

Lesson 2

Plan and Train for Your Exploratory Project



Key Words

experiential learning
exploratory project
field education
problem-based learning
training

What You Will Learn to Do

- Prepare for a service learning project

Linked Core Abilities

- Build your capacity for lifelong learning
- Communicate using verbal, nonverbal, visual, and written techniques
- Do your share as a good citizen in your school, community, country, and the world

Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Select an exploratory project
- Identify the steps needed in conduct a service learning experience
- Identify the essential components of a chosen service learning project
- Develop a plan addressing various circumstances and outcomes of the project
- Define the key words contained in this lesson

Introduction

There are several points to consider before undergoing service learning. Planning ahead will prepare you both mentally and physically to undertake the challenge. Before you select a service learning project in class, your instructor should familiarize you with service learning by guiding you in an **exploratory project** within the community. This will help you select a service project and demonstrate the steps to conducting a proper service learning experience.

Exploratory Project Purpose

The exploratory project is an introduction to a service learning activity that utilizes **experiential learning** and **problem-based learning** principles. The purpose of a teacher-planned exploratory project is to provide students with a meaningful experience, expose them to how it feels to serve, and stimulate their thinking about possible service learning activities.

One of the primary benefits of engaging in an exploratory project is to understand what service learning entails. Service learning is not community service, although many confuse the two. Until you participate in service learning, you will not have a real-life experience to justify the difference.

Exploratory projects help you capture a vision of how to make a difference in the world. After you get involved, you may begin to see the world through different glasses. In addition, as you work to address one need in the community, several other unmet needs will begin to surface. Your vision of the world may change when you begin to see critical needs where you never saw them before.

Suggested introductory projects could include going to a hospital or nursing home to visit residents, distributing food at a food bank, or volunteering at a local Red Cross or hospital program, such as that depicted in Figure 8.2.1.

Before participating in service, familiarize yourself with the following steps to conduct a proper service learning experience:

1. **Complete a preassessment of skill level using the Personal Skills Map from the JROTC Success Profiler.**
2. **Determine a school, community, or national need you can fill relating to class curriculum.**
3. **Brainstorm and select a meaningful service project that meets proposed guidelines.**
4. **Start a learning log to record new knowledge, thoughts, and feelings throughout all phases.**
5. **Plan and organize details of the service activity and discuss expectations.**
6. **Participate in a meaningful service activity that meets the service learning guidelines (Form 219-R).**
7. **Discuss and reflect on what you experienced (observation).**

Key Note Terms

exploratory project – a teacher-planned introductory project to service learning, intended to provide students with a meaningful experience, expose them to how it feels to serve, and to stimulate their thinking about possible service learning activities

experiential learning – gaining practical knowledge, skills, or practice from direct observation of or participation in events or in a particular activity

problem-based learning – an instructional Strategy that promotes active learning where problems form the focus and learning stimulus and problem-solving skills are utilized.

Figure 8.2.1: Volunteering your time in a hospital is just one way to help members of your community.

Courtesy of Michal Heron.



8. Discuss and reflect on what you gained from the experience (analysis).
9. Discuss and reflect on what you can do with the new information (integration).
10. Complete a project summary report and a final group evaluation form to judge teamwork and other activities.
11. Brief the experience to community members, administration, classmates, and so on.
12. Complete a post-assessment using the personal skills map and related analysis to determine plan of action.

Choosing a Service Activity

After participating in an exploratory project, you should be able to select your own service activity that meets an important need and integrates the curriculum.

It is very important that you participate in selecting a service activity that is meaningful to you and others. Brainstorm service ideas relative to the lesson curriculum and program at hand. Then as a class or team, select the service activity.

Service learning opportunities can use **field education** principles to incorporate scholastic programs with the curriculum. You can integrate programs such as the following:

- **Lions-Quest Skills for Action®**
- **Groundhog Job Shadow Day®**
- **NEFE High School Financial Planning Program®**
- **You the People®**
- **Chief Justice®**
- **Cadet Ride®**

Key Note Term

field education – performing service and training to enhance understanding with a field of study

In field education, you perform the service as a part of a **training** program designed primarily to enhance understanding of a field of study while providing substantial emphasis on the service.

Besides integrating curriculum and service, you will learn more about the different types, models, and terms of service in the next lesson, “Project Reflection and Integration.” Service learning projects can vary from addressing a littering problem to raising funds for a specific cause (see Figure 8.2.2).

Key Note Term

training - to form by or undergo instruction, discipline, or drill; to teach so as to make fit, qualified, or proficient

Planning the Service

After you have chosen an activity, you must plan the essential facets for project completion and prepare or train yourself for what is to come.

