Service-Learning...
by Degrees

How Adolescents
Can Make a Difference
in the Real World

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On May 22, 1985, the last day of school, the sixth-graders and their teacher sat around the same table where they had first discussed the plan to revitalize their town. By now a discount drugstore chain had looked at the city council’s survey and decided to open a store in Royston. A supermarket chain was also coming.

“What did you learn from all this?” Alice Terry asked.

“That you have to care enough to do something,” replied Julinna.

Today the two restored buildings are the home of a new clothing store. Though still not a boomtown, Royston has begun to come back to life. City planners have written an optimistic master plan for further development. Royston has become a town with a future. Says Chamber of Commerce president Greg Hall: “Before RIPPLES we had little growth in five years. Now we have over twenty new businesses. Our town has more potential than ever.”

On September 26, 1986, Alice Terry and her students walked on stage in a large auditorium in Washington, D.C., before 300 spectators. Donald P. Hodel, Secretary of the Interior, read a proclamation:

“This group of perceptive, energetic young people proved the educational system can make a dynamic contribution to the preservation movement and inspire the teamwork necessary to promote change. For their creativity, ingenuity, and perseverance, Brandee Braswell, Derrick Gable, Judi Gurley, Julinna Oxley, and Matt Wilson of RIPPLES, and their inspiring instructor, Alice Terry, are granted the Public Service Award of the Department of the Interior.”

When the applause and standing ovation came, so did Alice Terry's tears. Surrounded by her students, she knew: Every one of us can make a difference. Kids, too. We only have to try.

**What Is Service-Learning?**

According to Colin Powell, founding chairman of America’s Promise,

> Service-learning is a particularly fertile way of involving young people in community service, because it ties helping others to what they are learning in the classroom. In the process, it provides a compelling answer to the perennial question: “Why do I need to learn this stuff?” (Fiske 2002, 2)

Arising from a heritage of service in America, service-learning provides students with an opportunity for service while putting them directly in the midst of the learning process. Service-learning emerged from the ideas of John Dewey who promoted active, real-world learning. A critic of rote learning of facts in schools, Dewey argued that
children should learn by experience; in this way, he contended, students not only gain knowledge but also develop skills, habits, and attitudes necessary for them to solve a wide variety of problems (Dewey 1954).

Service-learning is a method by which students learn and develop through curriculum integration and active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that address actual needs in their community. It gives opportunities for students to use newly acquired skills and knowledge in real-life situations in their own communities. (National and Community Service Act 1990).

Acknowledging service-learning as a proven method of instruction that enhances learning and reclaims the public purpose of education, the National Commission on Service-Learning has recommended that quality service-learning be required as an essential part of K–12 education for all students in America. According to Madeleine Kunin, former deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Education, “Service-learning resurrects idealism, compassion and altruism . . . [W]e cannot survive as a nation unless we hold onto these qualities and teach them to our children” (Fiske 2002, 38). This statement exemplifies the new realization of the importance of service-learning in instilling the qualities of a caring society in the leaders of tomorrow.

Some educators fear that service-learning may be just another add-on in an already-overcrowded school agenda. Service-learning, however, is an effective partner with the majority of school-reform initiatives. The American Youth Policy Forum investigated the applicability of service-learning to twenty-eight of the leading comprehensive school reform models. In twenty-four of the twenty-eight cases, service-learning was rated as compatible with the school-reform models; eleven of the twenty-four rated themselves as highly compatible with service-learning (Pearson 2002). In this time of federal budget cuts for many educational programs, liberal and conservative politicians alike have continued to support service-learning. Teachers can apply for Learn and Serve America grants (see “Service-Learning Resources” in Appendix B) to support their service-learning projects through their state education departments.

What Does the Service in Service-Learning Mean?

Just what does service mean? Though it may seem to be a simple term, service in reference to service-learning can be confusing because it is used in connection with many other terms. In service-learning, service is usually defined as the action(s) taken by youth to address a community issue in a positive manner. The students themselves are known as the service providers while those receiving the service are
Introduction to Service-Learning

called the service recipients. In this book, we are looking at service through the lens of the service provider—the students. What are the students doing and how are they doing it?

