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# Service Learning Summary

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INST 6510 - Evaluation and Research In Instructional Technology

# Service Learning from Classroom to Community to Career

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**Abstract**

**Book Title:** *Service Learning from Classroom to Community to Career*

**Author:** Marie Watkins, Ph.D. & Linda Braun

**Audience:** Undergraduate students

**Issues:** Service learning has three components:

1. Service-learning should be related directly to the instructional objectives of the course for credit.

2. Reciprocity – all three entities, student, instructor and service-learning partner should be receiving something from the service-learning. The instructor receives instructional content that cannot be provided in a classroom, the student receives credit and invaluable, real-world learning experience and the partner receives service.

3. Reflection – this can take the form of in class discussion, presentations or journaling and should begin as soon as the service-learning project gets underway. The point of reflection is to enable the student to see how they felt about service-learning at the beginning and hopefully demonstrate how they've grown as the project progressed.

**Findings:** Service-learning can be a very beneficial way to learn subject matter. Students should be prepared to learn about the organization's services and policies prior to the service-learning launch. The organization should be willing to work with students to help them progress through the course objective goals. Instructors should be available to communicate and intercede if necessary.

**Bibliographical Information:** Watkins, Marie & Braun, Linda (2005). *From classroom to community to career*. Indianapolis, IN: JIST Publishing, Inc.

***Service Learning From Classroom to Community to Career***

**By Marie Watkins, Ph.D. & Linda Braun**

Service-Learning, at its core, is an attempt to educate in reality. Opportunities that partner the student and educator with the community provide a window's glimpse of life after education. These partnerships provide a chance for the student to learn how to communicate and problem-solve, to think critically, to integrate and apply knowledge, to understand society

and culture and apply values and ethics. As this learning is happening, the student is receiving an intellectual depth and breadth that cannot be obtained in a classroom as well as a lesson in how to adapt and think on their feet.

There are three components of service-learning:

- Service with learning experiences connected directly to an academic course and its objectives.
- Reciprocity between the agency, the educator and the student.
- Reflection

The first component means that service-learning should be included in the course objectives and in return the student will receive credit for participation. The service should be an opportunity for the student to apply the knowledge they have learned in the classroom in a relevant and meaningful way. The intent is to enhance the student's understanding of the subject matter they are studying. This learning should directly and intentionally prepare the student for active civic participation.

The second component suggests that the best service-learning projects are those that benefit all partners mutually. The student gains a deeper understanding of the subject matter because there is an opportunity to apply the knowledge. The instructor gains an educational tool that allows him or her to educate in reality. The community partner benefits from the service.

The third component is an opportunity for the student to make the connection between service activity and personal learning. Reflection can be in the form of classroom discussions, presentations or journaling. Structured reflection helps students to ponder the issues about

the meaning of service and their own contributions. Most students required to reflect on the service they are providing discover that the knowledge gained through participation in service has helped them to grow in some unintentional ways.

The book points out that service-learning invokes all of the stages of Bloom's Taxonomy:

Evaluation Stage
Synthesis Stage
Analysis Stage
Application Stage
Comprehension Stage
Knowledge Stage

Therefore, it's suggested that service-learning enables the learner to assimilate new material or new subject matter in a much more effective way than traditional instruction. Finally, learning by serving permits the student to develop cultural sensitivity and interpersonal skills.

Other important components that should not be neglected are a memo of understanding or agreement between the community organization, the instructor and the student. It's important that all parties know what their role will be before the project gets underway. The student should familiarize themselves with the organization and its policies. Additionally, the student should perform a SWOT analysis of themselves, identifying their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. In doing so, they become self-aware and can prepare themselves for the unexpected.

I've had the opportunity to participate in a quality service-learning project and a very poor service-learning project. The latter was an opportunity I had to travel to Nogales, Mexico for a day to spend time with the border communities between Arizona and Mexico. The project was part of the course objectives for a Mexican history course I was taking at Arizona State University.

I don't remember being informed of who our community partner would be or the objectives of our visit. Nor was I informed of what my role in the project would be – other than a witness to the poor quality of living afforded by the region. As a class we went to a grocery store and made observations about the poverty and despair that is closely associated with the border. We enjoyed lunch at a host family's home and observed the construction of a typical shelter. Finally, we visited a school where impoverished children spent their days learning.

This project would have been so much more meaningful to me and my classmates if some preparation had gone into organizing a service-learning experience. A partnership should have been formed, in my opinion, so that I, my classmates and future classmates could continue giving service to the community. It would have been helpful to tie the service project to the objectives of the course which was learning about Mexico's history from the 1800's to present day.

I remember being so over-whelmed with the feeling of being unable to help. At the school, I emptied my wallet and gave the money to the school's director so that she would be able to buy enough food for the next week. I think my time at the school would have been better spent by conducting a workshop that incorporated some of Mexico's history. Unfortunately, there was a language barrier and I'm not sure I would have been very effective.

The other service-learning project was provided in a database class. As part of the project, we were asked to visit the food kitchens and warehouses of St. Vincent de Paul, an organization that provides food, clothing and shelter to the under-privileged citizens of Phoenix, Arizona. Our instructor had prepared a memo of understanding before we began the project. Additionally, she provided a definition of our role as students and the organization's role.

We spent time outside of class in groups at the various facilities observing the organization. The purpose of spending time at the food warehouse was to evaluate the processes of storing, preparing and serving food. We also spent time at the clothing facility that distributes clothing and supplies to those in need. Again, we observed the processes of how clothing arrives at the shelter, how it's stored and how the clothing is distributed. Both evaluations contributed to designing a flowchart and building a database St. Vincent de Paul could access to track the flow of donations coming in and flowing out of the shelter - inventory control.

After we learned the processes, we designed flow diagrams that made suggestions as to how the warehouse and clothing facility could improve processes and minimize waste. The organization evaluated our suggestions and incorporated some of them into their processes. Using our newly acquired knowledge about database design, we created an inventory control database that St. Vincent de Paul began using to track their inventory. To this day, St. Vincent de Paul is still using our database.

I came away from this service-learning project with a greater understanding of how to flowchart and design a database than I would have if the instructor had chosen an instructor

centered approach rather than a student centered approach. Not only did I get a chance to apply my knowledge of building databases and designing flowcharts, I had the opportunity to increase my interpersonal relationship skills. I was able to increase my understanding of the cultural diversity that exists within the inner city of Phoenix and I witnessed ethics and values being used constructively within our classroom and within the organization of St. Vincent de Paul. It was a wonderful experience.

Neither project provided an opportunity to reflect. I suspect the Nogales, Mexico project would have given way to ranting and frustration while the St. Vincent de Paul project would have been filled with “aha!” moments, when a light goes on in our brain and we finally “get it”. It would be very interesting to look back on the experiences as they were occurring and see where and how I increased my knowledge and cultural diversity.

I believe in service-learning. I think it is one of the most effective ways to apply knowledge that I have ever experienced. The trick is to have a plan, a community partnership and a purpose. When done well, the knowledge and skill gained is invaluable.