

## Service Learning and Tutoring: An Exploratory Discussion

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### Abstract

The following examines service learning as a complementary component of tutoring programs. This article is a preliminary discussion of integrating service learning into tutoring programs. Though unconventional, the use of evidence presented from extant literature is relevant to all higher education stakeholders, including, but not limited to, professional tutors, peer tutors, tutorial administrators, college mentors, coaches, supplemental instructors, and faculty members.

*Keywords:* service learning, tutoring, supplemental learning, strategies, peer tutors, training strategy

### Service Learning and Tutoring: An Exploratory Discussion

The charge for any educator is to develop instructional strategies connecting classroom instruction to real life application of concepts taught. Effective educators can achieve this ideal through various instructional strategies linking classroom instruction to the students' application of that instruction. Service learning is a superlative strategy to enhance tutoring programs while increasing student engagement; it also connects education, field experience, personal reflection, community commitment, and public service (Bettencourt, 2015; Darby & Newman, 2014; Marshall et. al., 2015; Petracchi et al., 2014; Ricke, 2018). Service learning has the potential to fill specific needs of the community in which the service learning takes place, thus providing advantageous outcomes to all stakeholders (Fehr, Minty, Racey, Bettger, & Newton, 2014; Marshall et al.,

2015; Petracchi et al., 2014). Finally, service learning binds academics and community mindedness, which encourages critical thinking skills, development of learned knowledge, and knowledge retention (Fehr et al., 2014).

Tutors assist students with tying information learned in the classroom to application of that material outside of the classroom. Essentially, students receive the learning objectives, process the information, and then synthesize it in their minds. This confirms that the material passed from educator to student becomes learned knowledge. Additionally, learners often need some sort of practical application of the material for it to solidify and become *applicable* knowledge. For this reason, it is logical to connect service learning with tutoring in general, and peer tutoring specifically.

### Mutual Benefits of Service Learning

Schools expect educators, their stakeholders, and learners to have equivalently substantive benefits and gains from service learning initiatives. Students should achieve standards, gain strategies and skills related to the information taught in the classroom, *and* provide the service required in the service learning initiative. Concurrently, the educator needs to illustrate how application of the knowledge correlates with the service learning, thus illustrating the connection to the learning (Kessinger, 2015). Ultimately, the learning objectives achieved through the coursework must be evident in the service learning initiative to ensure academic success and provide mutual benefits to all stakeholders.

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## Reciprocity

Since a primary objective of the service learning initiative is to fill a community need, it is essential that the community receive some benefit from the service learning initiative (Kronick & Cunningham, 2013; Lieberman, 2014). Typically, this need comes in the form of personnel support that would be financially beneficial to the community. For example, an animal science program at a community college may provide students to assist with an annual adoption day at a local shelter where the students serve as volunteers for the event, thus saving the organizers money on hiring personnel for that event. Institutions that include service learning initiatives as part of their overall culture tend to have the most productive outcomes and highest participation rates (Bettencourt, 2015; Bialka & Havlik, 2016; Fullerton et al., 2015; Kessinger, 2015). This is because the most effective service learning initiatives have ongoing and persistent participation rates throughout the student body, not just within specific departments or divisions. In these service learning cultures, students naturally engage in the process because it is the norm; it becomes a part of their sense of belonging to the greater institutional identity.

## Knowledge Retention

Service learning is a form of experiential learning that immerses learners in a functionally equivalent or authentic professional work environment directly relating to their future use of the knowledge they are gaining. As a result, it is almost self-evident that service learning initiatives would result in improved knowledge retention. Such service learning initiatives not only provide students with the opportunity to directly apply methodologies learned in the classroom environment to real-world scenarios and activities, but they also notably increase knowledge retention (Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015; Mironesco, 2014).

Unfortunately, service learning is lacking in some traditional educational environments, particularly with the increased use of online learning platforms (Mironesco, 2014). Yet the increased use of online learning may also increase innovative educators' abilities to provide service learning opportunities (Helms et al., 2015). The 2015 study of Helms, et al. illustrated that online service learning projects can be just as effective in connecting learned infor-

mation to practical application, though the methods of assessment need more structured guidance than traditional classroom counterparts (Helms et al., 2015). The long-term potential for learner growth through service learning, even in online learning environments, exists.