Types of Service

We postulate that there are two basic types of service in reference to the service provider: direct service and indirect service. We have identified three types of direct service—hands-on service, advocacy service, and secondhand service. In hands-on service, students take positive, hands-on action to make a difference in the community through needed projects that are identified, organized, and implemented by the students. Students performing advocacy service engage in social action and advocacy designed to impact decision making on public issues by raising public awareness, working to get bills passed, and so on. Students can also choose to become involved in secondhand service by working to assist and support existing, established efforts such as the Cancer Society, Kidney Foundation, Save the Rain Forest, MADD, Just Say No, or Meals on Wheels.

Students can select one type of direct service that can be used for the duration of the service-learning experience, or a team can comingle their approach. More advanced levels of service-learning might involve students choosing to overlap more than one type of direct service within the same service-learning activity. As the students become more involved in and committed to a community concern, they may uncover aspects of the problem that suggest a new approach; hence, different types of direct service might be employed within the same service-learning experience.

Indirect service from the perspective of the service provider and the community refers to service that may not be seen immediately, and sometimes not for many years to come. For instance, indirect service could include cases where students through their service-learning participation become exposed to future career choices that they wouldn’t otherwise have known about, or when, long after a service-learning project is over, students, as adults, exercise their right to vote. When viewing a service experience through the lens of indirect service, the community can be considered the service recipient.

Why Is Service-Learning Important for Adolescent Students?

Service-learning is important for middle- and high-school students because adolescents need to be involved in learning that they consider relevant—something that interests them. Most adolescents are curious,
wondering about themselves and the world around them. They are consumed with questions such as Who am I?, Where am I going?, and What’s it all about? (Conrad and Hedin 1991). These adolescents must be given the opportunity to find out how they fit into the larger world outside of school as well as the opportunity to express themselves positively in real-world situations. They must learn skills so they can become more responsive and effective citizens and become more confident and compassionate human beings. By gaining passion for their community, students develop compassion themselves.

Adolescence can be considered a time of great developmental transition. Early adolescence is characterized by substantial growth and change. In the United States, adolescence now extends over so many years that it can be divided into three phases: early adolescence, from ten to fourteen; middle adolescence, from fifteen to seventeen; and late adolescence, from eighteen into the twenties (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development 1989).

If we are to believe developmental psychologists such as Piaget, Bandura, Kohlberg, and Gilligan, then development rather than achievement should be the aim of education. Shouldn’t education help young adolescents in their search for identity? If so, service-learning is a marvelous method of learning as it deals with real-life experiences, something that is meaningful to the adolescent himself.

Recent reports and school-reform proposals point out the benefits to adolescents involved in service to their community, acknowledging the fit between the characteristics of this age group and active learning. In addition to addressing many traditional goals of the middle school, service-learning also is uniquely responsive to the traits of adolescents. These traits include the need to test oneself, to experience adult roles, to experiment with new relationships, to be trusted, and to cross the bridge from school and family into the community—the world beyond (Schine 1996). In service-learning, the learning is meaningful to the students. As one student involved in a service-learning project related, “I’ve learned skills that I think are more important than what you learn in school: like problem solving, organization skills, and teamwork” (Bohlenberger and Terry 2002, 6).

Adolescence is a critical period of both biological and psychological changes for middle- and high-school students. There is a critical need to help adolescents acquire self-esteem, flexible and inquiring habits of mind, reliable, close human relationships, a sense of belonging to a valued group, and a sense of usefulness that extends beyond themselves (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development 1989). Because puberty is one of the most far-reaching biological upheavals in life, involving drastic changes in the social environment as young adolescents move from elementary to secondary schools, we need to connect schools
with communities that together share responsibility for each student’s success. This step can be done through identifying service opportunities in the community, establishing partnerships and collaborations, and using community resources to enrich the instructional program.

Service-learning fascinates young adolescents because it appeals to their idealism and quest for independence. They have ideal notions of what families, schools, churches, and societies ought to look like; they are known to rebel against the imperfect ones they experience. Not understanding why the rest of the world does not accept their idealistic solutions to social problems, they may become angry and destructive. Service-learning provides these idealistic youths with creative and useful means to try out new solutions so they can realize that they can indeed make a difference in the real world.

