

The Benefits of a High Quality Service Learning Program on the Development of the

Whole Child

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### Abstract

The purpose of this literature review is to present research in the area of service learning and its effects on academic achievement in students from elementary school through post secondary educational settings across race, gender, and socio-economic status. Attention will be given to additional benefits provided from service learning programs to the student's psychological, behavioral, and civic development. Service learning has a benefit to the development of the whole child but not without some obstacles. This review will demonstrate the multiple benefits of incorporating a service learning program into an educational program as well as to identify some of the challenges in doing so.

### Introduction

The concept of service learning dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. This literature review serves to demonstrate the benefits of service learning to the development of the whole child. Of greatest concern for this paper are the academic, personal/ social, and civic effects on students who voluntarily or involuntarily participate in school-based service learning projects at the elementary, middle, secondary, and post-secondary level. The literature on service learning for the purposes of this review are the results of research studies conducted on the topic of service learning over the last twenty years in the field of educational research.

While the world of education has undergone various changes, so has the application of service learning as an instructional strategy. The philosophy of incorporating service into the curriculum in order to elevate academic achievement began with such educational reformers as William James, Arthur Dunn, and John Dewey at the turn of the twentieth century (Metz & Youniss, 2005). These three men are the pioneers of the practice. Unfortunately, they were unable to provide empirical, longitudinal data to validate their hypotheses due to conflicting ideology and global circumstances (Metz & Youniss, 2005). During WWI, The Great Depression, and WWII, the opportunity to put the theory of service learning into practice for the purposes of gathering empirical data had been overshadowed by unemployment and patriotism (Metz & Youniss, 2005). School based service experienced another lull during the late 1950s and 1960s. This is largely due to attention toward math and science resulting from the Soviet Union

launching Sputnik and the subsequent “space race”. However in the late 1960s service learning for the purposes of civic responsibility came to the fore-front. Civil rights activism and the protests against the Vietnam War provided the impetus needed to educate students about civic involvement. Civic engagement was quickly replaced by the free market competition of the 1980s and 1990s and the “ethos of self interest” (Metz & Youniss, 2005, p. 414). The educational reforms of the late 1990s and early 2000s brought resurgence for the demand in citizenship training due to the influx of foreign born students into the American educational system (Metz & Youniss, 2005). What was lacking in empirical data at the turn of the twentieth century with James, Dewey, and Dunn has since been made up. Research done within the last twenty years shows that “school-based service can be a valuable tool for promoting civic development” (Metz & Youniss, 2005, p. 415) and increasing academic achievement across all races, genders, and socio-economic levels.

Service learning is an instructional practice of “service to the community as a means for instilling social responsibility and promoting civic cohesion among diverse persons within our democratic society” (Metz & Youniss, 2005, p. 414). James, Dewey, and Dunn promoted community service as an experiential learning opportunity that promotes civic responsibility. In time, their vision of community service transformed itself into the practice of service learning. Service learning takes the concept of community service and links it to classroom instruction. Service learning is a teaching technique that is specifically designed to meet curriculum goals, teach specific concepts, and promote involvement in the community (Anonymous, 1996). In an article titled *The Practice of Service Learning in Local School Community Contexts* (2006) Christopher Koliba, Erica Campbell, and Carolyn Shapiro identify six features that distinguish service learning from community service: involvement of a community partner, offers a service to be rendered, a learning objective is addressed, involves a reflection, learning extends over a period of time, and the learning involves all grade levels to a certain extent. In addition, service learning should offer positive, meaningful, and real experiences to the participants, involve cooperative rather than competitive experiences, address complex problems in complex settings rather than simplified problems in isolation, and promote deeper learning because the results are immediate and not contrived (Rosevear, 2009).

Service learning does not mean an episodic volunteer program, tallying a set number of community service hours into a log book, or appear one-sided where the activities benefit either the student or the community rather than both (Rosevear, 2009). Findings from a study conducted in 1999 by the National Center of Education Statistics for the Department of Education, as cited in *The Practice of Service Learning in Local School-Community Contexts* (2006), noted that schools that adopt service learning programs “understand that it (is) a way to help students become more active members of the community, to increase their knowledge and understanding of the community, to meet real community needs, and to encourage student altruism or care for others” (Koliba, Campbell & Shapiro, p. 687-688).

As concerns regarding immigration escalate and issues pertaining to student achievement rise, service learning opportunities provide a viable way of addressing these issues in a manner that is beneficial to all stakeholders. Despite racial, socio-economic, and gender barriers that exist in schools, research shows that service learning programs result in academic growth in all participants. Not only do students who participate in service learning programs perform better academically, they also experience growth personally, socially, and civically over the long term (Anonymous, 1997; Billig, 2000; Gardner, 1997; Hershey & Reilley, 2009; Melchior, 1999; Metz & Youniss, 2003; Metz & Youniss, 2005; Scales, Blythm, Berkas, & Kielsmeier, 2000; Schmidt, Shumow & Kacker, 2006; Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005).

#### Method

The research presented in this literature review is the result of extensive reading of several educational publications dating from 1997 to the present; on-line materials resourced through the Marquette University Raynor Library, Proquest and ERIC databases, publications provided by the US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, and The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and service learning organization, such as Learn and Serve America and the National Youth Leadership Council. Research in the field of service learning is limited due to the relative newness of the topic. Initial searches were conducted to link service learning with academic achievement in the elementary and middle school levels which produced few results. The search was then broadened to include other effects such as social and

behavioral effects and effects on civic responsibility. By broadening the search, access was gained to more longitudinal studies. These studies showed the short term and long term effects on the individual participating in service learning opportunities. Research found was both qualitative and quantitative in nature.

