

Chapter 4

Online Professional Development in Academic Service–Learning: Promoting Community Engagement in Public Education

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ABSTRACT

The overall purpose of this qualitative study was to describe how a 3 credit hour, web-based, graduate-level course in service-learning pedagogy supports the theory that service-learning as a pedagogy can be taught effectively in an online format. Service-learning integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities. Content analysis of the selected case studies and evaluation of the student's reflections concludes that the students enrolled in the online class in a Midwest University were, in fact, able to learn this teaching strategy and then effectively implement this strategy with their classroom of students in their local communities. The Literature Review discusses numerous research articles supporting the value of this teaching strategy of collaboration with community partners in citizenship training for youth, children and young adults.

INTRODUCTION

The National Commission on Service-Learning conducted a major research project on the use of service-learning as an educational tool for public schools. In the published report, *Learning in Deed* (2004) the report states that this strategy used for school based learning is ...

- A method of teaching that combines community service with curriculum-based learning, linked to academic content and standards.

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Online Professional Development in Academic Service-Learning

- About students helping to determine and meet real, community needs.
- Reciprocal in nature, benefitting both the community and the student.
- An effective way to encourage and foster active citizenship as part of a public education.
- An approach to teaching and learning that can be used in any curriculum area
- For all ages, even the youngest of children.

Our world is experiencing dramatic changes and the diversity in our population calls for major changes in how we see and treat our world in addition to the role we play as citizens in our country.

Wade (1997) quotes Pratt from his work, *The civic imperative: Examining the need for civic education*.

Civic attitudes taught in schools should affirm both individual rights and the common good. One of the goals of civic education should be to reduce ethnocentrism, citizens should develop tolerance if not appreciation for diversity and sincere empathy for others. Pratt (1988) described the development of a civic disposition as "...a willingness to act, in behalf of the public good while being attentive to and considerate of the feelings, needs, and attitudes of others. Civic virtue has an internal landscape reflected in the obligation or duty to be fair to others, to show kindness and tact, and above all to render agreeable service to the community" (p. 12).

These trends in our society indicate that we need to provide children, youth and adults with a better understanding of the role each must play in helping to strengthen our communities to sustain our democratic society. The way individuals mistreat others, show a lack of respect for those in authority, destroy or damage other's property, indicates a high level of careless abandon and irresponsible interactions towards others. Helping to train young people in learning about "caring for the other" in our society, is becoming even more critical each year. One of the very effective tools currently being used to promote and encourage active citizenship in public schools is the high impact practice of academic service-learning. Training higher education faculty and/or teachers in the PK-12 field, in strategies for using academic service-learning as pedagogy, can be delivered within the classroom or in online delivery. Both instructional models require careful planning and a solid structure of course requirements and service based assignments.

What is Service and Academic Service-Learning?

With the growing emphasis on service-learning, researchers in the field began to discuss the true meaning of "service." High Schools were adding a community service requirement to their graduation requirements and were struggling to define service and differentiate it from doing just any kind of volunteering. It became evident that there was a need to determine the use of the terminology being used as they looked for an answer to what is considered service and what distinguishes academic service-learning from other forms of community engagement? For example, penny wars were and are being used in many classrooms and are being considered service-learning projects, however, the youth involved have little sense of the benefits to individuals that might benefit from their collection of penny funds. The penny wars raised were often contributed to individuals living in another community or even a different country and students gained little sense about the value of this service relative to their role as a citizen in their own communities. Though raising funds for a cause is a form of service, and it can be linked to the curriculum, often there is little or no structured reflection about the community need and the service

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