

***Making a Difference
with Service Learning***

Chapter 8

Lesson 1

Orientation to Service Learning



Key Terms

community service
debriefer
facilitator
orientation
recorder
reflection
reporter
service learning
timekeeper

What You Will Learn to Do

- Identify the components of service learning

Linked Core Abilities

- Apply critical thinking techniques

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Compare the types of service opportunities within your community
- Identify the benefits of serving others within a community
- Associate the roles and responsibilities of service learning teams
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

Introduction

You have probably noticed that people who seem to find the most satisfaction in life are those actively engaged in doing something to make the world a better place for everyone. They seem happy because they are making a difference. Have you ever helped a friend through a difficult time, stopped to help change a flat tire, or take food to a sick neighbor? Then you know why people who help others appear to be more genuinely content with their lives.

Unfortunately, although you know you will feel good, it is probably not easy for you to get started. You are not alone. Many people find it awkward to reach out. However, after you take those initial steps and begin making a difference, the difficulties disappear. Feelings of accomplishment and generosity of spirit make the effort and time you spent worthwhile.

So how do you get started in service? First, look around you. There are problems and people in need everywhere. You do not have to look very far to find hunger, illiteracy, pollution, illness, poverty, neglect, and loneliness. Decide on an urgent need or one that you find most compelling. What matters most is that you make a commitment to address the need in a positive way.

After you have chosen a need, select a project that will help you accomplish your goal of making a difference. President John F. Kennedy reminded everyone to “Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.” Planning and carrying out the **service learning** project will help you selflessly “do” for your neighbor, your community, your state, your country, and the world.

The author Aldous Huxley said, “Experience is not what happens to you; it’s what you do with what happens to you.” Service learning takes that belief to heart. It is not enough to take positive actions; you must learn from your actions. For example, starting a paper recycling program is a worthy project; it can become more meaningful when you learn more about why it is important, reflect on your experiences, identify what you learned, analyze how you’ve changed, and decide other ways you can recycle and help others commit to recycling.

Service learning experiences can become the starting point for self-awareness, self-improvement, and self-fulfillment. In the process of making a difference for others, you make a difference in yourself.

What Is Service Learning?

Service learning is an active and experiential learning strategy where students have a direct impact on an identified need that interest and motivates them. It requires sequential lessons that are organized so **orientation** and training come before the meaningful service activity and structured reflection follows the activity.

Key Note Term

service learning – an environment where one can learn and develop by actively participating in organized service experiences within one’s own community

Key Note Term

orientation – the act or process of orienting or being oriented, such as being oriented on the first day of college

Key Note Terms

facilitator – one who facilitates; one who leads team discussion

recorder – one who takes notes for the team and organizes information

reporter – one who represents the team voice and reports team findings

timekeeper – one who keeps track of time and plans the schedule

debriefer – one who encourages team members and leads discussions after presentation and team discussion

Structured Teamwork

Service learning requires active participation in structured teamwork much like sports (see Figure 8.1.1). Working within small teams and solving problems together will help you become active participants. Each member is assigned a team role:

- **Facilitator.** The facilitator leads team discussions to identify needs and prepare service learning activities.
- **Recorder.** The recorder takes notes for the team and organizes information.
- **Reporter.** The reporter represents the team voice and reports team findings.
- **Timekeeper.** The timekeeper keeps track of time and plans the schedule.
- **Debrief**er. The debriefer encourages team members and leads discussion after presentation.

Cadet teams should determine, plan, and execute service learning activities with the aid of their instructor.

Orientation and Training

Orientation and training activities are necessary to prepare you and other participants for the service experience. Integrating what you are learning in class with the service activity is a key goal of service learning. This step requires in-class lessons, followed by selecting a service project that relates to the curriculum and meets academic standards.

You should be familiar enough with the material to conduct the service project you have selected. Part of the planning process will require you to determine what you need to know before the activity and to train yourself accordingly.

If possible, speak with representatives or others involved with the service you have selected to see what to expect. Orient yourself with the service goals, those you will be helping, other organizations or people that you may need to contact, and so on. In other words, learn what you need to know before starting the service experience and plan for all potential circumstances.

Meaningful Service

It is your responsibility to initiate and plan service activities to correspond to the lesson material. Although there should be at least 15 cadets per service experience,

Figure 8.1.1: Sports promote good health as well as teamwork.

