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The community as lab for service learning

Joseph Ciaccio

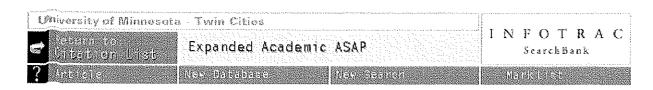
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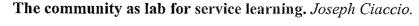


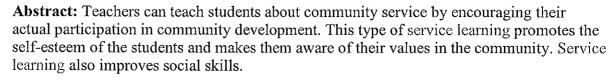






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Article A53688756

ted to grade-level achievement in reading, and parents are advised of their children's performance through a systemwide, reporting, process from the first day of school, parents receive a steady flow of letters, and descriptions of the instructional and developmental scales; a correspondence continuing throughout the year.

Literacy Graph

eracy graph. performance descriptors as the litrecord progress by means of the same port cards have been modified to sessment in September to the last in of the year and parents can follow dents far exceed this level by the end all Bangor first-graders. Many stuarea on the graph that indicates the late May in addition, quarterly retheir child's growth from the first asminimum performance expected of Farents can easily find the shaded goal of their child's annual program which defines unambiguously the and a "literacy assessment graph, hensive "literacy assessment profile" They also receive the first compreconferences, where parents review coincide with the fall parent/teacher and that the first one is designed to given in September, January, and May, their child's starting IRL and DRL Parents learn that assessments are

Inspired by the success of the literacy assessment team in first grade, a second-grade literacy assessment team was formed in 1993. The members understood that placing second-grade literature into levels would require different definitions from those

used in first grade. Their challenge was compounded by the need to address multiple genres and higher levels of comprehension required in the curriculum. Once again, an examination of the beliefs and performance expectations—that second-grade teachers bring to their reading instruction had to be established. And any assessment had to incorporate an extensive measure of comprehension and independent written responses.

schools in the use of their assess bangor teachers train other Maine enthusiastically endorsed. Today, assessment was under way and being in September 1996 the second-grade rubrics were put into final form. And staff training were complete. Kits and ment of test protocols, piloting, and program in two years, the developbridge the gap to the second-grade help advanced first-grade readers grade literacy team quickly created a ments in second-grade work, the firsttive. After witnessing early developtransitional reading assessment" to first-grade assessment was impera-Moreover, a connection with the

Not surprisingly, the third-grade teachers soon took up the challenge of continuing the development of the assessment system. What is evolving is a seamless, continuous-progress performance assessment in reading that provides teachers with valid feedback on their instruction, that relates information about growth in achievement to parents in clear terms, and that reports the progress of the school system to the public.

The Community as **I_AB** for <u>Service Learning</u>

By Joseph Ciaccio

From Social Education

Middle School are lined up in pairs in front of school, waiting eagerly for the policemen to stop a driver without a seat belt. When they do, two students approach the driver, who gets a well-rehearsed speech on seat-belt use. A small child in the back seat is offered cookies donated by a parent who owns a bakery, and toys donated by local merchants.

The children in this activity, who have prepared a pamphlet on seat-belt safety in four languages, hand their written words of wisdom to each amazed driver. They sent three requests to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration to get enough bumper stickers to pass one out to each stopped driver. The kids went to the sheriff's office to get permission for this activity, and acted as "spokespeople" when local TV cameras appeared on the scene.

What a wonderful experience for these youngsters! They went back into school pumped up and enthusiastic about their important contribution to the community. They felt good about

themselves because they realized they can accomplish something of significance. They tested their inner resources and were victorious in trying to give a practical lesson in safety to 60 drivers

Service learning is an exciting concept. Teachers can help students learn by using the community as a laboratory. Yet, far too many schools employ community service only as a sporadic activity when it should be an ongoing K-12 commitment.

