

[teachers](#)[parents](#)[students](#)[youth workers](#)[faith groups](#)[independent schools](#)[Home / Briefing Papers / Concepts / Service Learning-Celebration Concept](#) [go](#)

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[Concepts](#)[Organizations](#)[People](#)

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# Service Learning-Celebration Concept

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## Definition

**Service Learning** is best defined as a curriculum-based teaching method that enriches the community through service; integrating classroom instruction with community service activities (National Center for Education Statistics). It is an educational tool that demonstrates the power and ability of citizens of all ages to impact and tackle real world issues within their own communities (National Service Learning Exchange). It also challenges students of all ages to think critically and problem solve. The National Youth Leadership Council (2005) states "Service-learning is a philosophy, a community development model, and a teaching and learning method."

According to the Service-Learning and Community Service in K-12 Public Schools Survey (1999), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, the service must meet four requirements.

1. Be organized in relation to an academic course or curriculum.
2. Have clearly stated learning objectives.
3. Address real community needs in a sustained manner over a period of time.
4. Assist students in drawing lessons from the service through regularly scheduled, organized reflection or critical analysis activities, such as classroom discussions, presentations, or directed writing.

**Celebration**, according to Educator's Virtual Mentor, is the recognition that learning has taken or is taking place. It may be simple or highly orchestrated, but is not necessarily a culminating activity as service-learning is an ongoing activity (Disney Channel). Recognition is very important as it helps students understand the value of their contribution and fosters the development of a lifelong commitment to community involvement. (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse).

## Historic Roots

In 1903 a gentleman by the name of John Dewey believed that learning environments should be inclusive and all members regardless of ethnicity, race, gender or economic status should be able to come together and work to solve common problems (Estrella Mountain Community College). His classroom was experimental, but not out of sync with American culture. Students were allowed to test ideas, values, beliefs and customs for the purpose of critical investigation. His ultimate vision for public education was to produce good citizens (Estrella Mountain Community College).

Thirty years later, President Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced an experiment that was extremely successful bringing men together to help restore and revitalize the nation during its early recovery from the Great Depression. From 1933-1941 the Civilian Conservation Corps enlisted thousands of unemployed young men, mostly 17 and 18 years old and made them part of a peacetime army. These young men received vocational and on-the-job training. Thousands completed elementary and high school. Those who were illiterate were taught to read and write. Their duty was to curtail the destruction and erosion of the country's natural resources (U.S. History.com). Before it was over, three million young men engaged in a massive salvage operation, the most popular experiment of the New Deal (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, History).

On June 22, 1944, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the "Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944," better known as the "GI Bill of Rights." This bill linked service and education to

those members of our voluntary military. This allowed service members educational opportunity in return for service to America (The GI Bill).

The term "service-learning" is coined from educators Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey in 1967 (Seitsinger 2005). The term first appeared in the publications of the Southern Regional Education Board where they were the primary writers (Kessinger 2004). They wanted a term that described the combination of conscious educational growth with the accomplishment of certain tasks that met genuine human needs.

In the 1960s and 1970s service-learning was introduced and became a mainstay on many college campuses. From the mid-1980s, service-learning on college campuses increased in popularity (Kessinger 2004). In 1985 the National Campus Compact was formed by college and university presidents. The primary purpose of this coalition was to help students develop the values and skills of citizenship through participation in public and community service (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, History). Today, this is an organization of over 900 college and university presidents who have pledged to encourage and support academically based community service at their institutions (Kessinger 2004).

In the late 1990s articles and books began to be written about service-learning and a push for research also began. The federal government's interest and support of service-learning increased dramatically, primarily due to the passage of the National Community Service Act of 1990 under President George H.W. Bush and the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 under President William J. Clinton (Kessinger 2004).

### **Importance**

Service-learning models vary in size and scope. Some models have as few as four steps while others encourage ten or twelve. Yet every model should include Celebration. Given service-learning's goal of youth empowerment and community collaboration, celebration and recognition of participants in the school and the community is an important means for rewarding meaningful service (Indiana Department of Education). It also demonstrates to young people that others value their work and shows how important it is to say thank you to those involved. It helps reaffirm partnerships and renews the commitment to service. Recognition of students can help build habits of service and lead to a lifetime of community involvement. Additionally, when participants learn new skills, engage in risk taking, take on new responsibilities and offer their hearts and hands to others, it is appropriate to honor and recognize those efforts (Indiana Department of Education).

Celebration does not have to be the final step in any service-learning model – celebration can happen at any point during the service-learning program especially if the program is long term (Disney Channel). Recognizing the small steps of accomplishment demonstrates the value of the program and instills energy and excitement.

Celebration events do not have to be expensive or elaborate, yet they should try to incorporate teachers and members of the administrative staff, parents, community members and leaders of local businesses and government. Extending invitations to these members as well as members of the media is a good idea for positive publicity for the school and service-learning program. Teaching students how to positively promote their accomplishments is a valuable tool, yet too much emphasis on recognition may overshadow the true spirit of volunteerism (Ida and Rose 2003).

Some ideas for celebration include:

- Participants may develop a website, video, scrapbook or newsletter documenting the service-learning process. Those involved may offer personal insights and inspirational writings and reflection about the service-learning project.
- A school or community display with a spotlight on those who made service-learning a success. The display can be a bulletin board in the school, local grocery, convention and visitor's bureau, library, city or town hall or even chamber of commerce.
- Offering leadership roles to those outstanding students in other forms of planning or implementing other service-learning projects.
- Nominating participants for local awards and scholarships. Many national retailers offer awards for student volunteers.
- Hosting an event such as a breakfast, coffee or luncheon event honoring the participants.
- Awards, certificates, t-shirts, flowers or any other type of simple public recognition.

