Artistically Serving:
An Introduction to Arts-Based Service Learning

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The concepts of service learning and, more specifically, arts-based service learning, have evolved over the last 25 years. Art teachers who have extended their classrooms into the community—whether to another school campus or the community at-large—have already begun to integrate elements of service learning into their pedagogy. So what is service learning, what is the rationale behind combining service learning with arts education, and finally, how do you do it? To answer the first question, let us turn to a brief history of this pedagogy.

A Brief History of Service Learning
Although the term "service learning" was first coined in 1967 (Sigmond, 1990; SREB, 1973), it has roots in prior national service movements such as land-grant colleges and universities, settlement house education, and Progressive Initiatives (Stanton et al., 1999). Some service-learning researchers, however, would state that the notion of national service actively emerged during the New Deal Era under President Franklin D. Roosevelt through the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps.

In 1961, John F. Kennedy established the Peace Corps. His successor, Lyndon Johnson, expanded Kennedy's notion of the Peace Corps by creating Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), a domestic Peace Corps designed to place volunteers in community organizations to become catalysts for community change (APCO Associates, 1999). In 1990, President George H. W. Bush created the Office of National Service in the White House and the Points of Light Foundation to foster volunteering. That same year, Congress passed and President Bush signed into law the National Community Service Act authorizing grants to schools to support service-learning (Learningindeed, 2001).

Service-Learning: Definition
Kendall's (1990) literature review unearthed 147 different terms and definitions relating to service learning. For our purposes, service learning is defined as the integration of community service into the academic curriculum and includes five elements: preparation, action, reflection, demonstration, and recognition. The service must meet a genuine community need (a community may be within a school), and the activities are directly related to curricular learning goals. It is the combination of experiential, hands-on learning and the personal satisfaction students gain from helping others that makes service learning such an effective teaching and learning tool (Florida Learn & Serve, 2006). Most of Kendall's findings place great emphasis on the preparation and reflection stages. In preparation, students are given an outline and an overview of their project. They are informed of what they will be doing and why they are doing it. In high-quality service learning, where students are active project creators and coordinators, preparation is inherent in project design. Once the overall goal is realized, students take ownership of the project by helping to determine how they can best prepare in its execution.

In the reflective component, students utilize higher-order critical thinking skills to create understanding of the combination of formal learning with the service experience (Kraft, 1996). Reflection, then, is an internalization of students' thoughts and actions brought forth through structured journal writing, meaningful class discussions, and creative artistic venues. Reflection is the key component that distinguishes service learning from community service. Without cognitive deliberation on the purpose of the service, the service then becomes just an action performed for the benefit of the community. However, in service learning, both the students and the community benefit from each other in a reciprocal relationship.

Since Kendall's findings (1990), practice has shown that adding demonstration enriches both action and reflection. Demonstration provides a forum and opportunity for students to show what they have learned (and for teachers to assess that learning) through teaching others. This teaching can be in the form of lessons, presentations, performance, art, advocacy, or other methods, and the teaching also multiples the service learning that students do. Effective projects use recognition to bring together project stakeholders and value the positive contributions students have made. Such recognitions typically include reflection and demonstration activities.

The Rationale for Service Learning
Why do we engage in service-learning practice? For the past two decades, many educators have embraced this pedagogy as research has shown that it has positive academic, behavioral, and affective outcomes (Follman, 1998; Weiler et al., 1998). Well-coordinated service-learning projects enable students to make a personal connection with the community, one that is facilitated by the aid of the teacher, another student, or a community member. The service, as well as the academic instruction, must provide some meaning for the student in order for the student to retain, advocate, or even disagree with the meaning. Regardless, learning is involved; learning that conveys meaning.

What about the arts? Why should we include arts education in our curriculum? It has been argued that many facets of the arts should be thought of as meritorious activities that help to preserve cultural significance and authenticity. With this ideal, the arts then ought to be considered as a public good, non-excludable, and non-rival in consumption. We are teaching, then, something that is generally desired and supported by the public for the well being of society.

The arts are also inherent in what it means to be human, as our existence is predicated upon the ability to comprehend, communicate, and create meaning. These qualities are part of what differentiates us from other species. Our attempts to establish this meaning have led us to create symbolic relationships that help us understand different constructs. The arts are fundamental in aiding the creation of this meaning, as they allow us to communicate with and understand each other through creative processes and ensuing conversations about them.

Within the context of education, both service learning and arts education contribute to youth and community development in unique ways. Service learning fosters principles, moral values, and individual standards by providing opportunities for students to make community contributions. Arts education cultivates creativity, helping students contribute to a healthy and vibrant community in which they are producers as well as consumer of the arts.

Service learning and the arts share an approach to education that promotes authentic, active, community-connected learning. Both provide opportunities to focus on competencies, such as teamwork and problem-solving skills, and both share core values:

- Students learn through relationships with peers, teachers, and a community of adults who use
- knowledge in realms beyond schools.
- Students learn when they are engaged, and engagement is most likely when students see a
- personal and social value to what they are learning.
- Students learn through active, in-depth investigation and exploration.
- Students engage in critical problem solving and critical thinking.
- Most importantly, students learn through opportunities to address and reflect on authentic
- problems (Jobs for the Future, 1999).

Arts-Based Service-Learning Design
How do you create an arts-based service-learning project? To provide a prescriptive curriculum would result in a non-creative and inappropriate format, since each school, teacher, and classroom is unique and multifaceted. Each has its own needs and resources. Examples, though, are provided in Section 2 of this handbook. Taylor and Ballengee-Morris (2004), however, provides guidance by outlining five criteria characterizing service learning.

1. Planning: The service aspect of authentic service-learning is based upon a communally recognized need. Goals and curricula must be designed collaboratively.
2. Co-learning: Service-learning is reciprocal in nature. Service-learning students and the community learn with and from each other. Therefore, program- and community-specific training opportunities should be available and class or course-specific objectives must drive the experience.
3. Reflection: Continual, meaningful, and reflective exchange between all parties involved in the service-learning project is important for mutual respect of everyone's values, needs, and expectations.
4. Trust: Committed involvement that is both dependable and recognizes when to "let go" is essential to successful meaningful service-learning programs.
5. Hope: Service-learning experiences should be based and facilitated upon the idea that individual civic responsibility does and can make a difference in people's lives (p. 11-12).

Conclusion
The inclusion of service learning in the arts curriculum is on a rise. Though no national data exist as to the cumulative number of these projects in existence, the following statistics can be shared. In Florida, the percentage of arts-based service learning projects (based on the total number of Florida Learn & Serve projects awarded) rose from 2% in 2000 to 24% in 2005. A review of the National Art Education Association's (NAEA) past 8 years of conference presentations reveals 23 sessions focused on service learning, with only 2 relating directly to K-12 art education. From 1998 to 2002, the majority of the presentations at the NAEA conference focused on pre-service teacher education, but within the past three years, the presentations concentrated on research and project descriptions. This provides good indication that the integration of service learning into arts education is slowly gaining attention by researchers and practitioners nationwide.

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