It's no secret to those of us in the service-learning camp that quality service-learning benefits everyone involved — students, teachers, the individuals being served and the community at large. But what is it about service-learning that so positively impacts students? A growing body of research confirms that students involved in service-learning are more likely to perform better academically, are more apt to stay in school and actively engage in their learning, and tend to be more civic-minded, community-conscious individuals. Clear and intentional links between service projects and curricular content play an important role in student achievement, and this issue will present some strategies for creating those critical links.

Why all the emphasis on making clear curricular connections? Without the curricular linkage, service projects — while they cultivate a sense of citizenship — often fall short of helping students transfer knowledge and skills from one setting to another, and miss those crystallizing moments in a student’s life when learning truly takes root.

There are various ways to align service with curricular content; one way is to start with the learning (curricular objectives) — and connect it to some form of service. For example, in a unit on Making Healthy Choices, an English/language arts objective might be to examine ways that marketing over the years has been used to either promote or prevent cigarette smoking and then present the findings to the class. From this, a number of learning activities could follow that cross several content areas. Students could interview individuals affected directly or indirectly by the harmful effects of cigarette smoking (lung cancer, asthma, emphysema, etc.), then create and share a video, PowerPoint, story book, PSA or Op-Ed to tell that story. In math class, students could research the rate of absenteeism due to cigarette related illnesses, or calculate the amount of money an average pack-a-day smoker could save if he/she were to quit and suggest positive ways that money might otherwise be used. In science class students could examine the many chemicals in secondhand smoke and their harmful effects on others and the environment and share with the greater community to raise awareness. The possibilities are endless. When starting with standards, be clear about what you want students to know and be able to do, then involve them in designing a project around those outcomes. The more involved students are in creating their learning, the more likely their experience will leave a lasting impression.

Another way to align service with curricular content is to begin with a service project and identify curricular standards inherent in the actions of the project. For example, a simple Canned Food Drive project could be transformed into authentic service-learning by having students (prior to collecting the canned goods) study nutrition, research physiological and socio-emotional effects of hunger, compare and contrast nutritional value of various canned foods, track food collection efforts using graphs and pie charts, write articles or poems about how the project impacted the people they served, or themselves and their preconceptions about hunger, etc. When you begin with a project, it’s a matter of working backwards to find legitimate ways to link what students are learning with what they are actually doing during the project.

Yet another way to align service with content is to start with a community need identified by students or members of the community and brainstorm ways that work students plan to do will help them master learning objectives in different content areas. For instance, a group of students who identify a lack of wheelchair accessibility in their local community could gather to think of, propose and implement solutions. Students would likely utilize skills in a variety of content areas: math (measuring/calculating traffic patterns, etc.), English/language arts (persuasive writing/speaking/public speaking), technology (videocasts/PowerPoint presentations), social studies (minority populations, underserved, etc.).

Teachers sometimes find it challenging to establish links between service and content objectives in projects created by their students. While youth voice is a crucial element of quality service-learning, striking a comfortable balance without losing the curricular link can seem like a daunting task. The important thing to remember when making these connections is to keep an open mind and be very clear about what you want students to learn by the end of the project. Once you have established that vision, finding ways to link objectives to the service (action) will get easier with practice. And remember, whenever possible, engage students in the process!

In some of our conversations with teachers we’ve found that often it is the idea of creating curricular links that is most intimidating. Service and learning connections don’t have to be complicated. Oftentimes it’s simply a matter of stepping back and examining the possibilities for connection. At the end of the day, it is those clear and intentional links to curriculum that will help your students understand the real world applications of what they’re learning.
Funding Opportunities

The National Gardening Association and Home Depot Announce 2012 Youth Garden Grants Program
Deadline: November 28, 2011

The National Gardening Association awards Youth Garden Grants to schools and community organizations with child-centered garden programs. In evaluating grant applications, priority will be given to programs that emphasize one or more of these elements: an educational focus or curricular integration, nutrition or plant-to-food connections, environmental education, entrepreneurship, and social aspects of gardening such as leadership development, team building, community support, or service-learning.

Five programs will receive gift cards valued at $1,000 and 95 programs will receive a $500 gift card to The Home Depot and educational materials. Schools, youth groups, community centers, camps, clubs, treatment facilities and intergenerational groups throughout the United States are eligible. Applicants must plan to garden with at least 15 children between the ages of 3 and 18.

