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Mark K. Covey  
*Concordia College - Moorhead*

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Final Report  
9-B English Service-learning Evaluation  
Moorhead High School  
Moorhead Minnesota

August, 1998

Mark K. Covey, Ph.D.  
Department of Psychology  
Concordia College  
Moorhead MN 56562

NSLC  
c/o ETR Associates  
4 Carbonero Way  
Scotts Valley, CA 95066

## I. History

Mark Jensen, English faculty at MHS offered his service-learning program for an evaluation. This evaluation was initiated by Jeanie Jacobs consequent to the conditions of a grant she received; the structure of this evaluation evolved over several team meetings between Jensen, Ann Larson (District 152 Director of Community Service-learning) and myself.

## II. Program Overview

Mark Jensen teaches English to Moorhead High School ninth-grade students (9-B). These students are at risk of failing to meet the State of Minnesota's graduation standards for proficiency in English reading and writing. In an innovative application of service-learning pedagogy, Jensen has arranged for his students to tutor first grade students at Washington Elementary School who are themselves deficient in basic reading skills. The older students spend part of their week preparing lessons for the younger students and part of the week working with their first-graders tutorees or "buddies." This service-learning program provides the older students with academic content and a context into which they may apply this information. The younger students benefit through contact with the older students while they teach the basic skills.

## III. Evaluation Overview

Service-learning programs are, by definition, unique to the populations and issues addressed. However, there are four general claims for the efficacy of service-learning programs:

- A. *Academic Gains:* Service-learning courses have potential to engage students to a greater degree than other forms of instruction. The mechanism for this engagement is the careful integration of academic content with applications in the "laboratory of real life." Thus students see that their classroom activities are not mere esoteric concepts with which teachers and academicians are enamored, but ideas and principles that are meaningful in ways they may not have experienced before. This relating of the theoretical to the practical (and vice versa) demonstrates the relevance of both to the student, providing not only a context in which to legitimate the theoretical, but a vivid experiential structure in which academic content can be stored and more readily recalled.
- B. *Service to Community:* Service-learning applications require that someone is served. The characteristics of this group have come to include those who are undeserved. Service-learning interventions

meet previously unmet needs and in so doing, illustrate the interdependence of individuals and systems in communities.

- C. *Citizenship*: Advocates of service-learning claim that service-learning interventions foster citizenship behaviors. The opportunity to serve in communities is combined with purposive reflection concerning the need to serve. Students learn the relationship between societal needs and those who meet those need.
- D. *Personal Development*: Proponents of service-learning report substantial changes in individual servants' view of society and their role within it. For many students, a service-learning experience offers affirmation of their abilities to contribute to the well-being of others; for other students, service-learning may offer a venue in which their understanding of the social contract can be developed and examined.

An evaluation plan was proposed which was consistent with these general goals. This plan was implemented throughout the spring 1998 semester;

- A. *Academic Gains*; academic gains, if any, were assessed by careful tracking and comparison of standardized reading and writing test scores; these scores are presented in Appendix A. The scores were subjected to an interrupted time series analysis. In brief, the interrupted time series compares measurable attributes before an intervention (in our case, service-learning) with the same attributes following the intervention.
- B. *Service to Community*; Service-recipients themselves contributed their evaluation of the service-learning program. The comments of service-recipients were assessed through a structured interview conducted by Concordia College research assistants. The interview form and summary of recipient responses are attached as Appendix B.
- C. *Citizenship*; While there are many ways that citizenship issues might be assessed, I used a similar structured interview. Student assistants from Concordia College administered these interviews during the school day, late March to early April. This form and a summary of servant responses is attached as Appendix C. In addition, parents were asked to respond to several questions concerning their perception of their child's service experience. This questionnaire and a summary of parent responses are attached as Appendix D.
- D. *Personal Development*: The interview responses were also examined for evidence of changes in the servants' "world view" as were the parental responses to the program. Mark Jensen's observations of daily class interactions served as a valuable source of evaluative information.

