

# Preface

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## ABOUT THIS BOOK

Human brains learn more, remember longer, and grow more connections when the learning occurs in a real-world setting (Diamond, 1988). Service learning projects such as those featured in this book offer students the opportunity to learn in both controlled classroom settings and the everyday world—within their communities. As service learning projects unfold, at times the teacher introduces students to facts, concepts, and skills in a controlled classroom setting. At other times, students do new learning or apply old learning by performing authentic community service. As students work in their communities, they discover the joy of helping community members and improving the neighborhoods and cities in which they live. They realize that their formal learning is giving them tools with which they can offer valuable contributions to their families and neighbors.

Using the approach in *Service Learning: A Guide to Planning, Implementing, and Assessing Student Projects*, the teacher helps students structure the service learning project so that service actions lead toward mastery of curriculum goals. A well-managed and rich service project will often align with goals in several content areas. Teachers from these different academic disciplines have a powerful tool for integrating their curricula if they choose to work together to web the service learning project through their content areas.

Studies show that quality design of service learning projects enhances student learning, and the factors that seem to matter most are strong alignment with standards, clear communication of goals, and extensive, direct contact with community members (Billig, 2004). Teachers and students need to examine curriculum standards for their classroom or content area to select appropriate service learning projects. Students need to work with community partners or volunteers as often as possible to strengthen their understanding of and empathy toward service recipients. These contacts often help students overcome negative stereotypes that they may have developed about people who are different from themselves.

To make sense of their experiences, students do reflective journal entries that focus attention on progress toward learning goals through the service learning experience. As students journal, they review content learning and the importance of performing civic service, and they often add graphics, images, illustrations, song or poem lyrics, and even musical notations to their journal entries to engage the intelligences through which they learn best. This reflection provides students with self-feedback about their service learning experience that helps them remember what they learned and value that learning more highly (Billig, 2005).

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The Introduction and Chapter 1 of *Service Learning: A Guide to Planning, Implementation, and Assessing Student Projects* presents the fundamentals of service learning as a curriculum model, detailing how service learning can be implemented. Chapters 2–10, grouped into Part I, “Basic Projects”; Part II, “Intermediate Projects”; and Part III, “Advanced Projects,” are each devoted to a particular project and include the following elements:

- Description of the Project
- Assessing Risks: Establishing Protocols for Health and Safety
- Selecting the Service Learning Focus
- Working With a Community Partner
- Aligning Service and Educational Goals
- Reciprocity: The Community of Learners
- Managing the Service Project
- Fostering Reflective Learning
- Assessment and Evaluation

Some projects require independence of movement or physical strength or depth of background knowledge and skills that make them less suitable for younger students. With some modification, all of the projects are potentially usable by most teachers and students.

Included in the second edition are tips for tapping into multiple intelligences for each project. Each of Howard Gardner’s eight identified multiple intelligences is targeted in at least two of the tips, which are drawn from the author’s classroom experiences. These strategies work successfully with students from kindergarten through college, and using them gives learners the opportunity to learn in personally comfortable ways. Any of these strategies can be used successfully with any project to enhance its experiential nature and differentiated learning opportunities. In addition to the multiple intelligences tips, each project contains at least a few general pointers and background information that applies across all service learning possibilities. Alert readers will find useful nuggets in every chapter.

As teachers and students implement service learning in their classrooms, they need to begin building a master list of possible community service partners and Internet (Web site) addresses for a variety of service learning projects.

A search engine such as Yahoo! or Google leads to a number of different Web sites related to a given service learning topic. Many of these Web sites include references to community agencies or potential partners for projects.

To understand how to develop a management plan for a service learning project, a reader can cross-reference the section titled “Description of the Project” with the management plan grid provided in each chapter. Teachers need to spend some time examining the management grid for each project, which shows the actions of that particular service learning project, with the grid showing how the project aligns with typical goals in several different content areas. Teachers are encouraged to add to or revise the management plan that is included with a particular project. This strategic planning helps teachers effectively manage real-life service learning projects.

The feature in each chapter titled “Selecting the Service Learning Focus” includes a sample rubric that teachers and students can use to summarize their

thinking about the specific service learning project at hand. Readers are encouraged to study these rubrics as samples, modifying them for use with their classes. See “Selecting the Need for Service” in Chapter 1 for detailed information about how to use the rubric. Each service learning project models the use of the rubric. Suggestions about possible community partners are included in each chapter. Teachers are encouraged to review the suggestions for potential community partners offered in each chapter and explore other options at their own discretion.

Service learning is a rich tool that gives students a unique opportunity to experience integrated content learning in the real world. Students often begin learning ideas and skills in content-specific classrooms, working toward a mastery of the vocabularies of the distinct disciplines. Students then experience the interconnectedness of the content areas as they participate in a particular service learning project. This reinforcement and feedback will help students learn the content better, remember it longer, and see its helpfulness to real life. Remember that the teacher helps students with this reinforcement and feedback by structuring reflective log entries that are task and age appropriate. Asking students to review specific content learning, the teacher often guides students in thinking about the different roles that they play as they work on the service project. In so doing, the teacher prompts students to self-evaluate their mastery of the content goals and to assess their efficacy as service providers.

The reproducibles at the end of this book include rubrics or observation checklists, which teachers and work site coordinators use to assess student work habits and teamwork. Students use these checklists to self-evaluate their own behaviors. Teachers are encouraged to use the writing evaluation rubric also included in the reproducibles section to evaluate students’ written assignments, and they are also encouraged to give each student a copy of the rubric so that he or she has a tool to use for evaluating, polishing, and revising rough drafts of written assignments.

The nine service learning projects included in this book target goals in many different content areas and service sectors. Authentic learning targets for any school subject can align with carefully selected civic service projects; and teachers, administrators, and students can discover these alignments. Educators are encouraged to use their creativity and knowledge of their own disciplines to piggyback off these nine examples and develop their own community-specific service learning projects.