The benefits of service learning for students are wide ranging. Students feel useful and may experience a sense of personal growth and enhanced self-

for 31 years and is now an educational for 31 years and is now an educational consultant. Reach him at 58 Unqua Rd., Massapequa, NY 11758 (phone: 516-541-0078). Condensed from Social Education, 62 (September 1998), from its supplement, Middle Level Learning, M12-M13. Published by the National Council for the Social Studies, 3501 Newark St. NW, Washington, DC 20016 (phone: 202-966-7840).

stand its relevance to the real world in enhanced learning. community involvement thus results social studies when they better understudents become more interested in secondary schools. Moreover, many tation of the learning process in most mented, isolated, single-subject orienparts—in sharp contrast to the fragthat is greater than the sum of its interdisciplinary—a whole experience

Better Social Skills

tion bill. The team effort resulted in They raised \$4,000 in bake sales to when the bill became law. another terrific sense of achievement ertyinto a drought-resistant landscape. tion project, the students of Suzanne to testify in favor of a water conservasend representatives to Sacramento Middle School turned the school propstudents' social skills. As a demonstracomes of service learning is improving One of the most meaningful out-

tional Rights Foundation using publicsize information to solve a problem. to analyze, hypothesize, and synthecommunity problems requiring kids vice learning confronts students with Close Up Foundation and the Constituto them the Active Citizenship Today Social studies teachers have available As for critical thinking skills, ser-(ACT) program, a joint project of the

> policy issues to satisfy various conhomelessness, crime, drugs, and viotent and critical-thinking aspects of pares lesson plans on such topics as the social studies curriculum. ACT pre-

Service learning also tends to be focus of students in the Northside violence and interviewed legislators, grams on the topic for their school's gether and presented education procontrol, and identified pending bills sidered constitutional issues like gun politicians, and other community residents gathered information on teen school district of Texas. These stuworthy of their support. They put toconflicts among various groups, concreased crime. They observed value dents to determine causes behind in-The ACT project on crime was the

genuinely productive. studies curriculum when students see the projects they are engaged in as Service learning can enrich the socialcated it wasn't meaningful to them. ceived from school work, most indiors class what satisfaction they rework relevant. When I asked my hon-Students don't always find school-

through hard work and eager spirits. paper, they got recognition earned tification" appeared in the local news-When the kids' achievements in "beaudents. I was advisor to the Social Studing projects is recognition and posifiti and cleaning up the courtyard. "beautify" the school by attacking graf ies Club when students decided to tive attention for participating stu-An essential part of service-learn-

service learning. Community action Teachers can find a lot to like about

same direction, all part of the marvelstudents into the educational process. ing to entice non-academically minded ous mainstream, teaching becomes a master teacher will use service learnot pace from classroom learning. The programs can be fun and a nice change When all children are moving in the

deliver the 22 boxes of food to the were asked to bring in food for the name were spelled out. continued until all the letters of my astically. "Give me an i," he yelled. He me a C."The kids responded enthusistudents jumped up and yelled, "Give food on the pantry shelves. On the bus homeless shelter, the kids stacked the most, the principal selected them to homeless. Since my class brought the trip home, one of my most difficult the genuine highs of my teaching ca-Interfaith Nutrition Network. At the reer when the children in my school Service learning provided one of

students on a different level. You work students. Most of all, you, as the with them. You're on the same side. activity lets teachers relate to their satisfaction for the rest of your life. teacher, will cherish these golden tension, and greater cooperation from moments as an anchor of personal There is likely to be more trust, less What a great feeling! This kind of

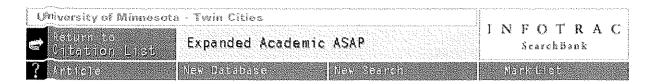
vice learning can bridge that gap. a sense of community while going community, but kids rarely experience to the world outside. Hopefully, serisolated entities. They are part of the to the final bell that delivers them back through the motions from homeroom Traditionally, schools function as

to Care community program. Since Dare to Care program teaches chilup litter in downtown Great Neck. The and toys for families in need. They also 1993, they have collected clothes, food School, on Long Island, are in a "Dare some day be better parents, friends rock values on a systematic basis may man dignity. Kids who learn these bedhelped the mayor's campaign to clean and members of their communities. dren compassion and concern for hu-Students of Great Neck North Middle

Active and Caring

eration appear to feel? After all, what insignificant as many of the older genlives feeling as helpless and politically stimulation, physical and mental satisfying career, but enjoyment of famcan one person do? doesn't even come to mind? Are our about being an active, involved citihealth, and ethical conduct." But what zen? Is this human endeavor so rare it ily and friends, recreation, intellectual will prepare students for "not only a children destined to live their civic It's been written that future schools

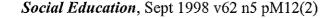
essential role to play in preparing stusolution is to teach children how to rich and wealthy (sorry, Abe). One government by the very tew, tor, the the world will be in their hands. world a better place to live in. It has an decisive and makes our immediate munity involvement through service dents for that time when the niture of tive ways. Its impact is emphatic and learning can affect students, teachers, and the community in protoundly posibecome active, caring citizens: Com-We are moving in the direction of













The community as a laboratory for student learning. (Middle Level Learning, September 1998, Issue 3) *Joseph Ciaccio*.