Interest in this topic stems from experience as an educator in the Catholic school system of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Service learning is a means to making the religion curriculum more meaningful through practical application of the Catholic Social Justice Teachings. This research serves to affirm and support the work begun at a school within the archdiocese that has instituted a middle school service learning program. This program serves to address concerns resulting from decreasing parental involvement in the day school during school hours and the underlying concern about raising children from a place of privilege to be mindful of other's needs. The research presented here will argue the necessity of establishing service learning opportunities parish wide to unify facets of the school community, Christian Formation for persons who are not part of the school community, and parish for the strengthening of community essential to maintaining the life of the Church.

#### Summarizing the Literature

In order for a student to reap the benefits of service learning, a quality program must be put into place. According to Jessica E. Rosevear in the article *3 Service Learning Projects* there are two ways to go about implementing service learning. One way to begin is to identify particular learning goals or standards and then develop a service project around them (Rosevear, 2009). The other is to identify a project to be done that addresses an issue in the community and then explore how to tie it to the curriculum (Rosevear, 2009). However, as Koliba, Campbell, and Shapiro indicate, quality service learning programs involve a clearly articulated community partner and parent involvement (Koliba et al., 2006). "Experienced practitioners of service learning found these connections (parent and community involvement) serving as a conduit through which service learning facilitates student learning" (Koliba et al., 2006, p. 701).

The anonymous author of the article *Learn to Serve, Serve to Learn* (1997) from Learning magazine supports this concept by identifying a 5 point framework for establishing a quality service learning program. This framework is supported by other

researchers as it emphasizes the connection between curriculum and community (Astin, Vogelsang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000; Billig, 2002; Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Kielsmeier, Neal & Crossley, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999; Seitsinger, 2000; Youniss, McLellan & Yates, 1997). A quality program first identifies and defines the community in which the service will be conducted to appreciate the history and culture behind the issues (Anonymous, 1997). Once students learn the history of a community they should then select a problem facing that community and research it (Anonymous, 1997). Once the students “have learned about the issues and problems in their chosen community, they’ll have to narrow those to one that will be manageable for them to work on” (Anonymous, 1997, p. 47). Here is where academic objectives need to be kept in mind. If a guiding teacher isn’t focused on maintaining the integrity of the study by linking the work to meeting the standards, the service learning project will run the risk of becoming community service instead of service learning (Anonymous, 1997; Koliba, Campbell & Shapiro, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). The framework offered by the anonymous author of *Learn to Serve, Serve to Learn* continues by including opportunities for students to examine policies and possible solutions to the identified community problem (Anonymous, 1997). This step allows students to exercise their critical thinking and problem solving skills to map out a plan of action within the existing infrastructure of the community. The last step of the framework then encourages the teacher and students to put the plan into action. It is important that the teacher guide students into choosing a project that is not so big that they’ll never see it completed or that will consume all instructional time. The students “need to be able to take action” (Anonymous, 1997, p. 47) in order to reap the various benefits of service learning. Students will see their wanting to make the world a better place actualized into the world becoming a better place (Hershey & Reilley, 2009).

In addition to this framework, several researchers found that the inclusion of a reflection piece was instrumental in students finding value in their work. Experiencing the value of service results in a life-long habit of service (Astin, Vogelsang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000; Hershey & Reilley, 2009; Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Kielsmeier, Neal & Crossley, 2006; Melchior, 1998; Seider, 2009; Wade, 2009). In their 2000 executive summary of *How Service Learning Affects Students*, Alexander Astin, Lori Vogelsang,

Elaine Ikeda, and Jennifer Yee noticed that “reflection as a means of connecting service experience to the academic course material” (Principal Findings section, para. 15) had both qualitative and quantitative results on college undergraduates especially when the reflection lead to discussion among students and professors. “Participation in service increases the likelihood that students will discuss their experiences with each other and that students will receive emotional support from faculty” (Astin et al., 2000, Principal Findings section, para. 6). It is through the reflection performed during the course of a service learning project and upon its completion that the benefits are able to be seen. Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer support the practice of reflection in their 1996 Phi Delta Kappan article, *In The Service of What? The Politics of Service Learning* by stating, “The importance of meaningful reflective component becomes clearer when one considers the kind of deliberation and student empowerment that such a curriculum can foster” (The Challenges for Practitioners and Advocates section, para. 23) especially in changing stereotypes and societal misunderstandings. Reflections “testify to the transformative power of service learning experiences” (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, The Challenges for Practitioners and Advocates section, para. 23). However, Kahne and Westheimer are quick to point out that reflections by means of journal entries “may simply reinforce previously held beliefs and simplistic, if generous, conclusions” (1996, The Challenges for Practitioners and Advocates section, para. 24) because the opportunities to hear other perspectives is not being offered and mindsets are not being challenged. Therefore a quality service learning program must include varying perspectives and discussion in addition to reflection.