This is where service learning begins. Service learning efforts should start with clearly stated goals and the development of a plan of action that encourages cadet responsibility. You can achieve those goals through structured preparation and brainstorming such as discussion, writing, reading, observation, and the service itself. Keep the goals consistent with the level of the activity planned and ensure that the goals and plan of action draw on the skills and knowledge of your team. When corresponding goals to the curriculum, try to determine academic content standards you will address through the service.

Besides determining goals and standards, plans should be comprehensive to ensure adequate preparation for each step or task. Determine a description of the task(s) and answer the following questions:

- **Who will be involved?**
- **What is involved and needs to be done?**
- **When will each step take place?**
- **Where will it all take place?**
- **Why will we do it?**
- **How will it work?**

For example, you might decide to visit a local veterans’ hospital. You could discover the needs of the elderly patients that reside there by discussions with the hospital’s administrative personnel or possibly by meeting with the residents themselves. You



Figure 8.2.2: Collecting trash to address a littering problem or raising funds for a special cause are both meaningful and effective service learning projects.

Courtesy of Bob Daemmrich.

should also determine where the project fits into the curriculum. Together, you might decide that the patients need to have younger people help them write letters to family members, assist with their wellness and fitness, or plan and lead activities.

Service Learning Success Story

During lessons on planning and social responsibility, cadets in Gastonia, North Carolina, decided to plant a garden at a nursing home. Their preplanning resulted in a specially designed, waist-high “no stoop garden” so seniors could help maintain the plants and flowers. This is a good example of how the needs of the elderly were taken into consideration when the garden plan was developed.

If you are aware of children who have a hard time learning to read, you could plan a service activity to a local elementary school. Because teachers rarely have extra time on their hands to spend one-on-one with these children, certain schools may welcome JROTC cadets who could come and spend time reading or listening to the children read. You do not have to limit this service to reading; consider helping in mathematics or other subjects. Remember to maximize the use of your participating cadets’ skills and knowledge. Contact your local Junior Achievement office at <http://www.ja.org>, for more service learning suggestions to help teach elementary students. You can also find service learning projects ideas by searching the Internet.

Do not forget to accomplish the administrative details during the preparation phase. Teams often overlook these requirements or assume that someone else will do them. You must obtain permission from school administrators to conduct the service learning activity as a field trip and arrange for transportation, lunch, parental release/permission slips for participating cadets, and the necessary supplies and equipment to perform the activity. Invite administrators, counselors, community members, and so on to be on your advisory board so that they will become more involved with your project.

Training for the Service

Before participating in the service activity, prepare yourself for different circumstances or outcomes. This may involve learning about the subject matter you will be expected to know to complete the tasks you have laid out or discussing different outcomes and expectations within your teams. Try your best to be prepared for different situations you may encounter. Within teams, or as a class, brainstorm and discuss potential hazards you may encounter, and precautions you should take to make the task run smoothly.

Pretend you are taking a bus to a children’s hospital with a group of cadets to tutor sick children who cannot be in school. You may need to train yourselves on particular academic subjects, research what grade levels will be represented, and locate the hospital. Also, make sure to pair up and plan a meeting time and place.

Executing the Service

In this phase there are a few rules to remember. Arrive on time and always be courteous. You are representing your school and you should act accordingly at all times. Also, ensure that you understand the task or goal at hand. If you are not sure, ask a person in authority, who should be able to point you in the right direction. If you are a team leader, make sure your team members feel completely comfortable with the tasks. Finally, if a situation or problem arises that needs an authority's attention (for example, an accident occurs and someone is hurt), take what actions you can and have someone contact the person in charge.

Being well organized and completely prepared are fundamental for a successful execution phase. For example, if you are going to build a garden such as the one mentioned earlier in this lesson,

- **Ensure you have the correct tools and supplies to complete the service.**
- **Know the name or names of the contacts for the particular service you are performing.**
- **Identify alternate group leaders in case there are absences.**
- **Assign cadets to work on projects according to their experience and abilities.**
- **Be thoroughly prepared to complete the task but be flexible to make changes because things may not go as you planned them.**

Remember, you are there to render a service for your community.

Conclusion

The exploratory project will introduce you to service learning through active participation. From there, you will be ready to choose your own service activity. At that time, remember that good planning is the key to a successful service learning venture. Training may be necessary to complete the task, and learning should be the focus as well as making a difference through service.

You should now be prepared to use the proposed steps and planning procedures to conduct a proper service learning experience.

Lesson Review

1. Define the term *problem-based learning*.
2. Why is it important to participate in a service activity that means something to you?
3. What materials might you need if you were visiting children in a hospital?
4. Name three projects in your community you might want to join.