

Service-Learning

What is Service-Learning? What isn't it?

"Service-learning is education in action." — Sen. John Glenn

Service-learning is a teaching method that enriches learning by engaging students in meaningful service to their schools and communities. Young people apply academic skills to solving real-world issues, linking established learning objectives with genuine needs. They lead the process, with adults as partners, applying critical thinking and problem-solving skills to concerns such as hunger, pollution, and diversity.

--National Youth Leadership Council Website

It's important to note that while service-learning is a component of civic engagement, they are not the same. Too often, civic engagement is equated to just service-learning (or even volunteerism). While service-learning should be celebrated as a component of civic engagement in that people reach out to one another and seek ways to be involved in addressing social problems, when citizenship is reduced to just service-learning, we lose sight of the greater purpose of both.

If we encourage and nurture only service-learning, we lose our ability to learn and practice politics, understood as the art of practical problem solving in many environments and contexts. We lose the chance to help shape the world through the process of governing, to participate in making the rules in each of the arenas in which we have a stake. This, of course, is called democracy, and the aspect one must develop to spark meaningful participation in it is called civic engagement or, in its purest form, citizenship.

Citizenship, when practiced fully, includes myriad acts of service-learning. This aspect is what makes service-learning so appealing to developing civic engagement: service-learning is part of a process that can help lift up civic engagement. In other words, repeated acts of service-learning lead to and lift up civic engagement.

However, it's important to realize that civic engagement isn't about the service-learning acts themselves, it's about a long-term commitment that we make to repeating those acts for a bigger purpose. When done intentionally, purposefully and over an indefinite period of time, service-learning can lead to civic engagement.

--The YMCA Service Learning Guide,
Second Edition

The materials on service-learning in the pages to come are adapted from:
The YMCA Service-Learning Guide, Second Edition

Other resources on service-learning include:

- The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse - www.servicelearning.org/resources/index.php
- Academic Civic Engagement Through Service - www.cowley.edu/student/aces/sli.html