increased their academic skills. The pre and post data related to academics and learning was compared to support the concept of infusing service learning into the curriculum to strengthen and enrich curriculum content, and to provide a link between service learning and student achievement of core curriculum content standards. Student feedback was considered an essential ingredient in the argument for instilling service learning into the curriculum. The post survey data asked the students how they would improve the program, and/or

what changes they would make prior to having the concept become part of the curriculum. It allowed the students to be instrumental in what and how they learn.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Research Findings

The purpose of this project was to determine the effectiveness of a service learning project on civic, academic, and social skills of special education students. Two different pre and post surveys were administered to measure that effectiveness. This chapter discusses what information was found on those surveys and what the information meant in reference to the purpose of the study.

The first pre survey discussed was administered to nine kindergarten students with behavioral disabilities. The focus of the survey was to determine how the students felt toward helping people, toward academic learning, cooperative learning, and to discover what, if any, future aspirations they may have toward a career in a service related field. The first question was very point blank, "Do you like to help people?" Five students said yes and four students said no. These students were very young and had a behavioral disability. These two factors were very essential in understanding the nature of their responses. Civic responsibilities in a young child are not often found. Children of this age are very self-centered. Add to that, the fact that these students had a behavioral disability. It was encouraging to have five "yes" answers before the project was even started. Students were also asked how they would help the homeless. Many of the students had very impressive ideas on how to help the homeless. Of the nine responses, only two said they would do nothing. The other seven students would give them food and a place to live, one student even going as far as offering his own house for the homeless person to sleep in. The responses to academic learning and working with

others was almost an even split. Five students said they like to learn new things, four said they do not. Four students said like to work by themselves, five like to work with others. Finally, the students were asked what they want to be when they grow up. The question was not asked in any way that directed the students toward choosing a service related career. It was simply asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Of the nine responses, six did turn out to be service related careers, such as firemen, policemen, a doctor, and working in a hospital. (It should be noted here that this survey was given two weeks after the terrorist attack on New York. The intern does not know what exposure the students had to that event, or if it impacted upon the choices of the students). The survey itself may have impacted on the students, because the idea of helping people find food and shelter was a question on the survey. The other three answers were typical choices that a 5-year old may give and were representative of what goes on in their world. The other three answers were, a "Pokemon" trainer, a WWF wrestler, and a Power Ranger.

The second pre survey discussed was given to nine middle school students with behavioral disabilities. The focus of this survey was also to determine the feelings of the students toward civic responsibility, academic learning, and cooperative learning, but on a higher level of thinking. This survey asked the students how they might have helped people in their neighborhood, and did they feel they could make a difference in their neighborhood. Seven students said they have helped out by taking out trash, giving directions and helping someone into their car. Some students included help given in their own house, such as help with homework and fixing the computer. Of the responses there weren't any real specific group volunteer experiences, such as committees formed to help

clean up trash around the neighborhood. Three students did say that cleaning up parks and schools could make a difference, but they had not participated in any of these activities. The most disturbing answers were the ones in which students felt that people just do not care and people are mean, so that helping out would be useless. It was difficult for the students to have a positive attitude toward civic responsibility and helping others if they felt people were “mean and don’t care”. The students were asked if they like to learn new things. Seven of the nine said yes, that learning helps to expand your mind and can move you closer to success. This fact was very enlightening to the intern. Middle school students, especially those with behavioral disabilities, have a reputation for being very poor students with very little, if any, interest in academics. The students were asked if they liked to work alone or in groups. The majority favored working in groups. Here, seven students said they prefer working as part of a team because you can get help from each other and bounce ideas off of one another. This was very encouraging. Collaborative learning is important for all students, especially those that are struggling emotionally and academically. The students were also asked if they ever thought about having a job that helps other people. Only four responses were service-related careers; a doctor, a nurse, a lawyer, and a cosmetologist. The other responses involved mostly manual labor jobs, such as construction work, and car repair.