Abstract: Teachers should provide children with many opportunities to actively be involved in the education process. Service learning is an exciting concept in education yet many schools employ community service only as a sporadic activity. Teachers can encourage and help their students to learn by using the community as a laboratory for the classroom where children can test and apply their curriculum to real life situations from kindergarten through high school.

Article A21177155

THE COMMUNITY AS A LABORATORY FOR STUDENT LEARNING

Joseph Ciaccio

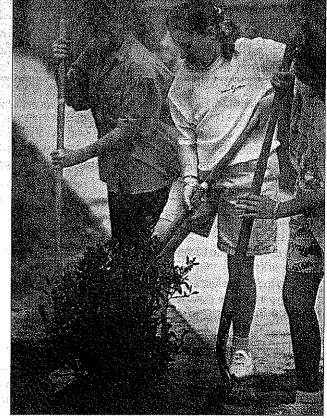
The eighth graders from Suzanne Middle School are lined up in pairs in front of their school. They wait eagerly for the policemen to stop a driver who is not wearing his seat belt. When they do, two students approach the bewildered driver, who finds himself the recipient of a well-rehearsed speech about the virtues of seat belt use. A small child in the back seat is offered cookies donated by a parent who owns a bakery, and toys donated by local merchants.

The children involved in this activity, who have prepared a pamphlet on seat belt safety in four languages (English, Spanish, Japanese, and Tagalog), hand their written words of wisdom to each amazed driver. They had written three requests to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (N.H.T.S.A.) to get enough bumper stickers to pass one out to each stopped driver. It was the kids who went to the sheriff's office to get permission for this activity. It was the kids who acted as "spokespeople" when local TV cameras appeared on the scene.

What a wonderful experience for these youngsters! These students went back into school pumped up and enthusiastic about their important contribution to the community. They felt good about themselves because they came face to face with the realization that they can accomplish something of significance. Fisk maintains that children should be actively involved in the education process. This seat belt activity certainly accomplished that goal. They tested their inner resources and were victorious in their attempt to give "a practical lesson in safety" to sixty drivers.

Service learning is an exciting concept

in education. Teachers can help their students learn by using the community as "a laboratory for the classroom where students can test and apply their curriculum to real life situations."3 Yet, far too many schools employ community service only as a sporadic activity when it should be an ongoing commitment from kindergarten through high school.



Students in Williamsburg, Virginia, conduct a landscaping project.

Service Learning Helps Students

The benefits of service learning for students are wide ranging. Students feel useful and may experience a sense of personal growth and enhanced self-esteem by becoming more aware of their positive inner resources. Social skills may improve because so much of the process is a group effort. Critical thinking skills may also improve because the students are solving real life problems.

Service learning also tends to be an interdisciplinary activity—a whole experience that is greater than the sum of its parts. This is in sharp contrast to the fragmented, isolated, single subject orientation that comprises the learning process in most secondary schools.

Many students become more interested in social studies when they better understand its relevance to the real world.

Community involvement thus results in enhanced learning.

Among the many positive outcomes of service learning, one of the most meaning

ful is improving students' social skills. The students of Suzanne Middle School turned the school property into a "xeriscape," or drought-resistant landscape, as a demonstration project. They raised \$4,000 in bake sales to send representatives to Sacramento to testify in favor of a water conservation bill "that called for planting drought-tolerant shrubs and flowers as landscaping for public roads and buildings." The team effort put forth by these kids resulted in another terrific sense of achievement when the bill became law.

What about critical thinking skills? Service learning confronts students with community problems that require kids to analyze, hypothesize, and synthesize information in order to solve a problem. Social studies teachers have available to them the A.C.T. (Active Citizenship Today) program, a joint project of the Close Up Foundation and the Constitutional Rights Foundation, which uses public policy issues to satisfy various content and critical thinking aspects of the

oto by Renee Bouchard, Close Up Foundation

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social studies curriculum. A C.T. prepares lesson plans on such topics as homelessness, crime, drugs, and violence.