Middle schools and high schools, through the establishment of small learning communities (see Chapter 6), can provide favorable environments in which to create a culture of service that truly link service and learning and that encourage teacher-student collaboration to meet the educational and developmental needs of students. According to Bill Gates (Gates 2005), the new 3Rs of education, which have replaced reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic are Rigor, Relevance, and Relationships. Gates, who with his wife, Melinda, has been instrumental in encouraging the development of small learning communities through the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, defined the 3Rs in a speech to the National Governors Association.

The first R is Rigor—making sure all students are given challenging curriculum that prepares them for college and work; the second R is Relevance—making sure kids have courses and projects that clearly relate to their lives and goals; the third R is Relationships—making sure that kids have a number of adults who know them, look out for them, and push them to achieve. (Gates 2005, 4)

Service-learning has the potential of being especially strong in small learning community school environments because these environments promote experimentation, risk taking, challenging curriculum, collegiality, cooperation, and shared leadership among administrators, teachers, and students.

The power of service-learning is that it is a path to learning for adolescents; it places them in a context in which the learning is real, having consequences for both themselves and others. Judith A. Ramaley, assistant director of the National Science Foundation’s Directorate for Education and Human Resources, expressed the importance of engaging students in real-world, service-learning experiences:

If we want our students to lead creative, productive lives, we must give them opportunities to learn in ways that have consequences for
others, as well as for themselves. I know of no better way to invoke the many facets of cognitive development, moral reasoning and social responsibility than to engage students in service-learning opportunities. At its best, a service-learning experience can be transformative. (Fiske 2002, 58)

**What Is Meant by Community in Service-Learning?**

Although *community* can be defined as local, state, national, or global, effective service-learning activities usually center on a local need area, one with which the students can readily identify and have more of an impact upon. By identifying a local concern and learning to work cooperatively in teams toward a common goal, the students learn to manage people, projects, and their time. They begin to see a *purpose* for their education and develop a personal commitment both to learning and to their local community. This action-based, hands-on mode of learning and teaching turns the classroom into an authentic learning community that bridges the gap between school and the *real* world. It promotes the student’s sense of responsibility to self and community.

**Benefits to the Community from Service-Learning**

The community experiences both direct and indirect benefits when students participate in service-learning. The most obvious benefits are direct ones, when students tackle a community problem and bring about a difference-making solution. In the previously mentioned story of the RIPPLES Gang, it’s easy to see how the students had a positive impact on their town. Service-learning, as this example illustrates, establishes a positive rapport between the community and the school. The actual value of the service to a community depends upon the issue the students identify and select as the focus of their service-learning project. Obviously, each community will have different need areas.

Some benefits to the community may not be evident in the short term but are important to the community in the long term. These indirect benefits can include students becoming more engaged in school and furthering their education; youth becoming resources rather than responsibilities and/or problems in a society; and young people evolving into responsible, participatory citizens.

**Are There Different Types of Service-Learning?**

Many different types of service-learning activities are often grouped together under the service-learning umbrella. This consolidation has often led to confusion for educators trying to develop effective programming
for their students as well as for evaluators trying to assess program im-
pacts and outcomes. Service-learning is not an easily definable activity, and comparing one type of service-learning experience to another can be like comparing apples to oranges. Apples and oranges are both fruit, but they don’t look, smell, or taste the same. It is the same with service-
learning: results from fifth graders who participate in a service-learning experience that involves the students volunteering at a local park or recreation area to clean up litter and fallen brush should not be mixed with results from ninth graders who research environmentally friendly land-use options in their community and work with community part-
ners to develop an action plan to design, build, and maintain a com-
munity nature trail or habitat. Both are environmental projects that resulted in worthwhile service to the community, but they shouldn’t be classified as the same type of service-learning.

