

Chapter 6

Technology Infused Service Learning: Changing Our World

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ABSTRACT

It seems like everyone is so busy today, it is easy to miss opportunities to reach out and make a positive difference. Though we are all experiencing the impact of tight economic times there is one lesson we are learning internationally: by putting our minds and actions towards mutual goals we all can benefit. What better way to live, learn, and work together than to share our knowledge and skills to improve our communities, both the one we live in immediately, and the one we thrive in globally. When we leave behind a legacy, will it be one of teaching service to our students to improve both academic learning and making valuable contributions to our communities for generations to follow? With the prevalence of computer-based technologies and the desire of youth to be digitally connected, it is an optimal time to share technology knowledge and skills for service learning opportunities.

We only think when we are confronted with problems. - John Dewey

INTRODUCTION

Service Learning History

Service learning is a curriculum approach combining academic learning with serving the com-

munity. This is in contrast to community service where the focus is on providing assistance alone. In contrast, service learning places the focus on the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and experiences related to learning goals and objectives as a critical component. According to Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer and Brahler (2004) service learning began in 1862 with the establishment of the Morrill Act Land Grant Institutions teaching agriculture and mechanic arts. In 1916, John Dewey who was an advocate of learning through experience viewed service as a way to improve education by learning

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more effectively and becoming better citizens. Even though service has been in existence for a long time the current term service learning was not put into place until the mid 1980s (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999). The incorporation of service learning seemed to really take hold in the 1970s, and is currently undergoing extensive reform and growth.

As to the chapter organization the first section provides a brief description of service learning, cases of service learning benefits, defining service learning elements and issues, demonstrating connections to experiential instructional methods, and technological enhancements of the service learning experience. The following sections provide additional background information on service learning, design and implementation, connections to service and technology standards, instructional technology tools, assessment of outcomes, discussions on some of the challenges, success factors, future challenges, and final conclusions.

Case studies of successful service learning initiatives integrating technology are severely lacking in the research literature. The use of technology in learning environments is still in the development stages and remains impacted by geographic locations, economic conditions, and level of technology experience. Most educational environments, both domestic and even more so in developing countries, are struggling to obtain sufficient numbers of computers, appropriate software, and needed training. With these issues in mind, we suggest how commonly available and current technologies can be used for technology enhanced service learning. Service learning has often been associated with acts of charity, volunteer work, or non-profit organizations and with current financial strains the need to offer service is even greater.

Service Learning Defined

Service learning can be defined as linking academic learning in specific ways to meet curriculum

goals and objectives while serving community needs. Service learning allows students to have the opportunity to develop an equal reciprocal relationship with the community for mutual gains by sharing knowledge, skills, and experience.

Service learning in the K-12 school setting is a growing area of interest to educators.

Legislative reform during the past 10 years demonstrates a growing national emphasis on increasing students' involvement with their community and linking this service to academic study through service learning. From a study of 6-12 grade students in 1996, the data demonstrated service learning had grown significantly since the 1980s. In 1984, researchers found 27 percent of all high schools (public and private) in the United States offered some type of community service and 9 percent of all high schools offered service learning. In 1996 National Center for Education Statistics, found 49 percent of all students in grades 6-12 participated in community service with 56 percent reporting service was incorporated into the curriculum (NCES, 1999).

Cases of Service Learning Benefits

Research on positive academic learning outcomes of service learning identified by Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray (2001) include 1) better understanding of the course concepts, 2) improved communication and problem-solving skills, and 3) increased understanding of responsibility of citizenship. Others such as (Gray, Ondaatje, Fricke, & Geschwind, 2000), have cited academic gains, personal and civic development (Sax & Astin, 1997; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001), student perceptions of increased learning, more likely to graduate (Osborne, Hammerich, and Hensley, 1998), increase in perceived engagement, satisfaction, and retention (Sax & Astin, 1997), and learners ability to see the relevance of learning as related to authentic experiences and issues (Dewey, 1938). Several case studies have reported higher levels of motiva-

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