The A.C.T. project on crime was the focus of students in the Northside district of Texas. According to Stephens, these students gathered information about teenage violence, and

interviewed legislators, politicians and other community residents to assess the reasons for the increase in crime; noted the conflict of values among different groups; examined constitutional issues such as gun control; and identified pending bills that they wanted to support. They also prepared and presented education programs on the topic for younger kids at their school.⁶

Students don't always find schoolwork to be relevant. I was surprised when I asked my honors class what satisfaction they received from their school work, and most indicated that it wasn't meaningful to them. Rich maintains that "motivation needs replenishment." Service learning projects can enrich the social studies curriculum when students see the projects they are engaged in as genuinely productive. 8

An essential part of service learning projects is recognition and positive attention for participating students. I was the advisor to the Social Studies Club when students decided to "beautify" the school by attacking graffiti and cleaning up the courtyard. When the kids' achievements in "beautification" appeared in the local newspaper, they received the recognition they had earned through their hard work and eager spirits.

Benefits to the Teacher

Teachers can find a lot to like about service learning. Community action programs can be fun and a nice change of pace from classroom learning. The master teacher will use service learning to entice non-academically minded students into the education process. When all children are moving in the same direction, as part of the marvelous mainstream, teaching becomes a pleasure.

Service learning provided one of the genuine highs of my teaching career when the children in my school were asked to bring in food for the homeless. Since my class brought in the most, the principal selected them to deliver the 22 boxes of food to the Interfaith Nutrition Network. Upon arrival at the homeless shelter, the kids opened the boxes and stacked the food on the pantry shelves. On the bus trip home, one of my most difficult students jumped to his feet and yelled, "give me a C." The kids responded enthusiastically. "Give me an I," he yelled. He continued until all the letters of my name were spelled out.

What a great feeling! This kind of activity allows teachers to relate to their students on a different level. You work with the students. You're on the same side. There is likely to be more trust, less tension, and greater cooperation on the part of the students. Most of all, you as the teacher will cherish these "golden moments" as an anchor of personal satisfaction for the rest of your life.

Service Learning and the Community

Traditionally, schools function as isolated entities. The school is part of the community, but kids rarely experience a sense of community while "going through the motions" from home room to the final bell that delivers them back to the world outside. Hopefully, service learning can bridge that gap.

The students of Great Neck North Middle School on Long Island are involved in a "Dare to Care" community program. Since 1993, they have collected clothes, food, and toys for families in need. They have also taken part in a campaign instituted by the mayor to clean up litter in the downtown area of Great Neck.

The Dare to Care program teaches children compassion and concern for human dignity. Kids who learn these bedrock values on a systematic basis may some day be better parents, friends, and members of their communities.

In describing schools of the future,

Sanderlin expresses her feeling that they will prepare students for "not only a satisfying career, but enjoyment of family and friends, recreation, intellectual stimulation, physical and mental health, and ethical conduct." I didn't see any reference to being an active and involved citizen. Could it be that this human endeavor is so rare that it doesn't even come to mind? Are our children destined to live their civic lives feeling as helpless and politically insignificant as many members of the older generation appear to feel? After all, what can one person do?

We are moving in the direction of government by the very few, for the rich and wealthy (sorry, Abe). One solution is to teach our children how to become active and caring citizens.

Community involvement through service learning can affect students, teachers, and the community in profoundly positive ways. Its impact is emphatic and decisive and makes our immediate world a better place to live in. It has an essential role to play in preparing students for that time when the future of the world will be in their hands. ❖

Notes

- Edward Fiske, Smart Schools, Smart Kids (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 246.
- Larry Martz, Making Schools Better (New York: Times Books, 1992), 122-23.
- 3. Lillian Stephens, *The Complete Guide To Learning Through Community Service* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1995), 10.
- Martz, 120.
- Stephens, 60, 208-9. For information, contact the Constitutional Rights Foundation, 601 South Kingsley Drive, Los Angeles, CA 90005 or the Close Up Foundation, 44 Canal Center Plaza, Alexandria, VA 22314.
- Ibid, 60.
- 7. Dorothy Rich, What Do We Say? What Do We Do? (New York: Forge, 1997), 67.
- Owenita Sanderlin, Creative Teaching (New York: A.S. Barnes & Corp., 1971), 170.

Joseph Ciaccio is an educational consultant in Massapequa, New York, who taught middle school for 31 years. He invites those interested in discussing this article to write to him at 58 Unqua Rd., Massapequa, NY 11758 (tel.: 516-541-0078).