The developmental service-learning typology created by the au-
thors (see chart in Appendix B) addresses the differences between service-learning activities based on the levels of both student learn-
ing and service. Using this typology, teachers can help their students progress from simple community-service activities in their younger years to more involved projects as they become more experienced in serving and learning. By classifying service-learning according to the impact on student learning and both the type and degree of service to the community, this typology provides a much-needed basic framework for educators, evaluators, and administrators. It distin-
guishes between three levels of service-learning—Community-Service, Community-Exploration, and Community-Action.

**Developmental Service-Learning Typology**

Like a thermometer, the service-learning degrees, or levels of involve-
ment, work on a continuum, as shown in Figure 1–1, rather than on sharply delineated points.

**Community-Service** (see Chapter 2) involves a high degree of ser-
vice with a lesser degree of learning. The interaction between the school and community flows in one direction—from the school to the community. Students sometimes participate in Community-Service to complete a specified number of volunteer hours in order to meet designated service requirements. Some service-learning advocates question whether this type of volunteerism should even be considered “service-learning.” When using a developmental model, community-
service is appropriate as an entry-level experience, especially for less mature students who have never participated in service-learning or
for students operating at a lower cognitive developmental stage. This type of direct service can include the following:

- Activities such as picking up litter in town parks or on the side of highways, shelving books in the library, volunteering in a hospital or nursing home, cleaning up graffiti, or donating time on a school or community “hotline.”
- Students collecting service hours by volunteering time to aid non-profit agencies.
Participation in Community-Service usually increases an awareness of community needs and leads to curriculum- and service-specific learning for the student. Higher degrees of reflection and a stronger connection to the curriculum lead to increased student learning.

**Community-Exploration** (see Chapter 3) directly connects classroom learning to real-life situations. Many schools incorporate service-learning into the curriculum through classes such as civics, art, science, history, health, language arts, reading, or computer technology. Community-Exploration involves tying the student service to an activity related to a specific area of study; it can involve internships, community information-gathering, environmental education, and other types of experiential education. Interaction between the school and community can flow in either direction—students go out into the community or elements of the community can come into the school. Community-Exploration does not necessarily involve direct service to the community, although it may involve a high degree of learning.

**Community-Action** (see Chapter 4) involves students not only becoming aware of a need in the community and providing a service but also becoming so involved and committed to the need area that they go beyond just supplying a service. Students analyze the situation, generate new ideas, and implement a difference-making plan of action. In the process, the students develop complex problem solving skills, advanced communication skills, the ability to connect knowledge across the disciplines, and the perseverance to overcome obstacles. In Community-Action service-learning, the interaction between the school and the community flows in both directions, producing greater impact in the community and greater empowerment in the students. Community-Action projects foster the highest degree of service and learning and have far-reaching outcomes in the community. In the case of the RIPPLES Gang, their Community-Action project led to the restoration of two historic buildings, a professional market study for their community, and a massive cleanup and revitalization of their downtown.

**Getting Started in Service-Learning**

You must consider a number of things when selecting and planning the level of service-learning that would work best for you and your students. First, confer with your colleagues to ascertain the options
and support for service-learning in your school or system. It is important to find out if and how service-learning is currently facilitated.

- Is service-learning recommended or required in your school?
- Are students required to attain a specific number of service hours?
- Must the actual service take place during school time?
- Is there administrative support for service-learning to be integrated into the curriculum?
- Will the service-learning activity need cross-department planning?
- Is there a school or community service-learning coordinator available for input or assistance?
- Is service-learning congruent with the mission statement of your school?
- How much time do you plan to devote to service-learning as a part of your curriculum?

Because you must not view service-learning as an add-on to any curriculum but as a pedagogy for teaching curriculum standards, start with your curriculum standards as you begin service-learning. Although not pointing to any specific curriculum objectives, as they vary by content and location, we have identified possible curricular connections (CC) in Chapters 2, 3, and 4 (see “Starter Ideas” in Chapters 2, 3, and 4).