### Benefits

In 2006, The National Youth Leadership Council in conjunction with the State Farm Companies Foundation put forth a report on the state of service learning research in the United States. This report examined how service learning enhanced learning objectives and how learning enhanced the service provided. This document states that “service learning builds social capital providing a way for young people to strengthen their connections with their school, communities and families. Through it, youth serve as resources for their communities, rather than being considered a source of community problems” (Kielsmeier, Neal, & Crossley, 2006, p. v). In her article *Research on School*

*Based Service Learning: The Evidence Builds* (2000) Shelley Billig summarizes 9 years of study completed by herself and fellow colleagues on the topic of service learning. In general she speaks to the findings on the effects of service learning stating:

the findings show that service learning can increase students' ability to learn complex subject matter, decrease their involvement in risky behaviors, and encourage them to form bonds with adult role models other than teachers and parents... it can develop a stronger service ethic, respect for diversity, a sense of efficacy, a more realistic sense of career possibilities, and a greater likelihood of being engaged in school and community. (Billig, 2000, p. 4)

The impacts of service learning on the individual are far reaching. Research suggests that involvement in a quality service learning program will result in positive growth in regard to personal and social development, civic responsibility, and academic learning across all grade levels from kindergarten thru post secondary education (Billig, 2000; Kielsmeier, Neal & Crossley, 2006; Koliba, Campbell & Shapiro, 2006; Markus, Howard & King, 1993; Metz & Youniss, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999; Scales, Blyth, Berkas & Kielsmeier, 2000; Schmidt, Shumow & Kacker, 2006; Switzer & Simmons, 1995; Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005; Wade, 2009). In addition, Alan Melchior, author of the 1999 National Evaluation of Learn and Serve America for the Center for Human Resources, as cited in *Research Roundup*, noted that "participation in the program had a range of positive outcomes for students, teachers, and community members"(Billig, 2002, p. 4).

Students who participate in service earn higher grades, have fewer behavioral problems, know more about the society in which they live, and may feel slightly more empowered to effect change. . . It appears that participation in service may contribute to adolescent development in a variety of ways, enhancing academics, behavioral and civic outcomes. (Schmidt, Shumow & Kacker, 2006, p. 136)

It is to be noted short term impacts are to be had while the student is involved in service but long term impacts can be had when the student remains involved in service over time (Hershey & Reilley, 2009; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Metz & Youniss, 2003a; Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Kielsmeier, 2000; Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997).

## Academic Learning

What is the purpose of school? Historically speaking, school was started to create productive citizens in order to maintain democracy. How does one go about creating a productive citizen? For education reformers like William James, Arthur Dunn, and John Dewey, it is “not just sitting around in a classroom and getting a particular grade, but rather that the information can be applied to something meaningful and larger” (Kielsmeier, Neal, & Crossley, 2006, p. 17). Service learning programs provide the opportunities to apply classroom learning to something larger. In their state of service learning report *Growing to Greatness* (2006) James Kielsmeier, Marybeth Neal, and Alison Crossley share information gathered for the National Youth Leadership Council to support the philosophy and educational method of service. They state that:

those who took part in service reported higher high school grades... alumni of service learning were more likely to rate the quality of their education higher... young people who participated in service were significantly more likely to report being very or extremely satisfied with not only their school life but also expressed the same sentiments about other important aspects of their lives – family, friendship, work, and life overall. (p. 19)

The academic effects of service learning participation support community involvement as a means to increase academic achievement across race, gender, and socio-economic status (Astin, Vogelsang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Billig, 2000; Gardner, 1997; Hershey & Reilley, 2009; Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Melchior, 1999; Scales, Blyth, Berkas, & Kielsmeier, 2000; Schmidt, Shumow, & Kacker, 2006; Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005)

The academic benefits of service learning from kindergarten through post-secondary educational settings are consistent among researchers. In a 1997 article entitled *The Controversy Over Service Learning* author Bonnie Gardner presented statistics that support service learning as a means of increasing student achievement. Gardner referred to a study conducted by Florida’s Learn and Serve director, Joe Follman, who studied 50,000 students over two years. Follman’s findings showed that “service learning increases grades and attendance and reduces discipline problems” (Gardner, 1997, p. 17). This finding reported by Gardner is supported in the article *Relevance of*

*Service Learning in College Courses* (2005) by Sally Cahill Tannenbaum and Richard D. Berrett. Their study sample of 566 students from 19 classes across various disciplines at the University of California, Fresno showed that “students participating in service-learning experienced positive outcomes in three academic areas: critical thinking, writing skills, and college GPA” (Impact on Academic Performance section, para. 1). Their study also noted that “service learning improves students’ ability to learn academic content and complete course goals” (Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005, Impact on Academic Performance section, para. 1). This is very compelling as 80% of the students indicated that the service aspect of the coursework made them more interested in the course material (Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005). According to the survey conducted by Tannenbaum and Berrett, service learning “increased academic relevance and understanding of course content...appeared to increase social awareness...is a useful pedagogical methodology” (Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005, Survey Results section, para. 1-3).

Sarah Hershey and Veronica Reilley, two middle school teachers, saw this same thing when they examined students at The Chinese American International School in San Francisco where students underwent a service learning opportunity through a collaborative effort between language arts and social studies. The purpose of the coursework was to help students understand the realities and causes of homelessness in their area. This service learning experience had a variety of short term and long term effects on the students involved as noted in the article “*Hobo*” is Not a Respectful Word (2009). By engaging students in activities linking the two content areas, the authors noted a change in stereotypes and misinformation among the students, transformation of student attitude and knowledge, and increased student performance in critical thinking, academic rigor, student centered instruction and project based learning as some of the short term effects of such a service oriented unit (Hershey & Reilley, 2009). The teachers also noted some long term effects on their students as well. They noted that many of their students continued participation in community service after graduation (Hershey & Reilley, 2009). They also noticed that there was an ongoing, increased awareness and concern for homelessness and poverty in their community and world (Hershey & Reilley, 2009).

Other research in K-12 and post secondary educational settings speaks to the academic benefits of quality service learning programs as well. Shelley Billig, after a two year study involving surveys and observations at multiple school sites that used service learning as part of their instructional program from 1984 through 1997, found students to make “moderate to strong gains on achievement tests in language arts or reading, improved engagement in school, an improved sense of education accomplishment, and better homework completion” (Billig, 2000, *The Impact of Service Learning on Academic Learning* section, para. 2). She also found that “elementary school students who participated in service-learning scored higher on state tests that measure reading for information and mathematics than non-participating students” (Billig, 2000, *The Impact of Service Learning on Academic Learning* section, para. 5) and “middle and high school students who participated in service-learning tutoring programs increased their grade-point averages and test scores in reading/ language arts and in math and were less likely to drop out of school” (Billig, 2000, *The Impact of Service Learning on Academic Learning* section, para. 7). Billig also noted that 83% of the schools that have service learning programs showed an improvement in grade point averages of those students who participate (2000).

Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer identified more qualitative academic benefits in their article *In the Service of What? The Politics of Service Learning* (1996). They believed that service learning promoted higher self esteem, higher order thinking skills, use of multiple abilities, and authentic learning experiences which provided a more well rounded, interdisciplinary form of education for the student (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996). They found service learning to create powerful learning environments because they foster authentic, experience based learning which is highly motivational due to the instant gratification obtained from the work done (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996). Service learning also stimulated the higher order thinking skills of participants in a variety of contexts depending on the purpose and function of the service being performed (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996). These findings are echoed by Peter Scales, Dale Blyth, Thomas Berkas, and James Kielsmeier in their study *The Effects of Service-learning on Middle School Students' Social Responsibility and Academic Success* (2000). Their study of middle school students in grades 6 through 8 from Kentucky, Missouri, and

Massachusetts, that represented a broad mix of academic ability, gender, race, and socio-economic status, found that “sixth grade students (involved with service) were significantly higher than seventh grade, but not eighth grade, on school engagement, and were higher than either seventh or eighth grade students on intellectual achievement, responsibility, conduct, and frequency of talking with parents about school” (Scales et al., 2000, p. 349). “Sixth grade girls, in both the service learning and control group, and sixth grade control group boys scored higher than did other students on intellectual achievement responsibility” (Scales et al., 2000, p. 349). However results showed “no significant effects of service learning were observed on school engagement, perceived scholastic competence, intellectual achievement, responsibility, GPA, or conduct at school” (Scales et al., 2000, p. 350).

The results of Scales, Berkas, Blyth, and Kielsmeier stating that service learning had no significant academic results is challenged by Jennifer Schmidt, Lee Shumow, and Hayal Kacker in their 2006 study of a nationally representative group of 4,306 high school students involved in service learning opportunities. From this sample a randomly selected group of 857 students were subjected to more intensive questioning to measure four outcomes: academic adjustment, behavior problems, civic efficacy, and civic knowledge. The control measures for this study were based on service participation: any service, number of hours, type of service, and voluntary or required service. The results of their study show that

students who participate in service earn higher grades, have fewer behavioral problems, know more about the society in which they live, and may feel slightly more empowered to effect change... It appears that participation in service may contribute to adolescent development in a variety of ways, enhancing academics, behavioral, and civic outcomes. (Schmidt, Shumow, & Kacker, 2006, p. 136)

Alan Melchior supports these finding in the *Summary Report: National Evaluation of Learn and Serve America* (1999). After conducting a three year study to identify the benefits of service learning on kindergarten through twelfth grade students in regards to civic and educational attitude, Melchior observed statistically significant gains in school engagement and math grades among the 760 middle and high school participants. These students also experienced “marginally significant impacts on science grades and core

grade point averages” (Melchior, 1999, p. 9). He did notice that there were “no significant impacts on English and social studies grades or measures of course failure, homework hours, or educational aspirations” (Melchior, 1999, p. 9). The results of the study clearly connect service learning to academic achievement in multiple ways. A quote from the summary report delineates the multiple benefits on middle and high school students participating in the Learn and Serve America program, a program started in response to the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993:

...high school students showed a slightly broader pattern of significant impacts than middle school students, with strongly significant impacts on school engagement and math grades a marginally significant impact on science grades. High school students also showed a substantial, statistically significant reduction in course failures...Middle school students showed positive increases in social studies, math, and science grades, and core GPA. But social studies increase was the only one that was statistically significant. (Melchior, 1999, p. 40)

Overall, service learning had a positive influence on the participants in Melchior’s study; positive, post-program impacts were shared by all subgroups (race, gender, and socio-economic status) (Melchior, 1999).

With such tremendous support for service learning at the middle and high school level as the Learn and Serve America report shows, it is not surprising that when post-secondary classes incorporate service learning into course requirements that similar results are seen. This is demonstrated in *How Service Learning Affects Students* (2000) by Alexander Astin, Lori Vogelsang, Elaine Ikeda, and Jennifer Yee from the University of California – Los Angeles study of 22,236 undergraduate students from 1994-1998. After establishing three different control groups where 30% of the students participated in course-based community service, 46% participated in other forms of community service, and 24% did not participate in any community service, the researchers measured significant positive effects in all areas of study (academic outcomes, values, self efficacy, leadership, career plans, and future participation in service) but when service was a part of a course there were stronger positive results (Astin et al., 2000). The researchers noted that the greatest area of benefit for the students was in writing but there were no significant findings with graduate or professional school admissions tests (Astin et al.,

2000). There was a positive effect with LSAT scores especially if those students engaged in service had the opportunity to discuss their experiences with their professor (Astin et al., 2000). The opportunity to discuss service with a professor was of academic significance when the discussion pertained to course material (Astin et al., 2000). Discussion also played a part in whether or not the student would do service again at a later date (Astin et al., 2000). Gregory Markus, Jeffrey Howard, and David Klug echo these results in their study of 89 students enrolled in a political science class at the University of Michigan in 1992 as part of their study *Integrating Community Service and Classroom Instruction Enhances Learning: Results From an Experiment* (1993). They found that incorporating a service learning component to the regular classwork had positive results with attendance and academic performance. Seventy-eight percent of the students attended the traditional class on a regular basis whereas 85% of the students attended the service class on a regular basis but these numbers did not reach a status of statistical significance (Markus et al., 1993). However, students involved in service as part of the course requirement had higher grades for the course than did their peers who did not participate in the service section (Markus et al., 1993). The authors suggest that this might be due to a deliberate connection to learner outcomes to “illustrate, affirm, extend and challenge material presented in readings and lectures” (Markus et al., 1993, p. 417). Connection to curriculum is an essential difference between community service and service learning.