#### IV. Evaluation Results: MHS 9-B Service Providers

Twenty-two of the service providers were individual met for 10 to 15 minutes by one of three college student interviewers. After a brief introduction, relating of the purposes of the interview, and reassurances of confidentiality, the service providers were ask to characterize their service experience, their affective reactions to the experience, the connection between classwork and service, and their willingness to serve in other contexts.

Students were clear in the relating of their activities with their tutorees. Encouraging reading was most frequently reported following by teaching or reviewing sight words. A few students mentioned the social elements of their service (e.g., “catching up” on the events in each other’s lives following a separation period). Not surprisingly for mid-adolescents, several reported that the service-learning experience provided a welcome break from the routine of classes and course work.

Clearly, the overall student reaction to the service experience is positive; most students eagerly anticipated their contact with their service recipients and obtained a sense of satisfaction when their recipient “got it.” Thirteen of the 22 students interviewed “looked forward to” their interactions with the younger students, 14 indicated that their service helped them learn 9-B English, and 21 of the 22 indicated that they felt a sense of accomplishment (e.g., “good”, “great”, “enjoys seeing them learn”, etc.) from the service experience. Importantly, 15 of the 22 indicated that they would like to serve as part of their other courses and many of these 15 had specific suggestions, mostly in mathematics.

A second source of valuable evaluative information comes from Mark Jensen. In several conversations during the evaluation process, Mark noted his enthusiasm for service-learning, founded in no small part on the gains he observed in the classroom. These gains are telling given the frequently challenging home environments of the 9-B students and their reputations as “less-than-stellar” performers in other classes. While class periods are reported to be interesting and challenging, also noted were the numerous times when individual students illustrated class concepts through their service. Clearly, the students’ service with Washington Elementary children provides an important conceptual link between the formal academic content of 9-B English and its application in practice.

Standardized testing of student accomplishment provides the final point documenting student accomplishments in this program. As a routine matter, students complete the Gates MacGintie Reading Test to provide a formal assessment of their accomplishments during their eight and ninth grade terms. This test provides a Total score and Verbal and Comprehension subscale scores. Change scores were calculated for the 25 students for whom eighth and ninth

grade scores were available by subtracting a student's eighth grade score from their corresponding ninth grade score such that a positive value represents improvement. For clarity's sake, these scores are reported as percentiles and tabled below

Gates Change Scores (9<sup>th</sup> grade – 8<sup>th</sup> grade)

Scale	average	range	standard deviation
Comprehension	0.72	-34 to 42	20.7
Verbal	19.92	-8 to 67	18.31
Total	10.64	-16 to 51	17.02

The most dramatic changes were evident in the Verbal subscale scores. Students here averaged a 19.92 percentile improvement between the eighth and ninth grades, an improvement which was statistically significant ( $t= 5.44$ ,  $df=24$ ,  $p<.001$ ). On this subscale, 18 students showed an improvement, averaging 28.28% while only four students showed decrements averaging only 4.25%. Likewise, the change in student's Total scale scores was also significant ( $t= 3.13$ ,  $df=24$ ,  $p<.01$ ); on this scale, only six students "lost ground", averaging 8.6% while 13 students averaged a 23.15% improvement (one student showed '0' change). Despite these changes, students showed no significant improvement in Comprehension subscale scores, attributable perhaps to the variability in the scores.

#### V. Evaluation Results: George Washington Service Recipients

As part of this evaluation, two Concordia College students also interviewed the first-grade service recipients. Twenty-seven first graders were available for interview; the interview instrument and abstracted raw responses are presented in Appendix C.

The first-graders were positive, and in several instances enthusiastic about their relationships with the older students. Anecdotally, their teacher reports that the first-graders were disappointed on those occasions when the ninth-grade "buddy" had to miss their appointment. Concerning the interview, all 27 of the service-recipients reported enjoying their contact with the older students. Twenty-six of them indicated that this contact was helping them with their reading, and 17 indicated some assistance with their writing (13 clearly indicating, 4 less so). The interviewers were asked to rate the apparent enthusiasm of the first-graders for their contacts; these ratings averaged 9.07 out of 10 suggesting that the first-graders were quite enthusiastic, on the whole.

