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Community Service Learning:
Providing Transition for Deaf Students

For the past three years, deaf students at Abraham Lincoln High School in Philadelphia have been participating in a program of community service and work training. Students have been getting an opportunity for hands-on workplace experience and exposure to a variety of job skills. They have had a chance to reflect on the impact these experiences have on their lives and choices for the future. The school curriculum has become more meaningful, since it can be directly related to the new activities in which deaf students are engaged.

The primary objective in starting the program was to give these students an edge in the transition from school to work. The benefits have gone beyond, however, making an impact on the learning situation itself, especially in terms of enhanced understanding of the capabilities of deaf people.

Program Description
Newer legislation and concerned school administration helped to further refine the program to include a component dedicated to transition services. The SCHOOL/WORK program fosters a smooth transition from school to work for many of the deaf students attending Lincoln. Students are offered a variety of services, ranging from receiving special equipment and instruction in use of the equipment to community service activities and actual paid service experience.

Special equipment is provided to make the world at large more accessible. Telecommunications devices enable students to use the telephone to call a service site, or to call for travel information. Telecaptioning devices attach to television sets, allowing the viewer to read the dialogue at the bottom of the screen and thereby providing access to numerous television programs that were previously inaccessible to deaf viewers. This equipment is made available to students in the program, thanks to a grant from a local foundation. While the decoders are known to help improve literacy skills and are made available to all students, the telecommunications devices are used as incentives for those who provide community service, or for those who are at a work site.

Many of the community service placements are traditional ones. Some students spend several hours each week for at least a semester doing various tasks in a nursing home, or helping in a government agency doing general office work. Students appreciate the opportunity to work, and particularly enjoy their contact with the staff and residents. The experiences are challenging, especially in overcoming communication barriers.

The experience of having deaf students at the community site is not only challenging, it is enlightening. Staff members express appreciation for the opportunity to work with the students, finding that it often opens their eyes to a new understanding. Deaf students are quite capable, and employees find that it is not

> Community service credit is given to the deaf buddies, and they are proud of their accomplishments as tutors. In the school setting, they are the recipients of others' help, in relying on interpreters and note takers in classes. This opportunity affords them the rewards of "serving" and of being regarded as the competent ones.

as difficult as anticipated to communicate with them on the job.

The experiences provide numerous opportunities for improving literacy skills. Sometimes notes which were written back and forth for giving instructions or asking questions were used in English lessons in the classroom. Students also practiced English when learning to communicate with the various supervisors by telephone. Something as simple as calling in to report an absence can take some coaching for a deaf adolescent to learn, since English is learned as second language for many, with American Sign Language being the first. Both reading and writing are practiced when typing text messages using special telephone equipment which conveys these messages on a small screen attached to a keyboard.

Other areas of the school curriculum are easily

adapted to student experiences. For example, when helping to feed nursing home residents, students can learn to measure quantities of food and beverage to serve.

Students often reflect on their experience in a journal. Writing assignments can be developed according to specific activities. For example, discussions and journal entries could be guided to address questions specifically for those performing service in a nursing home.

Another classroom activity was directly tied to a community service project. Under the sponsorship of the Deafness Council of Southeastern Pennsylvania, deaf students produced a directory of agencies and organizations that serve deaf and hard of hearing people in the Philadelphia area. The students collected, organized and prepared the information for publication, while others used the school resources in a typing classroom, in the print shop, and on a computer. Producing this directory was clearly a service to the Deafness Council, the deaf community, and professionals working with deaf people, but it also provided a way for students to learn about these resources for their own future use while developing a host of other valuable skills. One important service, for example, was to learn about how to contact interpreters and how to hire and use them correctly in job interviews, doctor appointments, or other important occasions.

Several students participate in a special program in which they tutor younger deaf students in a nearby elementary school. Under the direction of the classroom teacher, tutors work in small groups or with individual students, often reading stories or helping with certain tasks. This is part of the VISTA literacy program which involves a large number of hearing students at Lincoln as tutors in neighboring elementary schools. One of these elementary schools also has a program for deaf students similar to the mainstream program at Lincoln. With deaf tutors participating in the program, deaf children now have role models, something very rare in a mainstream setting, and very much needed.

Good Practices

...ities and supporting these efforts.

...taff development which includes the ...osophy and methodology of service ...ning will best ensure that program qual-...nd continuity are maintained.

