

Subject Area: Social Studies

Title of Instructional Method: Service Learning

Grade Level: All Levels

Description of Instructional Method:

One of the main goals in social studies instruction is to create informed citizens who are active in the community. Service learning provides the opportunity for students to practice citizenship skills while also learning first-hand knowledge of the world around them. According to Applegate and Moreale (1999), service learning is “what happens when students are afforded the opportunity to practice what they are learning in their disciplines, in community settings where their work benefits others” (as quoted in Borden, 2007). Service learning programs should be connected to academic learning so that classroom content is relevant to the service. Too often service learning is actually community service, focused on charity instead of citizenship (Wade, 1997). Students should also be given structured reflection activities about their experiences. Service learning has been proven to lead to “dispositions [like] tolerance...empathy, appreciation of diversity issues...and awareness of differential resources available to different community cultural settings” (Borden, 2007). All of these can be and should be taught in the social studies classroom, especially to promote democracy (Wade, 1997).

References:

- Borden, A.W. (2007). The impact of service-learning on ethnocentrism in intercultural communication course. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 30(2), 171-183.
- National Council for the Social Studies. (2001). Service-Learning: An essential component of citizenship education. *Social Education*, 65(4), 240.
- Shumer, R. (1999). Service, social studies and citizenship: Connections for the new century. *ERIC Digests*.
- Wade, R. C. (1997). Community service learning and the social studies curriculum: challenges to effective practice. *The Social Studies*, 88(5), 197-202.

“How-To”

Teachers or program directors need to be informed about issues concerning the community as well as opportunities for students to volunteer. The issues concerning the community need to be linked to issues being studied in class. For example, students volunteering at homeless shelters or soup kitchens could also be learning about poverty in the U.S. today or about the 1930's Great Depression in American History. The teacher or program director also needs to have access to various service outlets in the community.

To actually implement service learning, it depends on the available sources in the community as well as what is being taught currently in the classroom. It is not enough to go to the inner city to tutor minority students if it is not connected to some lesson in the classroom.

Pros:

- Students become better citizens
- Service learning can cover more subjects than social studies, such as science and language arts

Cons:

- Takes a lot of time to implement
- Too easy for good intentions to become simply community service instead of service learning
- Students are not simply memorizing facts or learning the curricula
- Teachers may need in-service training

More Resources:

Cairn, R. W., with T. L. Coble. (1993). *Learning by giving: K-8 service-learning curriculum guide*. St. Paul, Minn.: National Youth Leadership Council.

Iowa Service-Learning Partnership. (1995). *Joining hands community service-learning resource kit K-8*. Iowa City: author. (Available from Service-Learning Department, Seashore Hall Center, University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA 52242.)

Kraft, R. J. (1996). Service learning: An introduction to its theory, practice, and effects. *Education and Urban Society*, 28, 131-159.

Stephens, L. S. (1995). *The complete guide to learning through community service grades K-9*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.