## VI. Evaluation Results: Parents of 9-B Students

During parent-teacher conferences, parents of the ninth-graders were asked to complete a brief free-form survey to record their perceptions of the effectiveness of the 9-B service-learning program for their child. This instrument was tied to a particular element of the course that examined mental and physical health-promoting elements in Moorhead and individual student homes; students were expected to converse with their parent(s) regarding these elements. This instrument and the parent responses are presented in Appendix D.

Even though students were offered an extra-credit incentive for returning a completed form, only nine responses were provided. Both the low rate of return and the general tone of the responses suggest that parental support of these students may be less than optimal. None of the parents who responded indicated that they worked with their child on the assignment and only one provided any reaction to the assignment; that reaction was less than inspiring (“interesting, but [the project] had little impact on school”). Five of the nine parents were aware of the service-learning element of 9-B, but only one of these five noted that the service-learning element was “another positive influence” on his/her child’s attitudes towards school and school behavior. Taken collectively, these responses suggest that many of the 9-B students have parents who may not provide environments supportive of academics; additionally, the students and parents may have problematic styles of communication or relationships.

## VII. Summing Up: Clear Indicators, Remaining Questions, and New Considerations

Earlier in this report, I noted that service-learning proponents advance four claims for service-learning’s effectiveness; I will address these in turn.

In an evaluation project such as this one, constraints of time and money limit the degree to which we may be certain that the service-learning projects are responsible for the desirable *Academic Gains* shown by English 9-B students. That caveat aside, clearly 9-B students are showing academic achievement which is properly attributed to their participation in that class. While the effective element of that class may be service-learning, Mark Jensen as an effective teacher, or the combination of both, students do gain from the experience in ways which are apparent to their teacher, themselves, and to an apparently limited extent their parents. These gains alone argue for continuing and expanding the service-learning pedagogy which Jensen plans to do during the 1998-99 academic year.

Service-learning proponents also argue that the pedagogy provides valuable *Service to a Community*. That this was accomplished in the current program seems self-evident; MHS students provided significant and valuable contact time with first-graders. This contact offered support of that teacher’s efforts and

provided the younger students with an early introduction to positive adolescent role models. This contact would not have transpired without the service-learning element of the course.

Gains in *Citizenship* are less easily assessed in this in a short-term, "low tech" evaluation. An expected source of evidence was to be the parental responses, but the low return rate and negative tone of these do not provide much evidence that the 9-B service-learning course had much of an impact outside of the schools' environments. Perhaps we expect too much of service-learning in this regard, especially in dealing with children from relatively unsupportive home environments. While there is much anecdotal information that service-learning has an impact on citizenship, such as the consequences when one ninth-grader had to explain to his buddy that, because of a conviction and detention, the nine-grader would miss the weekly sessions that both came to enjoy, formal evidence for citizenship changes should be collected in future evaluative efforts.

Lastly, proponents of service-learning suggest that it promotes *Personal Development*. Like citizenship, direct evidence of this was not provided in this evaluation. However, there are many indirect indicators that the 9-B program has caused some students to reflect on their role in life and in society. Several students expressed to their interviewers that they were now considering the teaching profession because of their mentoring relationships. While this career path may be closed to many of the students, it is notable because teaching is a service to others and these students can envision a career in a service-intensive field. Such envisioning does not occur without substantial reflection and self-examination for children in this stage in their lives.

An evaluation frequently surfaces some improvements in addition to answering questions and this one is no different. It seems clear that students, parents, and the program would benefit if some way could be identified to more greatly involve the parents in their child's education. Resistance to this involvement should be expected as some parents are no doubt feeling stigmatized by their children's conduct or academic deficiencies. However, facilitating parents to be supportive would go a long way to improving the students' performance and may have consequences for parents' and student's quality of life.