## Ties to the Philanthropic Sector

Celebration is a vital component to service-learning because it helps those involved feel proud of what has been accomplished, it strengthens self-esteem and can provide ongoing support and energy to a long-term project or it can provide appropriate closure. When students feel good about what has been done, it is easier for them to stay motivated and involved (Indiana Department of Education). Not only do the individuals reap rewards, but the program as a whole brings visibility to the school and community. This can lead to new volunteers not only for future service-learning projects but for other members of the community that may want to satisfy their own sense of civic duty. There may also be increased community support suggesting new service-learning projects that can enhance the community. The more public recognition and awareness may lead to new funding opportunities as well (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse).

Through service-learning projects, nonprofit organizations all over the country receive hard-working volunteers who simultaneously learn through education and community, while they actively reflect and celebrate their service (Learning to Give).

Service-learning, as John Dewey demonstrated, is inclusive. All people and communities are able to work together to accomplish a goal – to work together to solve social issues. A school incorporating a program to help the elderly or homeless crosses boundaries and demonstrates to all participants the power of the heart and hand. This giving of oneself, serving while learning, is directly related to the philanthropic sector.

## Key Related Ideas

Key ideas related to celebration are the other steps of service learning. As previously mentioned, there are some models that have fewer steps than others, yet they all should include these key steps as described in the Students in Service to America Guidebook (2005):

**Assess the need of the community and school.** This step helps get the students involved early in the process, they can brainstorm ideas and then reach out to members of the community and discover what the community really desires. With outreach, students can discover what programs have already been done and if any other groups are doing something similar. Direct involvement with community leaders is necessary and vital for the success of the project.

**Select and implement the project.** Student's voice and opinion are critical at this stage. As with all programs involving learning and volunteerism, the program must have an energy and belief behind it to survive. Students that select and plan the service-learning project learn valuable life-long leadership, ownership and planning skills.

**Reflection.** This is a period of time where students assess what they have learned and how they would continue or revise the program. Students perform in-depth evaluations of what and how they have learned. Reflection can be connected to civics, composition, math, geography and science as well as art, music and physical education. All these areas of study can be used as reflective forms of service-learning.

## Important People Related to the Topic

- **Bush, George H.W.** (1924- present) In 1989, President Bush created the Office of National Service in the White House and the Points of Light Foundation to foster volunteering. President Bush also passed the National and Community Service Act of 1990. This act authorizes several programs to engage citizens of the U.S. in full or part-time projects designed to combat illiteracy and poverty, provide job skills, enhance educational skills, and fulfill environmental needs (Kessinger 2004).
- **Clinton, William J.** (1946-present) President Clinton's campaign stressed the establishment of a national "service" program that culminated in the passage of the national and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. This act is responsible for the establishment of three major volunteer, community service and service-learning programs: Senior Corps, AmeriCorps & Learn and Serve America (Kessinger 2004).
- **Dewey, John** (1859-1952) Dr. Dewey was a student of philosophy at Johns Hopkins University and completed his doctorate in 1884. As a teacher he became interested in the philosophy of education. In 1899 he published "School to Society" and in order to test out his educational theories he opened an experimental school in Chicago. Dewey argued children should learn by experience giving them the opportunity to develop skills, habits and attitudes necessary to solve a wide variety of problems (Spartacus Educational).
- **Glenn, John** (1921-present) Current Chairperson for the National Commission on Service-

Learning which was established to broaden the use of service-learning in school districts across the United States. He also has a deep commitment to education and to involving youth in public and community service. This inspired the formation of The John Glenn Institute for Public Service and Public Policy at The Ohio State University which partnered with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation to launch an initiative called "Learning In Deed: Making a Difference Through Service-Learning" (Learning In Deed).

### Related Nonprofit Organizations

- **Compact for Learning and Citizenship.** This link offers many downloadable publications and toolkits to help anyone interested in starting their own service-learning project. [www.ecs.org/html/projectsPartners/clc/CLCPublications.asp](http://www.ecs.org/html/projectsPartners/clc/CLCPublications.asp)
- **National Commission on Service-Learning.** This organization released a report called Learning in Deed: The Power of Service Learning in American Schools. It has also fostered Learning In Deed, a \$13 million four-year initiative that will encourage more school systems across the country to adopt service-learning, making quality service-learning opportunities available to youth in every classroom in grades K-12 throughout the country. [www.learningindeed.org/slcommission/](http://www.learningindeed.org/slcommission/)
- **Points of Light Foundation and Volunteer Center National Network** engages and mobilizes millions of volunteers who are helping to solve serious social problems in thousands of communities. Through a variety of programs and services, the Foundation encourages people from all walks of life — businesses, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, low-income communities, families, youth, and older adults — to volunteer. [www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org)

### Related Web Sites

**Disney Channel.** This site has a section specifically for service learning programs, what they are, the steps, why serve and additional resources. There is a downloadable toolkit as well. A great site to encourage the younger students with the Disney tie-in. [www.disney.go.com/disneychannel/learningtoserve/](http://www.disney.go.com/disneychannel/learningtoserve/)

**Indiana Department of Education: Service Learning Program.** The website offers information about service-learning and the key elements. There are links to funding opportunities, resources and Learn and Serve America. [www.doe.state.in.us/opd/srvlrm/](http://www.doe.state.in.us/opd/srvlrm/)

**Learn and Serve America** is a great resource offering information about service-learning and its impact. It also contains program links for individuals or organizations. [www.learnandserve.gov/home/site\\_map/index.asp](http://www.learnandserve.gov/home/site_map/index.asp)

**The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse** website offers resources, fact sheets, and hot topics, along with lesson plans and syllabi. It is a wonderful site to gain ideas and information about starting a service-learning program. [www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org)

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