Courtesy of Craig Hammell/The Stock Market.



you can either work in committees on one project or small teams on separate projects. For example, you may want to divide the project components among three teams of five cadets each. Learning should be an active and social experience that is meaningful to you and those involved. Within your teams, choose a service activity that

- **Addresses a real and important need another group is not addressing**
- **Is interesting and challenging**
- **Connects you to others within the community or world**
- **Challenges you to develop new skills**
- **Requires little or no money**
- **Is achievable within the time available**
- **Has a positive effect on others**

Structured Reflection

Reflection, or taking time to observe, analyze, and integrate actions with learning, is an important part of the learning process. A strong reflection helps you develop skills and extend learning from the service experience. You may use many types of reflection: learning logs and essays; team and class discussions; performances; graphic organizers; and public presentations. Using learning logs throughout the experience to record thoughts, feelings, knowledge and processes will help you organize what you have learned.

Within your teams, share what you have learned by discussing your answers to open-ended questions before, during, and after each service experience. Reflection questions should encourage observation, analysis, and integration.

Community Service versus Service Learning

Community service in many states is dispensed by a judge or court system as mandatory work for infractions of the law. Some students and members of the community view this type of service as punishment. What students learn is that they don't ever want to be forced to do "service" again. Today, many high schools include community service hours as a graduation requirement; though intentions are good, sometimes the emphasis is on quantity of hours, not the quality of the project.

Service learning, on the other hand, is a step up from community service; it brings academics to life and is driven by student involvement (see Figure 8.1.2). You should identify essential needs in your school or community and then decide on your own projects. In addition, you should plan and carry out your own projects and take responsibility for your own learning. Reflecting on the experience will reveal the importance of your service work and the impact you are making on yourself and others.

Key Note Term

reflection – a thought, idea, or opinion formed or a remark made as a result of mediation; consideration of some subject matter, idea, or purpose

Key Note Term

community service – any form of service provided for the community or common good

Figure 8.1.2: These two students are testing water quality as part of a service learning and science project.

Courtesy of Bob Daemmrch.



Why Use Service Learning?

Service learning is rapidly growing in popularity around the country. Students who are able to learn about the world around them and work to improve it as part of their education reap many benefits. Such students

- **Learn more**
- **Earn better grades**
- **Come to school more often**
- **Demonstrate better behavior**
- **Become more civic minded**
- **Gain a first-hand appreciation and understanding of people from other cultures, races, and generations**
- **See the connections between school and “real life”**
- **Feel better about themselves**
- **Learn skills they can use after leaving school**

Service learning provides a safe environment where you can learn, make mistakes, have successes, and develop by actively participating in organized service experiences within your community. For example, such experiences might include the following:

- **Meeting actual community needs by providing meaningful service**
- **Coordinating in partnership with the school and community**
- **Integrating these service opportunities into an academic curriculum, thereby enhancing what your school teaches, extending your learning beyond the classroom, and offering unique learning experiences**
- **Providing you with opportunities to use previously and newly acquired academic skills and knowledge in real-life situations in your own community**
- **Providing structured time for you to think, talk, and write about what you did and saw during your actual service activity**
- **Helping you to develop a sense of caring for others**

Providing service can be a powerful tool in the development of attitudes and behavior. It can transform young adults from passive recipients into active providers, and in so doing, redefine the perception of their involvement in the community from a cause of problems to a source of solutions.

Important skills you will need to work successfully to accomplish each service learning activity are similar to those identified in your program outcomes and core abilities. There are several important skills and qualities identified such as applying critical thinking techniques and building effective relationships with peers, coworkers, and the community. Learning these skills ensure that students are prepared for the workforce. The following are additional skills service learning can help you strengthen.

- **Being an effective team member**
- **Providing resource and time management**
- **Engaging in frequent and effective communication**
- **Making decisions**
- **Organizing and being responsible**
- **Effectively managing personal problems such as poor writing skills, lack of research skills, or stereotyping**

Conclusion

When combined with formal education, service becomes a method of learning or service learning. Learning is maximized by combining the three main service learning components: orientation and training, meaningful service, and structured reflection.

Service learning is the single learning strategy that can accomplish the most good for the greatest number of people. Studies suggest that service learning reinforces curriculum content and standards and benefits participants academically as well as personally and socially. By getting involved to help meet different needs, you have the potential to make a difference to someone specific or to the entire community.

Lesson Review

1. **Who do you know that might benefit from your participation in service learning?**
2. **Define the term *reflection*.**
3. **Compare and contrast community service and service learning.**
4. **List five benefits from participation in service learning.**