Finally, future efforts at evaluation should be begin during the planning of the academic year. This was not possible for this evaluation. However, evaluating any program as an on-going activity provides immediately useful information while it allows one to address questions with more sophisticated research techniques. This should not detract from the current program, however, which shows measurable student gains attributable to the efforts of its teacher to provide an engaging and effective educational experience for his students.



Appendix A  
Gate-MacGintie Reading Test Score

total	chang	comprehn.	verbal
score	chnng.scr.	chnng.scr.	chnng.scr.
-5.00	-9.00	3.00	
33.00	-5.00	42.00	
-9.00	-9.00	-3.00	
99.00	99.00	99.00	
41.00	42.00	35.00	
2.00	-2.00	-8.00	
19.00	23.00	27.00	
15.00	1.00	39.00	
7.00	-3.00	33.00	
8.00	7.00	-2.00	
.00	-12.00	16.00	
-9.00	-9.00	6.00	
11.00	-10.00	28.00	
35.00	-19.00	25.00	
5.00	-15.00	31.00	
17.00	42.00	-8.00	
51.00	41.00	67.00	
-3.00	-25.00	24.00	
5.00	-2.00	11.00	
99.00	99.00	99.00	
16.00	8.00	22.00	
-3.00	-12.00	8.00	
-10.00	-14.00	-6.00	
99.00	99.00	99.00	
15.00	-4.00	36.00	
12.00	4.00	24.00	
99.00	99.00	99.00	
-16.00	-34.00	28.00	
99.00	99.00	99.00	
29.00	34.00	20.00	
99.00	99.00	99.00	

note: 99= missing data

Appendix B  
Service Recipient Interview Form and Responses



First Grade Interview Data

Intwvr.	Child Name	Buddy Name	What do you do...?	o you like	Help with reading?	Help with writing?	See more...?	Intwvr. Rating	Comments
CC	Chris	unknown	color, read comics	yes	yes	sometimes	uncertain	10	told story of seeing Buddy outside father's store
CC	Jessica	unknown	color, read comics	yes	yes	unknown	yes	10	
CC	Dustin	unknown	color, read, write	yes	yes	yes	yes	10	
CC	David	unknown	unresponsive	yes	yes	yes	yes	8	told of visiting H.S.
CC	Jacob	unknown	color, trace hands	yes	yes	yes	yes	9	
CC	Klantt	Josh	games, movies, read and write	yes	yes	yes	yes	10	
CC	Kari	unknown	trace body, read, write	yes	yes	yes	no	9	
CC	Amber	two buddies	play games, read	yes	yes	yes	no	8	
CC	Justin	unknown	read, write	yes	yes	yes	uncertain	9	
CC	Collyn	unknown	reading, playing games	yes	yes	yes	yes	10	
CC	Jordan	Mike	practice flashcards, red	yes	yes	sometimes	yes	10	
CC	Blue	unknown	play games	yes	yes	no	yes	9	wanted to visit BB at H.S. instead of Wash. El.
CC	Spencer	"picks people"	read	yes	yes	no	yes	10	
CC	Jessie	Cody	read, flashcards, hangman	yes	yes	no	yes	10	
CC	Ashley	Robin	read, play games	yes	yes	no	yes	9	
CC	Reilly	unknown	read, write, play games	yes	yes	yes	yes	10	
CC	Eddie	unknown	read books	yes	yes	no	yes	9	
CC	Joey	unknown	read, play some games	yes	yes	yes	yes	9	
CC	Shawn	unknown	read	yes	yes	no	no	6	disinterested in interview
MW	Brian	Andrew	read, play games	yes	yes	yes	yes	7	reported ups and downs in BB reactions to him
MW	Melany	Riley	spelling, play games	yes	yes	yes	yes	10	
MW	Amanda	unknown	read, color	yes	yes	no	yes	9	
CC	David	unknown	word work, flashcards	yes	yes	no	yes	10	excited about meetings with BB
CC	Michael	"G"	read books	yes	yes	sometimes	yes	8	
CC	Brody	Cody	color, throw bean bags	yes	yes	sometimes	yes	9	
CC	Jacob	unknown	play games	yes	unknown	no	yes	7	
CC	Kassie	unknown	read, play games, flashcards	yes	yes	yes	yes	10	
27				yes	27	26	13	21	9.0741
				no		0	9	3	
				uncertain/equiv		1	5	2	