After you have identified your curriculum standards and how you will integrate service-learning into your curriculum, you should determine the level of service-learning that is most appropriate for your students and school situation. Carefully examine the Developmental Service-Learning Typology (see chart in Appendix B) and its accompanying table on types of service-learning. The typology is correlated to Piaget’s cognitive developmental stages, Bloom’s Taxonomy, and Bradley’s levels of reflection. The typology table outlines the activities, effects, and best practices at all three levels of service-learning. This information will help you establish the level of service-learning for which your students are developmentally ready.

A brief example of how the curriculum connection might differ depending on the level of service-learning chosen follows.

If your students are working at the Community-Service level and volunteering service hours, you might want to limit their volunteer options to needs specific to your curriculum. For instance, if you are teaching a unit on water pollution, students could participate in cleaning up trash or debris on a local streambed or riverbank. Be sure to extend their learning by connecting their service to the unit content through appropriate reflective activities.
In the same type of unit at the Community-Exploration level, you might want the students to investigate the types and causes of water pollution in your city, learn how to test the water quality, and visit a local water-treatment facility or invite an expert in the field to talk to your class. The students can then write a report and reflect on their findings.

At the Community-Action level, the additional activities might include testing the local waterways and water storage facilities for the presence of pollutants. If pollutants are found, the students could devise and implement a plan of action designed to reduce the water pollution.

**What Are the Logistics Involved in Service-Learning?**

So how are you going to organize this thing called service-learning? We wish we could give you a simple outline. That is not possible, however, because each service-learning experience and each teacher are different. This is the exciting part of service-learning! You get to organize your service-learning experience to suit your style of teaching and your classroom needs and limitations. You can do service-learning to fit your schedule and curriculum. You can do it daily, once a week, one week a month, after school, on weekends—whenever you like! Everything depends on the focus of your service-learning experience and how you will incorporate it into your curriculum. Will it be an integral part of your curriculum or an add-on? If it is an add-on, you might want to use differentiation strategies such as compacting the curriculum. Using this approach, you could plan to do service-learning one day a week; Fridays are ideal for participating in service-learning after you have covered all your weekly objectives. Much depends on the type of service-learning you do as well. Whereas a Community-Action service-learning experience might consume more time, a Community-Service service-learning experience might take only a day or a week to complete. It all depends on the service-learning experience you and your students undertake. That is the beauty of service-learning. Unlike some programs that are scripted, service-learning can be fashioned to meet your needs and those of your students. See Chapter 5, “Implementing Service-Learning in the Classroom,” for more ideas and suggestions.

**Basic Ingredients for Service-Learning**

The basic components of service-learning follow:

1. Preparation—the groundwork for identifying and preparing for the service-learning experience.
2. Action—carrying out the service-learning experience.
3. Reflection—analyzing, processing, synthesizing, and evaluating the information and ideas encountered during the service-learning experience.

4. Celebration—acknowledging, honoring, and validating the students’ service-learning effort.

Preparation—Getting Started in Service-Learning  

Preparation is, simply put, getting started in the service-learning experience. It is making important decisions, such as how the experience will be carried out. Will it be in your classroom? After school? Will it involve all your students? Only volunteers? Will students receive credit of some sort? What is the focus of the service? Will you be doing Community-Service, Community-Exploration, or Community-Action service-learning? Who might work with you on the project? Any community partners? Have you gotten your administration to support the endeavor?

Ready, Set, Go! Carrying Out the Action  

So you’ve decided what to do and are ready to start your service-learning experience. How you proceed with the action will depend on what type of service-learning you have chosen: Community-Service, Community-Exploration, or Community-Action. Action ideas and best-practice models for each level of service-learning are discussed in detail in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Reflection—The Learning Element  

In education, more value is usually accorded to service-learning activities that result in more academic learning by the students. An effective way to promote learning in service-learning activities is through the use of reflection. Reflection is an essential part of service-learning; it is the process of looking back on actions taken to determine what has been gained, lost, or achieved and connecting these results to future actions and larger societal contexts. Reflection utilizes creative and critical thinking processes to help youth convert their service experience into a productive learning experience (Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform 1993).

Reflection is the framework through which students process and synthesize the information and ideas they have gained through their service-learning experiences. Through the process of reflection, students analyze concepts, examine and evaluate their experiences, and form their own opinions (Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform 1993).