### **Personal and Social Development**

The 2006 report by the National Youth Leadership Council, which is another organization developed to address the 1993 National and Community Service Trust Act much like Learn and Serve America, entitled *Growing to Greatness* by James Keilsmeier, Marybeth Neal, and Alison Crossley noted that students involved in service develop skills in personal and social development which help them bridge the transition to adulthood. “Making the transition to adulthood is a very complex time, and expectations for the acquisition of new skills and roles are high. The very characteristics reported as making service experiences positive are those that provide youths the tools for this transition” (Keilsmeier et al., 2006, p. 13). Participants in service learning gain leadership skills, networking skills, confidence, communication skills, patience and

sensitivity (Keilsmeier et al., 2006). These statements are demonstrated in the work of Peter Scales, Dale Blyth, Thomas Berkas, and James Kielsmeier in their study *The Effects of Service Learning on Middle School Students' Social Responsibility and Academic Success* (2000). A total of 1,153 students participated in this study of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders from 1995-1997 representing a randomly selected balance of gender, race, and socio-economic status. This longitudinal study noted that students who had done 31 or more hours of service performed higher on the post-test for perceived efficacy in helping others (Scales et al., 2000). These students had a “feeling of concern and (have) a belief that their help can make a difference might be effects that together can promote more active citizenship” (Scales et al., 2000, p. 350).

A study by Sally Cahill Tannenbaum and Richard Berrett from California State University retrieved from Academic Exchange Quarterly on February 21, 2010, titled *Relevance of Service Learning In College Courses* looked at 566 students in 19 classes from various disciplines that incorporated service learning into the curriculum. They noted that “students demonstrated positive changes in social competency, perceived ability to work with diverse others, self-certainty, and improved self esteem after participating in service learning” (2005, Impact on Social Behavior Skills section, para. 1). These students also “perceived themselves more positively in self-worth and social competency and were more prepared to work with diverse populations” (Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005, Impact on Social Behavior Skills section, para. 1). This statement is further explored in the article *In the Service of What? The Politics of Service Learning* by Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer in 1996. These two researchers delved into the moral, political and intellectual aspects of service learning. In looking at the personal and social development of the child engaged in service learning, Kahne and Westheimer note that:

the experiential and interpersonal components of service learning activities can achieve the first crucial step toward diminishing the sense of ‘otherness’ that often separates students-particularly privileged students-from those in need. In so doing, the potential to develop caring relationships is created. (1996, p. 597)

Additional support is offered for the benefits of service on the personal and social development of students in the work done by Gregory Markus, Jeffrey Howard, and

David King in their report *Integrating Community Service and Classroom Instruction Enhances Learning: Results From An Experiment* (1993). In their study of 89 students at the post secondary level, Markus et al. found that students involved in service had noted that they felt they performed to their potential in the course that required service in comparison to those who attended the traditional class (1993). Those students involved in service noted that they learned to apply the principles of the class and developed a sense of values more than their peers not involved in the service (Markus et al., 1993).

These results are in contrast to the 1999 Learn and Serve America executive summary written by Alan Melchior. Melchior's report looked at the use of service learning programs in 17 middle and high schools in 9 states across the United States. Melchior reported the benefits of service learning on over 760 participants between the 1995 and 1996 school years in addition to a follow up survey in 1997. Even though there are "no statistically significant post-program impacts for participants as a whole on the measures of personal and social development" (Melchior, 1999, p. 41) which are noted as communication skills, work orientation, and involvement in risk behaviors, student "involvement in a well organized service learning program may play a role in reducing *some* kinds of risk behavior, though not all" (Melchior, 1999, p. 41). He further explains that "while service alone is not likely to dramatically reduce involvement in risk behaviors, service may contribute to the effectiveness of programs targeted to reducing at-risk behaviors among school-aged youth" (Melchior, 1999, p. 41).

Galen Switzer, Roberta Simmons, Mary Amanda Dew, Jeanne Regalski, and Chi-Hsein Wang support Melchior's findings in their 1995 work *The Effect of a School Based Helper Program on Adolescent Self Image, Attitudes, and Behavior*. They found that "adolescents who become increasingly involved in structured school and community programs might feel less alienated and become less likely to participate in antisocial activities" (Switzer et al., 1995, p. 448) Through their work with 171 seventh graders, they measured prosocial behavior identified as sharing, caring, and helping on those who participate voluntarily in a school based program called Helper Program. Switzer, Simmons, Dew, Regalski, and Wany noticed a decline in problem behavior. They noticed a reduction in deviant behavior in those that participated versus those that did not.

They conclude that involvement in such programs could “ultimately benefit society generally” (Switzer et al., 1995, p. 447).