Appendix C  
Service-Provider Form

## Service-Provider Interview Form

*General Notes:*

1. Remember that the focus of these interviews is to gain a general impression of the student's service experience. This impression should include a sense for a connection, if any, between the work in the classroom and the service to the first grade recipients.
2. Place your interviewee at ease. Strive for the perception that they are not the focus of the evaluation, rather that the program in which they are participating is the center of attention.
3. Of course, anything they tell you (outside the bounds of that which you are legally bound to report) is confidential; their teachers, supervisors, etc. will not learn of the content of your interview.

Name of Interviewer: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Little Buddy: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Tell me a little about what you do at Washington Elementary School: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you look forward to these periods? \_\_\_yes, \_\_\_somewhat yes, \_\_\_not really, \_\_\_no. Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is the connection between your tutoring and what you do in your English class at MHS? (elaborate/record examples)

---

4. Does teaching reading and writing to kids help you learn? (elaborate/record).

---

5. What do you think your little buddy (mentoree, tutee, kid, etc.) gets out of your service?

---

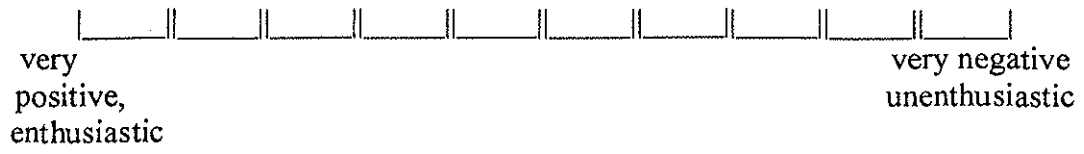
6. How do you feel when your buddy (kid, mentoree, etc.) understands something that you taught them?

---

7. Would you like to volunteer for other classes? If so, which ones? How?

---

7. Global Impression of Service Experience:







Appendix D  
Parent Questionnaire

## READING ACHIEVEMENT PROGRAM Year End Parent Evaluation

We are in the process of evaluating the success of this class and Service-Learning as a teaching methodology. We would appreciate if you would take a few minutes to fill out this evaluation of the Reading Improvement Program as it relates to your child. Please remember this is an evaluation of the program, not individuals connected with the program.

1. What if anything have you heard about this program from your child?

2a. Did you work with your child on tonight's project?

\_\_\_\_\_Yes

\_\_\_\_\_No

2b. If yes, what are your reactions to the process?

3. Have you noted any changes in attitudes or behaviors in your child as a result of being involved in this project? Describe.

4. Based on you and your child's experience with this Service-Learning program, do you have any suggestions that would enhance the student's learning experience?

**Thank-you much for your time!**

Parent Evaluation Responses

Heard from Child?	Work Together?	Reactions?	Changes in Attitudes/ Behavior?	Suggestions?
no	no	no	no	no
talked about ideas and implementation that they were tutoring at El. School	no	interesting, but little impact on school	no	chose idea and implement-- increase child's faith in system
child never brings work home	no	none offered	no	no
about project and tutoring	no	none offered	no	no
yes; told about 1 week before	no	none offered	no	no
like to hear more; positive and innovative	no	none offered	yes; "another positive influence"	communicate with parents more / more nights that parents can attend
no	no	none offered	no	no
child thought about rights and wrongs	no	none offered	yes: "growing nicely"	great program /heard a lot about it / thanks for added guidance in maturing

