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Joel S. Garavaglia-Maiorano

Joel Pile

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Service Learning: Making the Camp Connection.

Camping Magazine, Sept-Oct, 2001, by [Joel S. Garavaglia-Maiorano](#), [Joel Pile](#)

Camp programming that integrates learning through community service

Service learning, today's buzzword for education through service, is as diverse as are camp programs in our nation. From providing environmental education to tutoring to feeding the homeless, it is both a method and a philosophy. Programming for service opportunities in today's camps offers a variety of options, from short-term experiences to a fully integrated curriculum that links action and reflection. Service learning, therefore, may be best understood as a method to encourage campers to act, reflect, develop, and learn through community-organized service that connects the needs of a community with the knowledge and experience of campers.

The Role of Service Learning in Camp Programming

Initiatives for good camp programming come from counselors and directors who believe campers deserve the best recreational, educational, and service-related opportunities possible. Service learning provides a promising model for camp staff to bridge experiential education with traditional programming. The philosophy of learning by serving creates camper-centered, experientially guided activity within the community and brings the needs of the community into the camp.

Camp programming objectives are met by integrating real and meaningful community service into methods of teaching and learning. Campers explore and learn through practical application and real-life experiences. Integrating service into traditional camp programming addresses current concerns about camper education such as developing social relationships, exploring environmental issues, and understanding different cultures. With service integration, the context of existing programs comes to life by using real-world applications of camper-centered thoughts and concerns, often reconnecting campers with a sense of civic responsibility.

Positive outcomes

Through careful planning, implementation, and reflection, camps will be able to promote service-oriented educational programs. As these programs blossom, positive outcomes will result:

- * Critical thinking and inquiry skills will be used as primary tools to examine issues.
- * Counselors will become facilitators of learning, not dispensers of information.
- * Campers will learn and increase collaboration with each other.
- * Active learning will replace passive instruction.
- * Continuous and spontaneous reflection will occur throughout the entire process.
- * Campers will develop a sense of civic and social responsibility.

- * Participants will serve and be served by their involvement.
- * Campers will increase self-esteem and self-knowledge.
- * Campers will develop communication, problem-solving, and social skills.

Current Models of Learning by Serving

Today, many organizations integrate various principles of service learning in their program curriculums. The following two organizations show examples of how service-learning programs can impact their communities:

Troop 365 Boy Scouts of America

Troop 365 in Haysville, Kansas, created the opportunity to take the annual Scout canned food drive and turn it into a service-learning adventure. Rather than simply going door to door on the specified date and collecting food, the troop prepared flyers that identified and explained the purpose of collecting cans. This allowed area scouts to not only explain but educate others on the immediate needs of their community. Collection day involved the collaboration of local radio stations that broadcast the importance of the scouts' mission. Their hard work paid off with an overwhelming response from the community. Prior, during, and after the event, scouts were encouraged to reflect on the event by sharing thoughts, writing in their journals, and processing emotions.

Lakeside United Methodist Camp and Conference Center

This camp, located next to Scott Lake State Park in western Kansas, is an example of how a facility can be used to incorporate diverse populations and programs. Currently, several church and civic groups visit Lakeside year-round to do service-related projects that support the camp's mission and promote awareness to area historical attractions. Projects have included camp and park maintenance, erosion control, trail building, cultural awareness, team development/dynamics, and exploring geological formations.

The local university also uses this camp to teach leadership skills to students who learn through service. Plans are currently underway to develop a cooperative experiential learning center between the university and camp.

Transcending Boundaries

People most often remember 10 percent of what they read, 20 percent of what they hear, 50 percent of what they see and hear, and 90 percent of what they both say and do. Service-learning projects impact campers by providing them with opportunities to develop, participate in, and evaluate programs that link community needs with their own camp, helping them understand the connection between learning and living. By designing programs that apply learning through service, camps will foster positive challenges and growth for campers that will transcend the boundaries of the camp site and the intellects of the campers.

Joel S. Garavaglia-Maiorano is professor and chair of the Health, Physical Education, and Recreation Department at Kansas Wesleyan University.

Joel Pile, a former student government president, is a business owner and city council member in Haysville, Kansas.

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Education through Experience

John Dewey expressed the belief that all genuine education comes through experience: "If we strive for a democratic society, then we must educate our students so that they are able to contribute to that society. Surely the best way to do this is to involve them more directly in the functions and functioning of the communities in which they live."

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