### **Civic Responsibility**

Around the turn of the twentieth century when reformers like James, Dunn, and Dewey were introducing the concept of service learning to the world of education, the intent was made clear that the purpose of incorporating community service into the lives of students by offering school based service opportunities was to promote civic involvement as a means of maintaining democracy (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Metz & Youniss, 2005). Therefore it is not surprising that majority of the research performed in the area of service learning over the last twenty years notes tremendous benefit to students in the area of civic responsibility. This is demonstrated by Alan Melchior, author of *Summary Report: National Evaluation of Learn and Serve America* (1999), when he noted that positive statistically significant findings existed on measures of civic attitudes and behaviors on several measures of educational attitudes and school performance but no consistent impacts on measures of personal and social development. He noted that all subgroups; regardless of race, religion, gender, or socio-economic status, had positive, post program impacts in the area of civic/ social attitudes especially in acceptance to cultural diversity, service leadership, and civic attitude (Melchior, 1999). This is further substantiated by Edward Metz and James Youniss in their longitudinal study on two cohort groups found in the article *Longitudinal Gains in Civic Development Through School Based Required Service* (2005). Metz and Youniss tracked two high school classes. One class, the class of 2000, did not have mandated service requirements for graduation and the second class, the class of 2002, did have mandated service requirements for graduation. The graduating classes were similar across all study measures; school characteristics, gender, mother’s education, parent volunteerism, GPA, and religiousness. Metz and Youniss noted that after completing the required 40 hours of service for graduation, 80% of the students went on to do further service in the community (Metz & Youniss, 2005). They conclude that:

a school based service requirement can have its desired impact on students who enter school without a strong civic orientation. In the same sense that the requirement added little advantage to students who are already steeped in political

life and experienced in service, their less inclined counterparts can gain much when they partake of service that is presented to them as a serious step toward citizenship in the local community. (Metz & Youniss, 2005, p. 434)

“On the face of these findings, it appears that service, even when required, may heighten rather than deter volunteering to help others and to solve civic problems” (Metz & Youniss, 2005, p. 414).

In *Research on K-12 School Based Service Learning: The Evidence Builds* (2000) Shelley Billig echoed the findings of Metz and Youniss in that a high quality service learning program has an impact on a student’s sense of civic responsibility. After evaluating service learning programs in American schools from 1984-1997, she noted that:

service learning helps develop students’ sense of civic and social responsibility and their citizenship skills. Students who engaged in high-quality service learning showed an increase in their awareness of community needs, believed that they could make a difference, and were committed to service now and later in life.

(Billig, 2000, p. 37)

“Likewise, students who engaged in service-learning increased their understanding of how government works” (Billig, 2000, p. 40). Since a high-quality service learning program offers that essential link between community and curriculum, “service learning provides an avenue for students to become active, positive contributors to society” (Billig, 2000, p. 42). “Students who engage in service learning feel that they can ‘make a difference’ . . . Over 80% of participants in high-quality service learning programs felt that they had made a positive contribution to the community” (Billig, 2005, p. 45). This sense of accomplishment motivated many students to stay involved well past their school age years as indicated in *In the Service of What? The Politics of Service Learning* (1996) by Joseph Kahne and Joel Westheimer. Kahne and Westheimer make a point of stating how, if service learning is focused on charity, “students undergo experiences that demonstrate the value of altruism and the dangers of exclusive self interest” (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, The Moral, Political, and Intellectual Domains section, para. 3). If the program is high quality, reflection on service will take place. Engaging in reflection on social policies and conditions, according to Kahne and Westheimer, promote political

participation. The researchers call this “strong democracy” (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996, The Moral, Political, and Intellectual Domains section, para. 4).

### Challenges Toward Implementation

It is clear through this literature review that incorporating service learning into an educational program serves to benefit participants in a myriad of ways. Why then does only one state require service learning for graduation but 90% of Americans support service-learning in their local public schools? (Kielsmeier, Neal, & Crossley, 2006, p. vi). The answer lies in the challenges in implementing service learning within a school. The most immediate obstacle is teacher training. In order to provide teacher training, there must be adequate funding which creates the second obstacle. A third obstacle lies in the implementation. Once a teacher has been trained it simply becomes an issue of time for the teacher and their students in order to maximize the educational value of using service learning opportunities to enhance curriculum.

The National Youth Leadership Council report *Growing to Greatness* (2006) identified that only 37% of US teacher education institutions prepare pre-service teachers for service learning (Kielsmeier et al). “Service learning is a teaching methodology, not a prepackaged curriculum” (Kielsmeier et al., 2006, p. 80) so time should be given in instructing educators how to incorporate service as they would incorporate other learning strategies. Not being trained in how to incorporate service into the curriculum places the teacher at a disadvantage in their ability to address the needs of the whole child as stated by Anne Seitsinger in her presentation to the American Education Research Association in New Orleans in 2000. She stated that the “correlation between teachers’ pre-service preparation and types of certifications held, particularly for elementary and secondary education, were significant” (Seitsinger, 2000, p. 12) in the success of a service learning program. This can affect a teacher’s attitudes and beliefs and instructional practices as noted in her article *Service Learning and Standards Based Instruction in Middle Schools* (Seitsinger, 2005). She concludes “that service learning is aligned and complementary with reform recommended instructional practices for meaningful teaching and learning” (Seitsinger, 2005, Service Learning and Standards Based Instruction section, para. 1). Koliba, Campbell, and Shapiro reiterate this point in *The Practice of Service Learning in Local School- Community Contexts* by saying “the inability to quantify learning through

service learning, or any other form of experiential education for that matter, lies at the heart of the struggle about service learning and academic achievement” (2006, p. 705). Much training needs to be given to the teacher who wants to do service learning effectively with their students (Seitsinger, 2005).

