



Service-Learning Research and Practice

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FIRST IN A SERIES

Translating Effective Service-Learning Practice into Standards

In June, the National Youth Leadership Council, in collaboration with the National Service-Learning Partnership and RMC Research, convened a diverse panel of service-learning experts in Denver to begin establishing standards for pre-K-12 service-learning practice.

This meeting grew from the collective work of numerous service-learning organizations, spanning more than a decade, to refine best practices. Many of the eight principles currently under discussion derive from the 1998 *Essential Elements of Service-Learning*. (See timeline below.)

The Denver meeting resulted in a slightly revised list of promising practices based in research. The list is now undergoing scrutiny nationally by a series of reactor panels, which will ensure that the standards and indicators are well-written, resonate with the field, and involve a broad base of practitioners.

The next steps of the standards-setting process include:

1. Reactor panels, representing diverse stakeholders, are being held across the United States to fine-tune the proposed standards and indicators.
2. Researchers will synthesize feedback and finalize the draft standards and indicators.

3. The standards and indicators will debut at *The 19th Annual National Service-Learning Conference* in Minneapolis, April 9-12, 2008.
4. Partners are developing professional development guidelines and resources to help practitioners implement the standards.
5. Follow-up research is planned to investigate how well the standards predict outcomes.

If you are interested in hosting a reactor panel, please contact Shelley Billig at RMC Research (tel: 303-825-3636 or billig@rmcdenver.com). For more information on the standards-setting process, see Billig's article "Unpacking What Works in Service-Learning," from *Growing to Greatness 2007* available at www.nylc.org/unpacking. ■



CARYN PENU
NYLC Managing Editor



WOKIE WEAH
NYLC Vice President

Draft Standards for Pre-K-12 Service-Learning*

- Curriculum Integration
- Cognitively Challenging Reflection
- Youth Voice
- Diversity
- Meaningful Service
- Process Improvement
- Intensity/Duration
- Reciprocal Partnerships

*Results of the Service-Learning Standards-Setting Professional Judgment Group Meeting, June 5-6, 2007, Denver, Colo.

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Service-Learning Best Practices Timeline

1989
Wingspread Conference on Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning

1993
Alliance for Service-Learning and Education Reform develops Standards of Service-Learning

1998
Essential Elements of Service-Learning developed

2003
NYLC develops a certification process for service-learning, and revises the *Essential Elements*



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DEAR READERS

With this issue of *The Generator*, NYLC takes its journal of service-learning and youth leadership into the digital age. Not only can you now subscribe for free electronic versions at www.nylc.org/newsletters, but you will also hear from us more frequently – five times per year. (You may also subscribe to the printed version for \$12/year at www.nylc.org/bookstore.) With this increased frequency, we aim to bring you more timely articles rooted in research, with a focus on practical applications. Please send us your feedback at mjwegner@nylc.org and happy reading!



JIM KIELSMEIER
NYLC President & CEO

RESEARCH

Research Supports the Fourth “R” – Reflection

Research corroborates what practitioners know — that reflection is an essential ingredient in facilitating high-quality learning for students.

A recent survey conducted by Harris Interactive and NYLC found that participants in service programs that included reflection experienced healthier school climates, more success in school, and increased self-efficacy (Markow et al., 2006).

— **Reflection influenced school climate:**

Forty-three percent of service participants who reflected on their service reported having a teacher they could go to if they were in trouble or needed help (vs. 22 percent of those who did not reflect on their service). In addition, more of those who reflected on their service reported overall satisfaction with their school life (47 percent vs. 31 percent).

— **Reflection was correlated with academic success:**

Twenty percent of those who reflected on their service reported having completed college (vs. 13 percent of those who participated in service that lacked reflection).

— **Respondents who participated in service with reflection reported a greater sense of efficacy:**

Eighty-three percent reported that their service experience had improved their ability to help others (vs. 68 percent of those who did not reflect on their service experiences).

These findings corroborate other research that suggests reflection needs to be continuous, connected, challenging, and contextualized (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996, p. 16; Pritchard & Whitehead, 2004, p. 107).