The third pre survey discussed was administered to 12 high school students with multiple disabilities. The same survey given to the middle school students was given to the high school students. The first question, have you ever helped out people in your neighborhood, was an even split, six yes and six no. Two of those students could not remember how they helped out, and the others did small jobs, such as taking out the

trash, cleaning out a neighbor's shed, and watering plants. Many students did feel they could make a difference in their neighborhoods, by helping to get work done faster, making people feel better and happier, and making themselves feel happier. When asked if they liked to learn new things and work with other people, all 12 students said yes, they like to learn new things, for a variety of reasons. Some said it stimulates your imagination and you don't get bored. Others wanted a good education because its cool and fun, and can help you get the job you want. Clearly, these students were all open minded and ready for the project. Students were asked if they liked to work as part of a team or alone. Seven students like to work as part of a team because you can get help from others, in one way or another. Four students liked to work by themselves, because "it is cool to work by yourself and you can get things done faster and better". One student said he liked to work both ways, by himself and with others. Students were asked about their interest in working in a service related career. Six students responded yes to having a service related career when then graduate. They included two doctors, one nurse, one school principal, and two firemen. Other responses included a disc jockey, a baker, and construction worker. Three students did not know what they wanted to do after they graduated.

The post surveys were administered after six months of extensive activities related to a service learning project that involved gathering daily items needed by children living in a local homeless shelter. One important purpose of the activities chosen was to help raise student academic skills; therefore the activities chosen (see appendix E) were designed to meet the requirements of the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Area Standards. The

other purpose of the project was to heighten student civic and social skills. The questions on the post surveys were designed to measure any increase in these areas.

The first post survey discussed was the questionnaire given to the nine kindergarten students with behavioral disabilities. The post survey, like the pre survey, was simple in nature to meet the academic levels of this age group. One student had a negative response to every question. The other eight students' responses were discussed. The first two questions asked if the students had fun making the projects and would they like to make the projects again next year. Eight students said yes to both questions. The students were asked what new things they learned about helping people. Six students said it is very nice and good to help people. One student said she learned not to tease people and one said he learned to cook dinner, which does not relate to the project, but may relate to helping out at home. Students were asked what new schoolwork they learned. Here, some of the targeted curriculum standards were clearly met. Two students said they learned to draw, do art, and decorate. Five students said they learned how to count, sort, and put things together. One student said he learned handwriting. Finally, students were asked if they would like to help the homeless when they get older. This question was designed to gain insight into a possible interest in a service related career. Eight students answered yes.