...rvice learning is to assume real impor-...e in educating students for the 21st cen-...it must be incorporated into in-service ...ng and staff developemnt. It will be ...ally important, especially in this transi-...period as service learning begins to find ...e in the educational process, to provide ...quality training.

...udents' efforts will be recognized in ...nd small ways during the period of ...as well as with a culimating event, ...they share with the community and ...peers what has been gained and given ...gh service.

...nizing the work that children and youth ...m reinforces the significance of the en-...e and the worth of the young people. In ...iety that values work and measures ...e's importance by the jobs that they do, ...people, especially adolescents, become ...le. Credit for their achievements, affir-...of the skills they have mastered, appre-...for the time they have devoted to the ...unity should be publicly acknowledged. ...an be through the school or school ...or in the community. A presentation ...he service, or a book of essays or ...s joined with a party, picnic, or outing-...e no limits to the shape an end-of-year ...may take. Students should be called ...or the planning and execution of the ...take advantage of their creativity and

...learning has the potential to ...the barriers that often separate ...and community.

...vice learning connects school and ...nity in new and positive ways.

...learning has the potential to reduce the ...that often separate school and com-...Students learn that they can move ...the small circle of peers and take their ...contributing members of the commu-...they discover that learning occurs ...ut the community in traditional and

non-traditional settings-libraries, public agencies, parks, hospitals, etc. Relations are enhanced as agencies, citizens, and local government find that their expertise and counsel is sought by the school. Through service learning schools and communities become genuine partners in the education and development of youth.

5 Service learning is enhanced when integrated with systematic formative and summative evaluation.

All learning programs, especially relatively new ones, can benefit from systematic evaluation. While anecdotal evidence of a program's effectiveness is useful, more systematic methods for assessing a program's impact are needed, particularly since the field of service learning is growing rapidly and demamd for in-depth understanding of program models and approaches is high. Such assessment includes detailed documentation of program components and processes; the outcomes identified by, and expected of, all participants (i.e. students, community members, schools); and the impact of the service learning program on individual participants, schools, and community.

Assesment processes can vary in extent and complexity, depending on the nature of the questions asked and on the available time and resources.

A major benefit of formative assessment is program improvement. Ongoing data can help supply necessary information regarding program design in relation to program purpose and can pinpoint where modifications might be necessary or desirable. Summative assessment also affects program development, but in addition provides aggregate information on the overall effectiveness of a particular program model. A combination of formative and summative assessments, whether done on a small or large scale, helps to ensure that programs will remain responsive to their purposes and participants.

From Alice L. Halsted, Chair, Standards Committee, National Alliance for Service Learning in Education Reform. Seventh draft of the proposed standards for School-based Service Learning-2/22/93 If you have any additions, comments or corrections that will improve the final draft, please contact Harry C. Silcox at the Institute. The Committee would very much appreciate your input. A final draft is expected from the Alliance in 1994.

Deaf Students

This course is much sought after, and facilitates the integration of the deaf students, who participate in all school activities, both during and after school hours. Due to rostering constraints, however, the course was scheduled to be dropped. Instead, under the direction of a teacher, deaf students volunteered to help teach their hearing peers sign language during their lunch period. They were provided with hearing buddies, and given a handful of topics to "discuss" over lunch. Telecommunications devices were provided as incentives and allowed the students to communicate over telephone lines in the evenings. Community service credit is given to the deaf buddies, and they are proud of their accomplishments as tutors. In the school setting, they are the recipients of others' help, in relying on interpreters and note takers in classes. This opportunity affords them the rewards of "serving" and of being regarded as the competent ones.

Since Lincoln High School has an established community service program for regular education students, it was fairly easy to adapt these sites and activities for working with deaf students, and for giving them community service credit. The most difficult part was overcoming communication barriers, whether on public transportation, asking or understanding directions given by a supervisor, or explaining a change in scheduling.

In meeting these challenges and others, deaf students have shown that they are able to participate fully in a range of community service activities. They have gained skills and knowledge while providing service to others, building a better dialogue between the deaf and hearing worlds. Literacy and academic skills both in and out of the classroom became more meaningful with the opportunity for direct application. Young deaf people are making an impact on the community, while growing in self esteem and self expression. Community service offers a new dimension in career development for a more meaningful preparation for them as they enter the world beyond school.

Yona Dansky,
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Abraham Lincoln High School

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