NATE SCHULTZ
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Reflection activities should:

- occur throughout the service experience to establish connections between information learned and actions taken.
- question participants’ assumptions about their service and, when necessary, draw “attention to ideas, feelings and actions that may be disturbing, troubling or shocking” (Pritchard & Whitehead, 2004, p. 108).

Reflection thus can help young people move beyond preconceived notions, cultivate empathy, and even revise their course of action so that they can better serve their communities. (See the *Teacher Tools* handout for reflection prompt ideas.) ■

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Eyler, J., Giles, D.E., and Schmiede, A. (1996). *A Practitioners’ Guide to Reflection in Service-Learning*. Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University.

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Pritchard, F. F., and Whitehead, G. I. (2004). *Serve and Learn: Implementing and Evaluating Service-Learning in Middle and High Schools*. Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers.

Service-Learning Best Practices Timeline <small>CONTINUED</small>	2005 Wingspread Conference on Service-Learning Practice Excellence	2006 National Standards Development Committee proposes the “Principles of Effective Practice for K-12 Service-Learning”	2006 NYLC pilots the Certificate of Excellent with University of Wisconsin-River Falls	2007 Draft Standards for Pre-K-12 Service-Learning developed
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Denver First-Graders Apply Analytical Skills to Issue Selection

“Criteria-based decision-making” sounds like the province of town meetings and higher education settings. But in Denver and other sites across the country, elementary and middle school students are using this democratic process to hone in on their most pressing community issues — whether gang violence, second-hand smoke, or water quality. It’s a process that builds analysis (i.e., pre-reflection) into the initial stages of service-learning, as students develop the criteria by which they select a community issue to address.

Developed by the national nonprofit Earth Force, criteria-based decision-making is a central part of its *Community Action Problem-Solving* service-learning curriculum. Earth Force staff take a methodical approach to every step of the service-learning cycle, emphasizing students engaging their critical-thinking skills.

For example, faced with the selection of whether to tackle an aspect of gang violence, second-hand smoke, or water quality, the

It’s a process that builds analysis into the initial stages of service-learning, as students develop the criteria by which they select a community issue to address.

teacher/facilitator asks the students to select the criteria they will use to make their decision. Often, even first-graders have good ideas about how such decisions should be made, says Ellis Elementary teacher (and Denver Teacher of the Year) Bonnie Staack. “Can we get it done within the time we have?” “Do we need to travel off-site?”

“Will it address a learning objective?” “Will we have fun?” — all are equally valid criteria on which to base issue-selection.

Then the real exercise in democracy begins. Each student votes using a three-point scale. One finger means no; two fingers mean maybe; and three fingers indicate yes. In a class of 30-plus students, a teacher can scan the room for an average of the fingers,



ESTEFANY RAMOS-LOPEZ, a second-grader at Ellis Elementary in Denver, helps her classmates educate their community about the dangers of second-hand smoke.

recording each ranking for each criterion. Each issue gets voted on according to the same criteria. If a clear “winner” doesn’t emerge from the voting, the tie provides an opportunity for lobbying by devotees, before a vote-off. As Staack says, among her diverse class of first-graders, “It was an incredible process. ... Kids debated why one issue was more important than another.”

The process not only is employed at the issue-selection stage of the service-learning cycle, but also can be used in the project-development phase. In the CAPS approach to service-learning, criteria-based decision-making, and the research that follows, helps students get at the root causes of an issue.

The process thus gets at the aspects of reflection that lead to cognitive gains. As the recent research emphasizes, reflection needs to be continuous, connected, challenging, and contextualized for it to result in the transformative development potential in most service-learning experiences (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996, p. 16; Pritchard & Whitehead, 2004, p. 107).

At Ellis Elementary, Staack’s first-graders already know this. ■

For more information, visit www.earthforce.org.