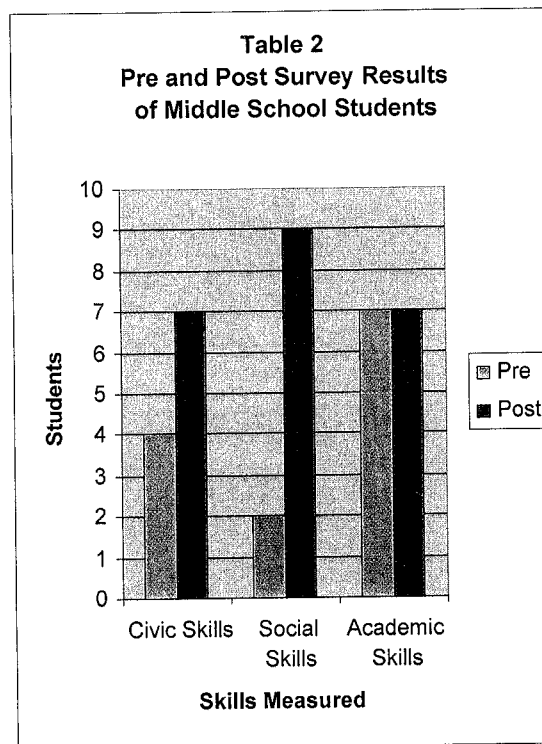
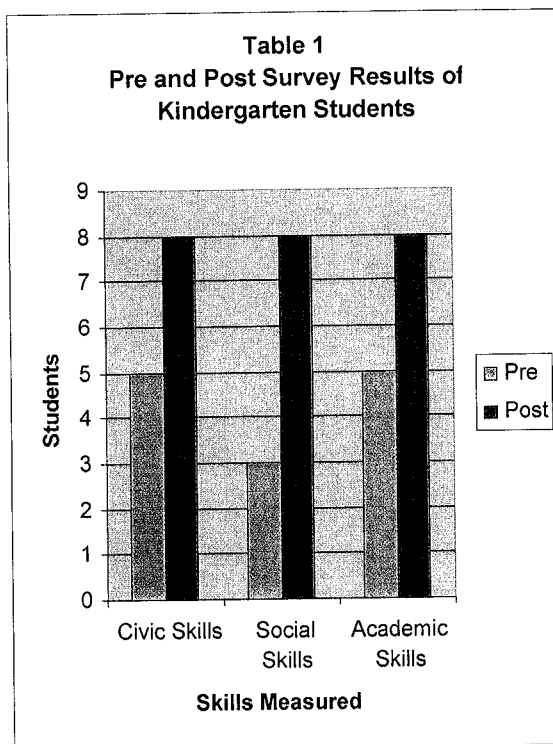
The second post survey discussed was administered to the nine middle school students with behavioral disabilities. The students were asked what was the most meaningful thing they learned and how did they feel the project effected the community. Eight students said they learned that sharing with others, especially others that are less fortunate, is the right thing to do, and they learned to think about others, not just

themselves. One student said he learned to appreciate his parents and siblings, because the kids at the shelter do not have either one. All nine students said the project definitely had an effect on the community, because the shelter was part of their community, and the project made the children there very happy. Students were asked would they volunteer for the project again, and would they now consider having a job that helped other people. All nine said yes, they would volunteer again, but only seven would now consider a service related career. Those careers included a fireman, working in a hospital, nursing, and being a “homeless person specialist”. One student wanted to be a scientist, and one student said he did not have the patience for a service related career. Students were asked if the project increased their academics skills. Seven students said yes, but their comments all focused on learning new social skills. One student said the project was too much fun to learn anything, and one student said the project did not involve any reading, so he did not learn anything. Students were asked if their life goals changed. Four students said no, because even before the project began, one of their life goals was to help others. Two said their goals have not changed, but did not state why. Two students said they have not set any life goals yet, and one student said he still wants to be an astrologist and a nuclear scientist.

The third post survey discussed was administered to the 12 high school students with multiple disabilities. The post survey focused on measuring improvement of civic, social, and academic skill levels of the students. The students were asked what was the most meaningful think they learned. Ten students said that helping people and being nice to kids while having fun was what they learned. One student learned how to give presents to people in need and one student said he did not learn anything. Students were

asked would they participate again. Eleven students said yes they had fun. It was “cool”, and they liked helping kids. One student said no, because he felt like he would not fit in. Students were asked would they now consider having a job that would involve helping other people. Nine students said yes, but did not know what the job would be. One student said he wanted to wash cars and two students said no. Students were asked if the project helped to increase their academic skills. Eleven students said yes, but were not specific on what skills. One student said the project increased his social skills. When asked about improving the project, ten students were happy with the project the way it was. One student would donate more “stuff” and one student would use different delivery bags.

