

LINK TO CURRICULUM

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What Does It Mean to Link to Curriculum?

Linking to curriculum means that service-learning experiences are specifically designed to meet particular learning and curricular goals and/or content standards. Learning goals should be clearly articulated and activities should be reviewed to ensure that there is alignment with the curriculum. Goals should explicitly be linked to desired outcomes for both those providing the service and those being served.

Application to Service-Learning

- Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005) found that using service-learning to teach content standards or curricular objectives was among the strongest predictors of all academic outcomes.
- In a study of CalServe, evaluators found that academic impacts were related to clarity of academic goals and activities, scope, and support through focused reflection (Ammon, Furco, Chi, & Middaugh, 2002).
- Kirkham (2001) found that 97.9% of teachers who linked service-learning to curriculum reported that students learned more than what they would have learned through regular instruction. Students' grades improved and absenteeism decreased. High school students in the study reported learning new skills, knowledge, and interests, and a greater understanding of people and the community.
- Kraft and Wheeler (2003) found that alternative school students who participated in service-learning with strong connections to curriculum demonstrated significant increases over time in motivation to learn, writing scores on a six-trait writing assessment, and in grade point averages.
- Hamilton and Zeldin (1987) showed that high school students learned more when issues, which were being discussed in the legislative sessions they observed, matched those being discussed in the classrooms; and when discussion in class, before the service experience, was related to greater satisfaction with the service.
- Conrad and Hedin (1980) demonstrated that students had the greatest increases in problem-solving skills when the challenges they experienced in the field were parallel to those discussed in class.
- In a study of over 500 students, Dewsbury-White (1993) found that students who participated in a content-integrated model of service-learning significantly outperformed peers in an isolated service-learning model on a measure of subject matter knowledge.
- Teachers who aligned their service-learning activities with standards had students who scored higher on measures of academic efficacy and engagement than those who did not (Billig & Brodersen, 2007).
- In a study of Project Citizen in which students attempted to address public problems through policy change, Root, Northup, and Turnbull (2007) found that in-class use rather than extracurricular use of the curriculum was linked to better student learning.
- Youth Service California (2006) has seven elements of high-quality service-learning, one of which is integrated learning. The indicators of integrated learning are:
 - The service-learning project has clearly articulated knowledge, skills, or value goals that arise from broader classroom or school goals. The service informs the academic learning; content informs the service. Life skills learned outside the classroom are integrated back into classroom learning (p. 15).

Educational Research Supporting This Concept

- In a review of the literature on curriculum integration, Lipson, Valencia, Wixson, and Peters (1993) reported that integrated curriculum helped students to apply skills, retrieve information quickly, develop a more integrated knowledge base, have more positive attitudes toward learning, and have more time to explore linkages within the curriculum.
- Researchers from the National Research Council (1999) synthesized studies on how students learn. They found that knowledge taught in a single context is less likely to support flexible ability to apply knowledge than knowledge that is gained in multiple contexts. “With multiple contexts, students are more likely to abstract the relevant features of concepts and develop a more flexible representation of knowledge” (p. 65).
- Tasks that are relevant, contextualized within the real world, and challenging but achievable have been found by researchers to increase student achievement when they are aligned with learning goals (Lepper, 1988).
- In a mixed methods study of a high school reform pilot project to address challenges of high levels of freshman failure, curriculum integration was identified as a strategy related to increased student understanding and learning (Patterson, Beltyukova, & Berman, 2007).
- In a qualitative study, middle school students who were involved in projects-based learning were more focused, excited, and highly engaged in learning (Wurdinger, Haar, Hugg, & Bezon, 2007).
- Epstein (2007) conducted a study of preschool practices and showed that children had much stronger learning outcomes when teachers intentionally connected hands-on and other activities to specific instructional targets.
- Bransford and Vye (1989) showed that students are able to transfer learning from the classroom and solve novel problems when there is repeated opportunity to practice, coupled with coaching and reflection.

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