The three levels of reflection follow:

- **Level One:** Observation—recognition of a dilemma.
- **Level Two:** Analysis—responding, framing, and reframing.
- **Level Three:** Synthesis—use of experimentation and strategy selection (Bradley 1995).
Although extremely important in establishing the learning aspect of service-learning, reflection is unfortunately often pushed aside due to time constraints. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 explain how the levels of reflection correspond to each service-learning level—Community-Service, Community-Exploration, and Community-Action. These chapters also include a suggested list of reflective activities at each level.

**Celebration—Enhancing the Experience for Students** Celebration is an important component of service-learning whereby the good work the students have done is acknowledged. From a simple recognition certificate or a party to formal recognition by the town council or state legislature, celebration enhances service-learning experiences for youth by validating their efforts and honoring their contributions.

In order to gain the most from their service-learning experiences, students need exposure to the 3Rs of celebration: Recognition, Reward, and Respect. Celebratory activities can range from teachers arranging a pizza or ice cream party in class or at a local pizza or ice cream parlor within walking distance to showing a movie after school with snacks or holding a skating party or cookout on a Saturday. In addition to these fun activities to honor the students’ work, businesses, clubs, organizations, and government agencies often recognize the efforts made by students to improve their communities. This recognition can range from the awarding of certificates and trophies to the presenting of cash prizes or scholarships for individual or group efforts. Exemplary service-learning experiences can sometimes gain national recognition for the students and their school (see “Opportunities for Celebration and Demonstration” in Appendix B).

**Using Choice and Voice to Identify a Need Area**

Giving the students a *choice* and *voice* in determining the focus for the service-learning activity helps to ensure at least some degree of interest from the onset of the service-learning experience. As the students proceed through the service-learning activities and become empowered to make an actual difference in their community, their interest level soars. Keeping the curriculum and student learning objectives in mind, you might want to compile a list of possibilities for the students to choose from as a class. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 contain examples of possible service-learning activities at each level of involvement—Community-Service, Community-Exploration, and Community-Action.

At the Community-Exploration and Community-Action levels, after the students have brainstormed, discussed, and decided on the top two or three options, you can divide the class into groups and have each group research a different option. Their assignment would be to find out how much of a problem the selected concern actually is in their
community and to report their findings to the class (see Chapter 5). This research might take the form of interviewing schoolmates or town residents, checking the current and back issues of the local newspaper, and gaining insight into the general problem area by researching the topic in the library or on the Internet and then connecting it to the concern in their community.

If possible, the students should take an Awareness Walk to the actual site for investigative purposes. If the students are unable to actually walk through the area, try to arrange a time for them to make observations through the windows of a car or school bus. It is important for later planning purposes that the students have firsthand knowledge of how the problem affects their community.

**Assessment in Service-Learning**

How do you assess your students in service-learning? Since service-learning is a pedagogy just like group work or lecture, you would assess your content objectives in the same manner you would for other topics. For instance, if your content involves history objectives, you would assess your students’ knowledge of the subject matter using the same method you would normally use, be it essay, multiple-choice, or short-answer tests.

So how would you assess the students’ service-learning involvement? You could both assess and promote student learning through reflective activities, informal, formal, or both. Actually the use of both measures is ideal. Using formative and summative assessments serves to increase student learning concerning the service-learning experience. During the service-learning experience, students should be given opportunities to reflect on the meaning of the experience. Formative assessment could involve informal assessment where you ask the students to discuss their ideas and feelings in an informal setting. Perhaps you set aside a few minutes at the end of class for the students to share and discuss their ideas and insights from the experience. Students could also journal their ideas and feelings on a regular basis. Journaling is an effective tool for reflection for students. Summative assessment could also be informal or formal. At the end of the experience, a summative assessment captures the essence of the experience for the students. What did they take away from the experience? What impact has it had or will it have on them? On the community? This approach can include techniques such as discussion, journaling, a project, or a paper. Chapters 2, 3, and 4 offer level-specific suggestions for reflection. Specific techniques and tools for assessment can be found in Chapter 5 and in Appendix A.
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