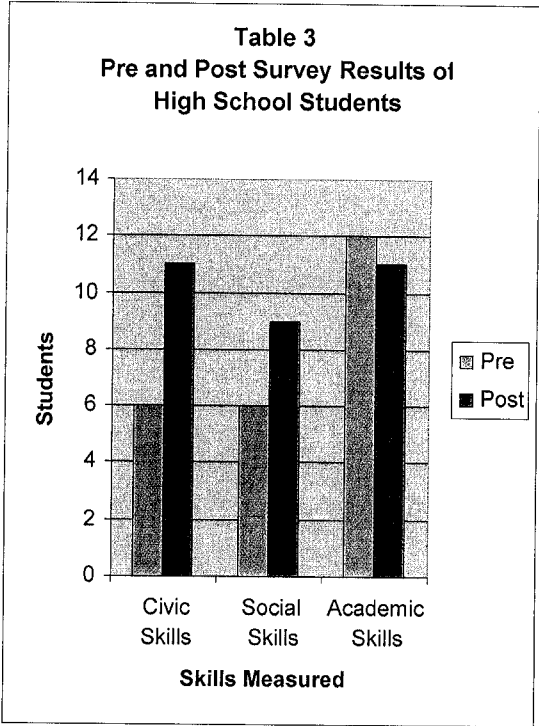
The intern first made comparisons between the pre and post survey answers given by the kindergarten students with behavioral disabilities (see Table 1). The answers were used to measure the effectiveness of the service learning project on the civic, social, and academic skills of the students. Only one student had a negative response to every question on the post survey. There was an overall increase in the area of social and civic responsibility. Eight students, as compared to five in the pre survey, are now willing to help other people and had a positive answer on how it felt to help other people, and the importance of not teasing others who may be different. There was also an increase in their academic learning and feelings toward civic responsibility. Eight of the students targeted specific skills that they learned, and would be interested in helping the homeless when they get older.



Secondly, the intern made comparisons between the pre and post survey answers given by the middle students with behavioral disabilities (see Table 2). There was a positive increase in the way students felt about helping out others. The majority of the students went from having a not caring attitude to one of caring for others and having social responsibility for those less fortunate. There was also an increase in the number of students interested in having a service related career, from four to seven. There was no increase in learning any new specific academic skills.

Finally, the intern made comparisons between the pre and post survey answers given by the high students with multiple disabilities (see Table 3). There was an increase in civic skills, from six pre survey to eleven post survey students. Eleven students were willing to repeat a service learning project and to help out in the community, as compared to six students, who before the project began, would not help out at all in their

community. There was a slight increase in student interest in social skills, up from six to nine. Academically, eleven students did say that they increased their academic skills, but were not specific about what new skills they learned.



Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications, and Further Study

The service learning project completed by the special education students at Magnolia Regional School has proved to be a useful method in improving the social, civic, personal, and academic skills of those students. There were many successful outcomes as a result of the project. There were also areas of the project the intern felt needed improvement; improvements that would bring about even more positive findings in future service learning projects. There was also a positive organizational change and positive implications on the intern's leadership development. Finally, there was also a need for further research.

Qualitative research conducted by the intern revealed that the most improved areas were the increase in students' social and civic skills, and personal skills of sharing, caring, and cooperation with others. The project provided the students with the opportunity to realize that they can make a difference in their community and, in turn, make a difference in their own lives. The students at Magnolia Regional School indicated an increase in their desire to help others and to pursue a service related career. The students became partners with a community shelter for homeless children. There was a deep connection between the students involved in the project and the children at the shelter. Many students voiced the feelings of appreciation for what they have in their own lives, and in turn, wanted to give to others less fortunate. They had the opportunity

peers and teachers, so that the project would be a success. The students were engaged in many activities that allowed them to solve problems and realize what it means to be a member of a team. These were all important benefits for students with disabilities who frequently experience low self-esteem and problematic behaviors in school. Students with behavioral disabilities do not often see themselves as positive contributors to their community or as positive contributors in the lives of others. Students with behavioral disabilities do not often see their education as a means to improving their lives as well as improving the lives of others. This project has helped these students to realize some of their potentials and how to use their skills to better their own lives as well as the lives of others.

The students indicated a slight increase in their academic skills. The intern was hoping for greater acquisition of academic skills. Academic achievement is what distinguished the service learning project from volunteerism. Every activity completed in the project was based on connecting the activity to a state education standard, so the results should have been higher. The students needed a stronger sense of connection between what was achieved in the classroom and every day life skills. More emphasis should have been placed on the relationship between the academic skills and the completion of a project activity. This may have given the students a stronger sense of academic achievement.