Please contact the National Gardening Association for more information and to apply for this funding:
http://www.kidsgardening.org/grants/2012-youth-garden-grants-1/

Humane Education Grants
Deadline: November 30

The Humane Society of the United States is accepting applications for the new Humane Education Mini-Grant, designed to fund classroom teachers who lead innovative, standards-based programs and curricula in humane education, specifically the teaching of kindness and respect for animals and their natural habitats. Applicants must be K-12 certified teachers working at a public, private, or parochial school. Projects should engage students in hands-on activities that lead to the acquisition of new knowledge, awareness, or self-discovery as they relate to humane education.

http://www.humanesociety.org/parents_educators/award/humane_education_mini_grant.html

Stephen J. Brady STOP Hunger Scholarships
Deadline: December 5

The Stephen J. Brady STOP Hunger Scholarships recognize and reward students who have made a significant impact in the fight against hunger. The scholarship recipients each receive $5,000 for their education as well as a $5,000 matching grant in their name for the hunger-related charity of their choice. Scholarships are open to students (kindergarten through graduate school) enrolled in an accredited educational institution in the United States. Applicants must have demonstrated on-going commitment to their community by performing unpaid volunteer services impacting hunger in the United States at least within the last 12 months.

http://sodexofoundation.org/hunger_us/scholarships/scholarships.asp

Names in the News

Wendy Duvall — principal at Hopkinsville Middle School, (Learn and Serve Schools of Success) in Kentucky was featured in the National Youth Leadership Council’s Fall 2011 issue of the Generator. Click on the link to learn more about how service-learning is growing in Christian County!


Staff Updates: National Center for Learning and Citizenship

We are thrilled to welcome Molly Ryan, Assistant Policy Analyst to the NCLC team. Some of you may remember Molly as she participated in several of our Schools of Success site visits. Prior to joining ECS, Molly served as staff attorney for the North Carolina School Boards Association. She has experience in governmental relations and school board policy drafting and analysis. Molly holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from North Carolina State University, and a Juris Doctor from the Campbell University School of Law, North Carolina.

Brady Delander has joined the Education Commission of the States after more than a decade as a writer and editor for various publications and journals. He holds a bachelor’s degree in journalism from the University of Northern Colorado which will serve him well in his capacity as assistant editor/administrative assistant with NCLC.

On a bittersweet note, December marks the end of an amazing NCLC chapter as Ann Rautio, Assistant Researcher and staffer extraordinaire (!) will retire after 14 years with the Center. Ann has been an integral part of NCLC’s fabric and her passion for civics education and service-learning is an inspiration. While we will miss her immensely, we wish her the very best as she embarks on this exciting and well-deserved new adventure!
Whole Kids Foundation & FoodCorps
School Garden Grants
Deadline: December 31
The Whole Kids Foundation and partner FoodCorps offer $2,000 grants, along with curriculum, resources and mentorship, to 1,000 schools. FoodCorps’ expertise in gardening, and its ongoing support will help schools build and sustain their gardens to ensure long-term success. All schools and garden-related nonprofit organizations are eligible to apply for grants to support the launch or expansion of school gardens that will help children engage with fresh fruits and vegetables. Garden projects may be at any stage of development, planning, construction or operation.
http://wholekidsfoundation.org/gardengrants-application.php

Fund for Teachers: Grants
Deadline: Varies by state
The Fund for Teachers provides funds for direct grants to teachers to support summer learning opportunities of their own design. Maximum award: $5,000. Eligibility: teachers who work with students in grades pre-kindergarten through 12, with a minimum of three years teaching experience, full-time, spending at least 50% of the time in the classroom at the time grants are approved and made.
http://www.fundforteachers.org/about-us.php

Captain Planet Foundation:
Grants for the Environment
Deadline: January 15, 2012
The Captain Planet Foundation funds hands-on environmental projects to encourage youth around the world to work individually and collectively to solve environmental problems in their neighborhoods and communities. Maximum award: $2,500. Eligibility: U.S.-based schools and organizations with an annual operating budget of less than $3 million.
http://captainplanetfoundation.org/

Earthwatch Institute: Fellowships
Deadline: February 13, 2012
The Earthwatch Institute offers educators fully-funded fellowships for hands-on learning with leading scientists doing field research and conservation on one of over 100 projects around the world. Maximum award: fully-funded fellowship. Eligibility: elementary, middle, and high school educators and administrators of any discipline.
http://www.earthwatch.org/aboutus/education/edopp/

For additional funding ideas and opportunities, visit:
http://www.servicelearning.org/funding-opportunities

Quote of the Month
“Believe you can and you’re half way there.”
—Theodore Roosevelt