To overcome this obstacle in implementing a valuable instructional method, time and effort must be given to training professional educators in how to incorporate service learning into the curriculum. This can be done through professional development opportunities such as seminars, peer coaching, and courses that highlight service learning (Kielsmeier et al., 2006). This all takes time: time to learn, time to practice, and time to teach. Time demands of service learning can be burdensome to a student and a teacher (Gardner, 1997). When an instructor employed best practices, students indicated a more favorable perception of their service learning experience (Tannenbaum & Berrett, 2005). “Teachers who used service learning strategies more frequently exceeded basic prerequisites, such as degrees and certification, with more professional knowledge of national and state curriculum standards and more professional knowledge of middle level students’ developmental issues” (Seitsinger, 2000, p. 14). Ultimately, teachers involved in service learning are doing so because they realize how effective it is on student achievement if not for any other reason (Hershey & Reilley, 2009; Seitsinger, 2005; Seitsinger, 2000). The resultant social capital from the interpersonal connections associated with service learning isn’t enough to keep service learning viable within a school (Koliba, Campbell, & Shapiro, 2006). Funding for professional development can present an additional obstacle when making the decision to incorporate any new methodology into an educational system especially if the outcome is to be of high quality.

Funding is necessary for the implementation and continued employment of service learning opportunities within an educational program. Funding can be provided through government agencies, corporate and business gifts, grants, community partnerships, issue oriented funds, individual gifting, or fundraising especially if the program is a school wide or district wide initiative (MacPherson, 1995). It is optimistic to note that according to the 1999 National Center for Education Statistics report *Service Learning and Community Service in K-12 Public Schools* that “83% of public schools with service-learning offered some type of support to teachers interested in integrating

service learning into the curriculum” (p. 9). Professional development opportunities and the financial support of service learning programs can be funded through membership in such organizations as Learn and Serve America, National Youth Leadership Council, National Council on Service Learning or the National Beta Club which receive government money to promote service among American youth. In addition, these programs are supported by foundations that give financial backing to research and development. Individuals pursuing the integration of service learning are encouraged to seek out multiple grant opportunities to support the costs of implementation (Melchior, 1997). For instance, Alan Melchior noted in his 1997 *Summary Report: National Evaluation of Learn and Serve America* that \$337,842 were given out in grants by Learn and Serve America, \$142,186 were given in matching funds, and \$1,615 was put toward national administration of the program which would include evaluation by the Learn and Serve America staff nationwide. Likewise, the National Youth Leadership Council gave out \$37.5 million in funding for service learning programs in 2010 (retrieved April 24, 2010).

Once faculty and staff have been trained and a program of service learning is established, the third obstacle to maintaining a high quality experience involves the implementation of policy and practice for the duration. This requires 5 elements as noted in *Growing to Greatness* (Kielsmeier et al., 2006). Kielsmeier, Neal, and Crossley identify vision and leadership, curriculum, professional development, partnership and community, and continuous improvement as essential characteristics for the maintenance of any quality service learning program. Service learning is a methodology that can not be done sporadically (Rosevear, 1997). It must be consistently applied so as to become part of the culture (Kielsmeier et al., 2006). The culture of a school lies heavily in the leadership; whether that is the superintendent, principal, or significant teachers, parents, or students (Kielsmeier et al., 2006). If service learning is to be part of a school culture there must be support from the leadership (Kielsmeier et al., 2006). All aspects of implementation hinge on the involvement of the leadership from the practice to the funding. If the leadership does not “buy – in” the initiative will not progress. This is evidenced by statistics presented in *Growing to Greatness* (2006) that shows that even though 90% of Americans support service learning in their public schools, only 45% of

high schools and 30% of middle schools, and 22% of elementary schools in the United States are engaged in service learning (Kielsmeier et al., 2006).

Not only is leadership essential, so is the connection to curriculum which takes leadership to enforce. Whether the curriculum director is an individual who performs this task for a district or a set of teachers who perform this task for their school, “service learning advocates need to enlist the support of all involved in curriculum work if they are to succeed” (Kielsmeier et al., 2006, p. 79) This alliance between teachers and curriculum is essential in today’s high stakes world of standardized tests and accountability. To prove the effectiveness of this method of instruction the correlation between academic achievement, curriculum, and the attainment of standards must be demonstrated through the work of all education professionals (Kielsmeier et al., 2006).

In order for a service learning opportunity to be successful there must be community involvement and parental support ( Billig, 2000; Billig, 2002; Koliba, Campbell, & Shapiro, 2006; Melchior, 1999; Metz, & Youniss, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999; Schmidt, Shumow, & Kacker, 2006; Seitsinger, 2000; Seitsinger, 2005; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997) Only 37% of the American population was familiar with the term “service learning” when the National Youth Leadership Council conducted it’s survey in 2006. Strangely, once participants learned what the term “service – learning” meant, that statistic went up to 90%. The tragedy however is that the term was explained to mean that it is what happens when students take what they are learning in school and applying it to community projects (Kielsmeier et al., 2006) This lack of understanding regarding the term “service-learning” creates a common misconception that service – learning is servitude (Gardner, 1997).

Community/ school partnerships are an essential element of service learning experiences in which students, teachers, and community partnerships design projects to address community needs as an integral part of the school’s academics. Community/ school partnerships can help students increase their understanding of and commitment to civic responsibility, and can help community organizations meet their goals. (Kielsmeier et al., 2006, p. 80)

If people don’t know what service learning is, they won’t contribute the support or financial backing to see that it is implemented.

Involving community also assists with the last essential element to successful implementation which is continuous improvement (Kielsmeier et al., 2006).