## Diversity Awareness

Creating opportunities to expose students to various cultures is an objective goal in most degree programs or educational curricula. Employers desire employees who are not only representative of the community but are also empathetic to and involved with diverse people. Students who become involved within the greater community of the educational institution may integrate into a local employer's cultural milieu more efficiently. An effective way to learn about other cultures is immersion in the relevant culture(s) (Jones & Bond, 2019; Miranda-Wolff, 2019). Therefore, effective service learning initiatives should improve community relationships between various organizations and institutions within the greater educational community (Liu & Lin, 2014; Marshal et al., 2015). These initiatives should also widen the participants' worldview and provide opportunities to increase cultural and social understanding and awareness. When possible, it is advantageous if they provide the individuals involved with options for posteducational opportunities within the community itself (Liu & Lin, 2014; Marshal et al., 2015; Michael et al., 2018). Service learning initiatives assist in making these cultural and social exposures and immersions possible, thereby enhancing understanding and acceptance.

## Applicability to Tutoring

Service learning initiatives must provide an immediate or direct application of the skills and knowledge covered in the classroom to be successful and worthy of engagement by its participants (Darby & Newman, 2014; Kronick & Cunningham, 2013; Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015; Oswald, 2016). Tutoring programs, particularly those programs with a peer tutoring component—wherein a peer serves as a tutor to a fellow classmate—provide such an opportunity. By incorporating a direct application of relevant skills to all participating students through

tutoring programs that implement service learning strategies, participating disciplines also interact with diverse departments and communities positively and effectively (Darby & Newman, 2014; Fullerton et al., 2015; Maynes et al., 2013; Moore & Mendez, 2014).

### Continuity and Sustainability

As is true for any educational program, continuity and repeatability are vital. As financial responsibilities are critical, the implementation of self-sustaining service learning initiatives are more attractive to administrators and other stakeholders (Darby & Newman, 2014; Lieberman, 2014). Further, programs with the ability to repeat results of learning objective achievement and service to community are more capable of evolving and expanding to better connect with and meet the needs of the community, institution, program, and individual participants (Lieberman, 2014; Nixon & Salazar, 2015).

### Tutoring *Is* Service Learning

To that end, tutoring *is* service learning. Tutors work alongside educators to assist students in bridging gaps between the information taught in the classroom and applying that material beyond the classroom (Daingerfield, 2020; Herrmann, 2014; Marx et al., 2016; National Tutoring Association, 2016; O'Brien et al., 2014; Oswald, 2016; Vick et al., 2015). The andragogical relationship between tutor and tutee, wherein they become partners and self-regulated learners in the learning process, is a perfect example of service learning, particularly when applied to educational programs (Hussain, 2013; National Tutoring

Association, 2016). For example, persons majoring in math who participate as peer tutors are providing a service while learning themselves (Hussain, 2013). Furthermore, students see the impact of tutorial programs on their academic endeavors and subsequently are more inclined to participate in tutoring in the future (Backer, Keer, & Valcke, 2015; Marx et al., 2016; Winans-Solis, 2014; Zimmerelli, 2015). Finally, tutorial programs, by design, allow for flexible opportunities to incorporate service learning initiatives.

### Conclusion

The goal for any educator is to emphasize the importance of continual learning. As students reach graduation, they should leave their respective programs with their heads held high because not only have they earned a degree, but they are also prepared and excited to continually challenge themselves through the learning process by giving back to the community supporting their journey. Students, faculty, and tutors especially need to be regularly reminded that *learning never ends*. Successful students are lifelong learners who engage within their community civically because they have learned to love the process of learning. The ability of service learning initiatives in developing connections between what a tutor learns in training, what a tutee learns in tutoring, and what they *both* apply in the community is innovative and effective, with widespread, lasting, and positive benefits.

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### Author's Note

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