MADDY WEGNER, NYLC Communications Director

Project Ignition Teen-Driver Safety Campaign Names Winners

Shallowater (Texas) High School won the 2007 *Project Ignition* award for the best teen-driver safety program in the nation this past spring at *The 18th Annual National Service-Learning Conference* held in Albuquerque, N.M. Program sponsors State Farm® and NYLC presented the Shallowater team with a \$10,000 check for their efforts. Each of the past three years, 25 high schools from around the nation

have been awarded \$2,000 grants to develop teen-driver safety campaigns. From the 25 schools, 10 finalists are invited to *The National Service Learning Conference* where winners are announced.



SIDDHARTH DAMANIA
NYLC Youth Advisory
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Other 2007 winners include:

- Ada High School, Ada, Okla.
- Branchville High School, Branchville, S.C.
- Howenstine High Magnet School, Tucson, Ariz.
- Idabel High School, Idabel, Okla.
- Harry D. Jacobs High School, Algonquin, Ill.
- Louisburg High School, Louisburg, Kan.
- Medina Valley High School, Castroville, Texas
- Slinger High School, Slinger, Wis.
- Youngsville High School, Youngsville, Pa.

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Reflection Questions

One of the most elusive teaching skills is asking open-ended questions. Yet helping young people process their service-learning experiences is essential to moving beyond the “feel good” results of the experience to cognitive gains.

High-quality reflection challenges students to think deeply about their service-learning experiences. By encouraging multiple methods of reflection throughout the experience — before, during, and after — teachers can help students reach intended academic, civic and social outcomes. With the questions listed here, the goals are to encourage students to examine their preconceptions and assumptions, generate solutions to local and global problems, and determine roles that they can play in realizing these solutions.

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Journalistic Questions

- Who was involved in the project? What were their roles?
- What was the issue addressed? How did you decide to address this issue?
- When did the service-learning project take place?
- Where were the service-learning project sites?
- Why was this issue critical to the community?
- Why did you choose to address this issue?
- How did you address the issue?

Questions that Encourage Critical Thinking

- What did you see, hear, read, or notice on-site?
- How is what you observed similar or different from your pre-service assumptions?
- Do any of these assumptions seem to belong together? Why?
- Could some of these assumptions belong in more than one category?
- How do you explain what is going on?
- What did you see or hear that agrees with this explanation?
- Is there any evidence that refutes this explanation?

Questions that Encourage Symbolic Thinking

- What object would you use as a symbol of this experience?
- Why would you choose this symbol?
- How does what you are doing make you feel like a garden (or a book, a river, etc.)?
- How are parts of your experience like parts of the garden (book, river, etc.) and why?

Available from the NYLC Resource Center at www.nylc.org.
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Reflection Activities

- Journal-writing, creative writing, personal essay, or op ed article
- Article for newsletter
- Podcast or public service announcement
- Online discussion groups
- Summaries of group learnings
- Presentations during or after the project, which may include video, computer slide shows, bulletin boards, panel discussions, websites, or persuasive speeches
- Directed reading on complementary topics
- Library research individually or in teams
- Research projects in which students analyze an issue and make recommendations for change
- Creative writing projects
- Discussion in pairs or small groups
- Murals, collages, banners, or musical displays
- Individual or small-group presentations of objects that symbolize the service-learning project
- Poster ad or PSA using a symbol to bring awareness to the issue
- Essay presenting the issue from several points of view
- Visual representations of the issue and the emotions it elicits: cartoons, collage, photos
- Interviews of community partners and beneficiaries of services
- Skit or dance that explains perceptions
- Dialogue journals, in which students are paired and discuss their experiences

Questions to Help Process Emotions

- What bothers you about the issue?
- What do you think about the people or things involved?
- Are your thoughts about the issue facts or opinions?
- Why do you have the opinion that you do?
- What other ways can you view the issue?
- What other facts and opinions might be important to consider?
- How would the issue change if viewed from another perspective?

Extension Questions

- What does this service-learning project mean to me?
- What does this service-learning project mean in terms of other people my age?
Why should people my age be concerned with the issues that arise from this project?
- What does this service-learning project mean to my community? How do the ideas that arise from this service-learning project affect both my community and other communities?
- What does this service-learning project mean in terms of my country?