Using qualitative research, the intern was able to obtain feedback from the students indicating that the majority of the students were satisfied with the project and would participate again. This piece of evidence proved to be very encouraging to the intern. Students with learning and behavioral difficulties often struggle in school. This project

was active and interesting, and attests to the fact that programs for these students should be active and interesting to be beneficial to them. Also, the teachers involved in the project were pleased with the progress of the students, and would also be willing to participate again in a similar project. The teachers completed a “Service Learning” rating scale on each student (see appendix F), although the results of the scales were not part of the research project. They overwhelmingly agreed that the project was worthwhile, useful, enjoyable, and was a powerful learning experience for everyone involved. The teachers did participate in an in-service meeting to orientate them to service learning and to the activities involved in this particular project (see appendix G).

There were certain areas that the intern would change and improve upon when engaging in future service learning projects. The first would be to solicit student volunteers for the project. The three classrooms selected to participate in this research project were chosen by the administration at the Magnolia Regional School. Although students were not forced to participate, there was a certain feeling of obligation among some students. There were also students from outside the chosen classrooms that wanted to participate and could not. Volunteering for a project gives one a sense of intention and allows for natural expression. Secondly, the students should have been more involved in selecting the subject of the project. The Together Shelter was chosen as the recipient of the service because it is an outreach program serviced by the district. Students should discuss different issues of interest and then conduct research on those issues before choosing one for the project. This would better enable them to select a project that they are more willing to stay with and complete. Also, the lack of space and time for completion of the activities as an entire student group was a hindrance. The classrooms

were from three different “wings” of the school and operated on three different schedules. There should have been a specific time and place for the project activities to occur that would have fit into all three schedules. This would have provided a better sense of cooperation between ages and academic levels, and would have made it more unproblematic for the intern to facilitate the activities.

The Callalily County Special Services School District has elected to incorporate service learning into their current curriculum. This project was the first service learning activity to be completed at the Magnolia Regional School. The district was very pleased with the positive changes in the students’ behaviors and the increase in their social, civic, and academic skills. Service learning enriched the academic curriculum through constructive, age-appropriate activity and ongoing reflection. Service learning strengthened the curriculum with relevant activities that increased student interest. Service learning also linked the contents standards to the activities carried out during the project. The Callalily County Special Services School District has seen the educational value of a service learning project and has also realized what a positive link the project was between the district and the community.

The service learning project also had positive implications toward the development of the intern’s leadership skills. The service learning project enabled the intern to have practical experience that produced a productive educational outcome and a positive change for the school district. To assist in the development of leadership skills, the intern coordinated the following activities: defined the goal, built support, conducted research, made and implemented a plan, identified and found resources, organized public relations, evaluated progress, and implemented a form of recognition.

Further research is needed on the effects a service learning project has on the skills of special education students. The study of a service learning project should be expanded to include data collection and analysis of behavioral checklists, disciplinary reports, and teacher reports of changes in learning and behavior, and feedback from parents, guardians, and teachers. Further research assessing the impact of service learning projects would assist educators in realizing the importance of having their students participate in such projects and how it could enhance their efforts to facilitate academic development. Further research would also help to fine tune service learning projects to better serve the purpose of academic achievement and curriculum enhancement. Further research would aid in school reform and school restructuring by including instruction that fosters community involvement while raising academic standards. Finally, further research would provide more needed evidence to support the theory that service learning is an effective method of instruction when trying to improve academic, civic, and social skills of special education students, especially students with behavioral disabilities. There is a need for these students to develop understanding and caring behaviors towards others. A strong service learning project coupled with the collection of multiple sources of data that address the academic, social, and civic goals of the students will aid in that process.

There were many positive consequences of implementing this project, for the students, and for the community. The students learned to communicate better with each other, with teachers, and with persons in the community. They learned how to express their feelings, verbally in group discussions and by writing their feelings down in a personal journal. They learned to recognize the fact that there are differences in our society, and

to accept that diversity without being judgmental. They gained insight into what responsibilities might be involved in a service related career. The students improved their academic skills by combining activities with real life experiences.

