

The NYLC Service-Learning Glossary

The following are terms commonly associated with education, service, and more specifically, service-learning. These definitions are written specifically to describe the terms as they relate to service-learning.

Accountability: Measurable proof — often shown in student achievement data — that teachers, schools, districts, states, organizations, and agencies are efficiently and effectively accomplishing their goals.

Advocacy, Direct Service, and Indirect Service: A set of terms used to identify the span of service types. Advocacy is a form of service in which participants lend their voices and talents to help eliminate the causes of a specific problem. Direct service takes place when participants establish personal contact with people in need. Indirect service involves participants channeling resources to the area of need rather than working directly with those in need.

Authentic Assessment: A form of assessment that measures students' knowledge and skills as demonstrated through a real-world product or achievement that could serve a purpose in society. Service-learning demonstrates learning through a service project that results in such a product or achievement.

Capacity-Building: Growing and strengthening an individual's or organization's skills and abilities. In service-learning, promoting youth voice and leadership is part of building the capacity of young participants.

Character Education: Instruction in core values, proactive strategies, and practices, including responsibility, initiative-taking, and integrity.

Civic and Citizenship Education: Teaching the knowledge and skills necessary for effective civic participation, and connecting education to concepts such as democracy, liberty, responsibility, and freedom.

Community Service: Community service is often a form of volunteerism. It is done within a defined community, which could be a classroom, school, town, or city. Typically, it does not have an intentional tie to learning; the emphasis is strictly on service. In the context of the judicial system, "community service" sometimes has a punitive meaning.

Community Youth Development: A strategy of youth engagement where youths advance community development goals, resulting in benefits to both youths and the community.

Community-Based Learning: A term used for any learning experience that occurs in the community. Common forms of community-based learning include field trips, internships, and apprenticeships, which offer important opportunities for students to master skills within real-life settings but have no formal service dimension.

Community-Based Organization: An organization that is based in a community and provides education or other services to promote community well-being.

Critical Thinking: Stresses analysis, interpretation, and problem-solving. Service-learning, which involves planning, implementation, and reflection, requires participants to think critically at all stages of a project.

Curriculum Integration: The intentional tying of service activities to learning objectives. The service experience enhances the learning of identified concepts, content, and skills. The learning strengthens and enhances the quality and value of the service experience.

Developmentally and Age Appropriate Service: Service activities and learning objectives are appropriate for participants, but also challenge and stretch them cognitively and developmentally.

Diversity: The variety of abilities and social and cultural heritages of participants engaged in service-learning and the communities they serve. Good service-learning values diversity among its participants and takes advantage of the different skills and perspectives they bring to the project.

Education Reform: A plan to systematically change educational theory and practice. Over the years, education reform has meant everything from progressive proposals for change to the reinstatement of traditional methods, and now some argue that the term is useless in its ambiguity and ineffectiveness.

Experiential Education: Students learn by actively engaging in experiences that will have benefits and consequences, along with focused reflection on those experiences. Students experience practical applications of the material being taught, and develop new skills, attitudes, and ways of thinking. Service-learning falls under the broader umbrella of experiential education.

Formal, Nonformal, and Informal and Education: A set of terms used to capture the span of learning contexts for acquiring knowledge and skills. Formal education generally refers to learning taking place through a school. Nonformal education includes activities with definite educational objectives that take place outside the school context, such as those provided through community-based organizations. Informal education includes self-directed, lifelong learning activities, such as reading, and learning through social contact, such as children learning adult roles by observing, assisting, and imitating.

Intergenerational Service: Service performed by youths and adults in partnership.

Learning Assessment: Documentation and evaluation of how well students have met curricular goals and learning objectives. Because of the nature of service-learning, assessment activities such as portfolios, rubrics, and anecdotal records may need to be used in addition to standard approaches such as tests and papers.

Meaningful Service: Service with clear goals that meets genuine needs, recognizes and capitalizes on community assets, and has significant results for participants.

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Metacognition: Thinking about thinking. For example, evaluating personal progress during a service-learning project.

Missionary Ideology: A problematic way of thinking that leads providers of service to impose their ideas (often without realizing it) on the recipients of service, with little or no consideration of that group's traditions, cultures, beliefs, and needs.

Multiple Intelligences: A theory by Howard Gardner that describes the broad range of capabilities (intelligences) used by humans in solving problems and creating things and ideas. Emphasizes the need to recognize learner differences in instructional design. Includes eight intelligences: verbal/linguistic, logical/mathematical, visual/spatial, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist.

Place-Based Learning: Learning rooted in that which is local, including history, environment, culture, economy, literature, and art. Student work focuses on community needs and interests, and community members serve as resources and partners. Service-learning projects are often, but not always, place-based learning.

Preparation: Preparation consists of the learning activities, orientation, training, and analysis that prepare participants for all aspects of their service experience. It helps participants understand their roles; skills, information, and safety precautions needed; and the people with whom they will be working.

Project Evaluation: The process of evaluating how well a service-learning project achieved its goals, and what impact the project had on participants and the community. Project evaluation is entirely separate from student assessment.

Reciprocal Partnerships: Productive relationships formed between the service-learning participants and other community members and organizations, through which all parties benefit.

Reflection: The processing of the service experience that is done before (pre-reflection), during, and after (post-reflection) service, using multiple methods to encourage critical and creative thinking. It is often through reflection that the service activities and the learning objectives connect.

Rubric: A scoring guide that describes criteria for student performance and differentiates among different levels of performance within those criteria. Rubrics are most successful at evaluating participants if the participants help create them.

Self-Evaluation Tool: A tool, often a checklist or rubric, that a participant uses to evaluate his or her own successes and shortcomings.

Service: Helping an individual, organization, cause, or community.

Service-Learning: A method of teaching that enriches learning by engaging students in meaningful service to their schools and communities, and integrating that service with established curricula or learning objectives.

Social Entrepreneurship: A philosophy that combines a social mission with business-like discipline, innovation, and determination. Social entrepreneurship can take place in the for-profit, nonprofit, and government sectors. Ventures often reduce grant dependency by generating earned income through means that advance the mission.

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Standards: What students — and more recently, teachers as well — are expected to learn and do. Includes content standards, which specify what students should know in various subject areas, and performance standards, which assess the degree to which content standards have been met.

Technology Integration: Requiring participants to successfully use technology to enhance their service project.

Volunteerism: Volunteerism refers to the act of performing service without pay — usually with charitable institutions or community agencies.

Youth Voice: Young people having ownership of and an active say in a service-learning project. This includes young people leading the selection, design, implementation, and evaluation of the project.

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