High quality continuous improvement provides opportunities for staff, students, and community members to learn from and support each other on a regular basis to improve practice, to take responsibility for their own learning, to celebrate success, and to reflect upon student contributions. (Kielsmeier et al., 2006, p. 81)

Reflection is not only essential to ongoing, successful implementation, it is also noted as an essential element to high quality successful service learning (Astin, Vogelsang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000; Hershey & Reilley, 2009; Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Kielsmeier, Neal & Crossley, 2006; Melchior, 1998; Seider, 2009; Wade, 2009). Continuous improvement, if not done effectively, can be an obstacle for implementing a high quality service program. Effectiveness would require leadership to provide common planning time and teacher release time, professional sharing opportunities, inclusion of service learning into a school improvement plan, and including service learning as a component to teacher evaluations (Kielsmeier et al., 2006) All of which point back to the original challenges: trained personnel, time, and money.

### Conclusion

It can be concluded that service learning provides multiple benefits to student participants as well as to their teachers, school, and community. Benefits are gained by participants regardless of whether the program was mandatory or voluntary as dictated by the course requirements. Additionally, academic achievement, personal/ social development, and civic responsibility are impacted by service learning in individuals regardless of race, gender, religion, or socio-economic status. “Program participants showed positive short term impacts on a range of civic and educational attitudes and behaviors, including impacts on attitudes toward cultural diversity and service leadership; on involvement in volunteer activities; on attitudes towards school; and on school grades” (Melchior, 1999, p. 91). Students that continue with service experiences past the time of direct involvement stand to have long term gains in understanding their community and academic work (Melchior, 1999; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997; ) Through service learning in their formative years “individuals become adults whose civic engagement

helps to sustain, reform, or transform society” (Youniss, McLellan, & Yates, 1997, p. 620).

Service allows youth to see society as a construction of human actors with political and moral goals rather than as a distant, preformed object. Instead of viewing themselves as too young to have power, youth observe that their actions have effects both in helping individuals who are homeless and in comprehending the forces that pertain to poverty and its consequences. Instead of thinking of society as determined by impersonal forces, youth recognize that their agency gives them responsibility for the way society is and for the well-being of its members. ( Youniss et al., 1997, p. 625)

The lasting effects of service learning is the transference of education wanting to make a difference in the world being actualized by the students wanting to make a difference in the world (Hershey & Reilley, 2009; Kielsmeier, Neal, & Crossley, 2006; Melchior, 1999)

With its many benefits, the greatest inhibitors to a successful, high quality, service learning program are personnel, time, and money. So why should a teacher, school, or district implement such a form of experiential learning? The answer to this question lies mainly in the main benefactors of service learning opportunities; the children. With the continued rise in immigration, the widening achievement gaps among cultural subgroups, the emergence of a global community through advanced technology, a student today needs to feel empowered in order to be in control of their own destiny.

Those students that benefited most from service learning opportunities were those who are marginalized by today’s main stream culture (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999; Metz & Youniss, 2005; Scales, Blyth, Berkas, and Kielsmeier, 2000; Schmidt, Shumow, & Kacker, 2006; Switzer & Simmons, 1995). Even though European and Asian American students are more likely to participate in service (Schmidt, Shumow, & Kacker, 2006) it is students of African or Hispanic heritage that benefited most from the active learning experience that service learning provides (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999) Females were more likely to participate in service learning opportunities than males (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999; Metz & Youniss, 2005; Schmidt, Shumow, & Kacker, 2006) but males were the main

beneficiaries (Metz & Youniss, 2005; Switzer, Simmons, Dew, Regalski, & Wang, 1995). Galen Switzer, Roberta Simmons, Mary Amanda Dew, Jeanne Regalski, and Chi-Hsein Wang noted as part of their study on *The Effect of a School Based Helper Program on Adolescent Self Image, Attitudes, and Behavior* (1995) that “participating boys exhibited positive changes in self esteem, depressive affect, involvement, and problem behavior relative to other groups” (p. 445). More affluent schools, those with less than 50% of their students on free or reduced lunch, tend to offer service learning to their students through a means of voluntary involvement (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Schools with a higher percentage of students on free or reduced lunch tend to offer service learning to their students through a means of mandatory involvement (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999). Using the measure of civic involvement as a means of determining growth in their study of *Longitudinal Gains in Civic Development Through School Based Required Service* (2005), Edward Metz and James Youniss, noted that after two years of mandatory service the less inclined students showed a sharp increase in civic involvement where as those without mandatory service remained low. However, “students who perform service voluntarily do not differ from those doing required service on any of the outcomes of interest (academic, behavioral, or civic outcomes) – voluntary service does not appear to be more beneficial to youth than required service at least in terms of outcomes” (Schmidt, Shumow, & Kacker, 2006). What Metz and Youniss maintained is that those who were less inclined to serve benefited from required service because it placed them into situations that they may not have normally participated to enhance the learning experience (2005).

At present we are left with the conclusion that a consciously designed service program which espouses civic responsibility in the community and offers students opportunities to do service worthwhile sites at the very least gets students to take their requirement seriously and stimulates their interest in various aspects of the civic domain. (Metz & Youniss, 2005)

#### Recommendations

The field of research in service learning has grown in the last twenty years to span all ages, races, gender, and socio-economic status. More longitudinal research on the effects of service learning is necessary to continue to show the academic gains afforded

to students who are actively involved in service learning. Logistically speaking, such research is difficult to conduct due to the many variables involved in assessing academic growth in students. “The field is clearly a messy one” (Billig, 2000, in Limitations of Research section, para. 2). Since the intent of service learning is grounded in civic responsibility there is a lot of data available to support this aspect of a person’s development, however it is growing outdated. Outdated research poses a problem for understanding the academic and personal/ social effects of service learning on the development of the whole child as well. Very little data exists on the effects of service learning on elementary aged students. This may be one area for researchers to pursue in regard to establishing a life long habit of service. There is extensive, though outdated, research on high school and post secondary students. Since the measures required for this data is highly dependent on consistent instruction across time, the “human factor” poses the greatest threat to validity and reliability of any study.