The community received a much-needed service, and experienced a positive relationship with students that often have a reputation for being non-productive citizens of our society. That positive relationship was affirmed when the service learning team received thank you cards sent by the children who lived at the shelter. The cards provided a real connection between the students, the school, and the shelter. The service learning project was definitely an undertaking to be replicated, due largely in part to the great success of this project.

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Appendix A

Research Instrument

Pre-survey for 7th – 12th Grade Students

Student Pre-survey for 7th – 12th Grade

1. Have you ever helped out people in your neighborhood?

Yes

No

2. If yes, when and where did you help, and what kind of help did you give?

3. Do you feel you can make a difference in your neighborhood by helping out other people? Why or why not?

4. When you grow up, have you ever thought about having a job that helps other people? If yes, what kind?

5. What do you know about homeless people?

6. What do you feel is the best way you can help the homeless people?

7. Do you like to learn about new things? Why or why not?

8. Are you willing to try new things? Why or why not?

9. What is an important goal for you to achieve during your life? Why?

10. Do you like working on problems as part of a team or by yourself? Please explain.

Appendix B

Research Instrument

Post-survey for 7th – 12th Grade Students

Service Learning

Date _____

Student Post-survey for 7th-12th Grade

1. What is the most meaningful thing you learned from the project?
2. Do you feel that your participation in the project had a positive effect on the community? Why or why not?
3. Would you volunteer to participate in another service learning project? Why or why not?
4. Would you now consider a having a job that helps other people, and what would it be?
5. Do you feel the project was helpful in learning new information about the homeless? Why or why not?
6. Do you feel the project helped you to increase your academic skills? Why or why not?
7. Have your life goals changed since you participated in the project? Why or why not?
8. What improvements and/or changes would you make to the project?

Appendix C

Research Instrument

Pre-survey for Kindergarten Students

Appendix D

Research Instrument

Post-survey for Kindergarten Students

Appendix E

New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards Addressed in this Project

New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Areas Addressed in this Service Learning Project

Area 1. Cross-Content Workplace Readiness

Standard 1 - Students will develop career planning

Standard 2 – Students will use information and technology

Standard 3 – Students will demonstrate self-management skills

Area 2. Arts (Visual & Performing)

Standard 1.3 – Students will apply art elements

Area 3. Comprehensive Health & Physical Education

Standard 2.2 – Students will predict daily needs for a healthy life style

Area 4. Language Arts Literacy

Standard 3.1 – Students will speak for real purpose

Standard 3.2 – Students will listen attentively and critically to a variety of speakers

Standard 3.3 – Students will write in clear, concise, organized language

Standard 3.4 – Students will read a variety of materials for comprehension and analysis

Standard 3.5 – Students will gain information from a variety of media

Area 5. Mathematics

Standard 4.5 – Students will use mathematical tools

Standard 4.10 – Students will develop an understanding of statistics and will use them
to describe sets of data

Standard 4.12 – Students will recognize when to use estimation

Area 6. Social Studies

Standard 6.4 – Students will acquire historical understanding of social ideas

Appendix F

Service Learning Rating Scale for Students

Service Learning Rating Scale for Students

Student's Name _____ Date _____

Evaluator _____

Based on your observations during the project, please rate the student for each of the following behaviors:

circle 1 if the student almost never displays the behavior

circle 2 if the student seldom displays the behavior

circle 3 if the student sometimes displays the behavior

circle 4 if the student often displays the behavior

circle 5 if the student almost always displays the behavior

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Takes initiative in planning and carrying out service activities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Communicates regularly with all people involved in the project. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Follows through on agreed commitments and responsibilities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Displays enthusiasm and a positive attitude toward project. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Employs appropriate interpersonal skills to relate well with teacher, students, and community members. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Demonstrates organizational skills necessary to conduct a service learning project. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Appendix G

Staff Orientation – Service Learning

Staff Orientation – Service Learning

What is Service Learning?

Service learning combines meaningful service to the community with classroom studies in a way that improves students' learning and strengthens the community. Students work in collaboration with community members, teachers, and classmates to meet real community needs. Educators have argued that service can positively influence students in the following areas:

1. intellectual development
2. ethical development and moral reasoning ability
3. social and psychological development
4. citizenship, civic and social responsibility
5. tolerance and acceptance of diversity
6. career goals and knowledge

Project Description

This project is designed to raise and heighten awareness of the needs of homeless individuals, while developing social, civic, and academic skills. Students will design and prepare gift bags for a homeless shelter. The project will take place over the course of the school year. The participants will meet once a week for two academic periods.

Community Involvement

The project focuses on providing gift bags for the homeless that temporarily stay at the Together Shelter in Glassboro.

Grade Levels

K-12 students from the North, South, and East wings.

Teaching Team

Kathleen White – Coordinator

Irene Gianelli – North 109

Donela Winegan – East 108

Susan French – South 107

Academic Focus

Workplace Readiness

1. Objective – Students will develop career planning

Activity – demonstrate dependability by attending meetings and completing projects

2. Objective – Students will use technology to gain information

Activity – use of computers to research the homeless

3. Objective – Students will demonstrate self-management skills

Activity – work cooperatively with others to accomplish project goals

Activity – journal writing to evaluate their own actions and accomplishments

Arts

1. Objective – Students will apply art elements

Activity – designing and producing gift bags

Health

1. Objective – Students will predict daily life needs required to maintain a healthy

life style

Activity – research what basic needs the homeless require to maintain a

healthy life style

Language Arts

1. Objective – Students will speak for a real purpose
Activity – group discussions as a reflective activity
1. Objective – Students will listen attentively and critically to a variety of speakers
Activity – group discussions, teacher instruction, guest speakers
2. Objective – Students will write in clear, concise, organized language
Activity – journal writing, writing a plan of action, citing sources of information, addressing invitations to the end of the year celebration
3. Objective – Students will read a variety of materials for comprehension and analysis
Activity – research homelessness and its causes using a variety of sources
4. Objective – Students will gain information from a variety of media
Activity – view information about the homeless from different media sources

Math

1. Objective – Students will use mathematical tools
Activity – use calculators to estimate the quantity of products needed for gift bags and to keep count of items gathered
2. Objective – Students will develop an understanding of statistics and will use them to describe sets of data
Activity – use graphs to analyze data for the items used in the gift bags
3. Objective - Students will recognize a situation in which estimation is appropriate
Activity – estimate the quantity of items needed for the gift bags

Social Studies

1. Objective – Students will acquire historical understanding of social ideas

Activity – study of the homeless shelter and how it functions to meet the needs of the homeless, invite a guest speaker from the shelter to conduct a meeting with the students to inform and answer student questions

Assessment

A rating scale will be used to assessment student performance.

Reflection Activities

Students will keep personal journals of their work and accomplishments and also participate in group discussions.

Recognition

A celebration will be planned in May of 2002 for all participants.

Effective Leadership

Being able to “let go and let be” seems to be the greatest challenge for adults participating in a service learning project. It takes strength and courage to hold young people accountable and to know when to intervene. In situations where students’ safety is in question, adults must step in with caution. But errors and blunders are inevitable and come with the territory of freedom and responsibility. Mistakes and failures provide the greatest learning. Young people aren’t challenged to improve when they are constantly rescued or corrected. Please keep these theories in mind and practice during your participation in the project.

Thank you.

Biographical Data

Name	Kathleen E. White
High School	Vineland High School Vineland, New Jersey
Undergraduate	Bachelor of Arts Teacher of the Handicapped Rowan University Glassboro, New Jersey
Graduate	Master of Arts Supervision and Curriculum Development Rowan University Glassboro, New Jersey
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