

Service Learning:
Improving Student Learning *and* Character

A Masters Research Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree,
Master of Arts in Teaching at Colorado College

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March 2013

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Chapter One: Introduction

In a world where social and environmental issues are increasingly complex and global in nature, teachers have a unique opportunity to not only prepare their students academically, but also help learners apply their skills as active members in society. How can we incorporate these current events and issues into our classrooms? Furthermore, how can we empower students to feel that they have the power do something about these problems? Service learning can be used as a tool to engage students in their studies, increase learning, and build character. How successful is service learning as a teaching tool and to what extent can it be applied in public schools today?

Nature of the Problem

While each generation has faced unique hardships and challenges, as our economy has become increasingly global in nature, issues have taken on more multi-faceted and complex dimensions than ever before. Within the next generation, people will have to act as global citizens to face issues such as an ever increasing human population, resource shortages and climate change. Climate change is perhaps the best example of a current issue that is incredibly complex and global in nature. As an example, it is the only issue to date that the scientific community has come together across the board to agree that, if not addressed, will have immediate and long lasting impacts. It has the power to change weather patterns, ways of life, and even actual land masses. To address climate change, citizens will have to understand and apply complex concepts of ecology, economics, civics, and international relations. Such an issue cannot and will not be solved without a well informed citizenry that is willing to act collaboratively.

Are topics such as climate change even appropriate for young children to learn about or explore? Potentially not. Teachers should be sensitive to, as Sanera and Shaw (1996) claim, that sometimes, in trying to expose students to current events, we tend to predict impending doom and disaster. This causes students to fear the world around them, and even exhibit apathy towards service because they feel the issues are too insurmountable to approach. Environmental educators have even coined the term “ecophobia” to describe how children respond to being inundated by doom-and-gloom environmental curriculum. *Beyond Ecophobia*, author Sobel (1998), claims that just as children who suffer from physical abuse apply distancing techniques to avoid dealing with hurtful or conflicting feelings, students who feel overwhelmed by social or environmental issues do not want to continue to learn about topics they find particularly disturbing. However, in her article *Pebble in a Pond*, Wade (2009) argues for the value of what she calls “social justice education.” Wade, using developmental research, rationalizes that, at the elementary level students are experiencing exponential growth in their ability to empathize and are actively developing their own definitions of right and wrong. She goes on to say:

Many children experience injustice daily as they are bullied or harassed for their differences or their families struggle to make ends meet...we should realize that young children have far greater capacities for learning about facts and ideas beyond their immediate surroundings than we might have originally thought. (Wade, 2009)

So, if students are already going to start developing concepts of right and wrong and problems and issues beyond themselves, we should not shield or protect them from complex issues, but help learners to understand them in a proactive way.

While this is certainly a legitimate goal, is it currently possible in today's high-stakes testing culture to begin, as Sobel and Wade would promote, to address social and environmental issues in the hopes of preparing a generation ready to take on our problems with care, creativity, and correct information? With the rise of No Child Left Behind legislation (2001) and the increase of state standardized tests, schools find themselves dependent on test scores, and improving them, to keep funding for their schools and teachers. Bond (2011), in an article for *Carnegie Perspectives*, claims that the pressure to do well on tests makes, "the temptation to tailor and restrict instruction to only that which will be tested almost irresistible." In education today this is widely referred to as "teaching to the test" and it leaves little room for what are now considered "specials" in our school systems. Even subjects such as science, only tested in fifth grade in the state of Colorado, and social studies which is never tested as of yet, are reduced in the curriculum, not to mention music, art, and physical education which were once staples of the elementary experience. Where does climate change and social justice fit in to this school system, and would the powers that be even consider it a school's responsibility to address current events and civic responsibility?

It would appear that certain powers do believe it is the responsibility of educators to prepare students to be global citizens. The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21) is a national organization that advocates for "21st century readiness for every student." (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012) The 21st Century Readiness Skills are: critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012). Since 2002 sixteen states have become P21 Leadership States, meaning governors of those states have committed to directly link their state standards to 21st Century Readiness Skills. Many other districts and states across the country are integrating the skills into

their standards (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012). The 21st Century Readiness Skills represent a nation-wide desire to infuse education with real-world skills that empower students to inherit the world of tomorrow. In other words, the 21st Century Readiness skills are just one example of trying to root our education system in a pragmatic real-world approach.

Service learning is a way to bring all of these issues together in schools because it is linked to tested curriculum, encourages students to solve relevant problems, and allows students to learn about current issues within the context of developing their own confidence in being able to take action. Just as P21 works to place standards in the context of relevant, transferable skills, Sobel (1998) would say that removing “abstraction” is the cure to *ecophobia*. Sobel (1998) cites that teaching about the rainforest and its destruction is too abstract because it is too far removed from American students’ daily lives. Sobel (1998) parallels abstraction to *mathphobia* in young learners- teaching abstract concepts too early disenfranchises kids because developmentally they want to be able to relate their school subjects to something they already know. Indeed, some educators would claim that helping students communicate and connect what they already know may be the most important thing that elementary educators can do for their students (Ogle & Beers, 2012). Through service learning, students have the opportunity to delve deeper into issues they see unfolding around them thus eliminating abstraction. So, through service learning, students may not be tackling climate change, but they are practicing becoming 21st Century citizens by observing an issue close to home, applying a process to come up with a solution and take action, and finding an authentic application for the skills they are learning in school.

When students are engaged in activities with an authentic purpose, they are more likely to do their best. In fact, there is a strong to moderate positive correlation among service learning and students’ test achievement and homework completion (Billig, 2002). This could be attributed to

the fact that because service learning helps draw clear connections between school subjects and their relevance to the real-world, students are less likely to be bored or apathetic (Hedin, 1991). Beyond the potential academic benefits, service learning proponents claim service learning promotes a suite of character development qualities including: increased attendance in school, motivation, interpersonal development, self-esteem, and demonstration of positive lifestyle choices (Eyler, 1997). Youth Service America (2012) ascertains that service is the highest calling that any child or adolescent can answer while growing up. It establishes the young person's place in the world, gives a sense of value and efficacy beyond the immediate family, and bestows power that only comes from being an actor and not a recipient. Through service learning, service is combined with intentional learning. Young people begin to find their authentic voice on a particular issue, giving them the integrity to take action in new ways, and asking them to consider their impact through the process.

Thesis Statement: Service learning standards of quality practice can be implemented to optimize student achievement.

Rationale of the Study

Teaching students to read, write, and be proficient in math is not enough in today's society. Schools should be a place where students can discover their place within the greater community and prepare to be leaders of tomorrow. I believe that students can make a real difference in the world around them and should be challenged to think critically and create solutions. Service learning has the potential of serving multiple purposes to promote academic excellence while grounding academic learning in the real-world situations that empower students to take action.

Key Terms and Definitions

Service Learning is differentiated from service or community service because it is directly linked to learning objectives. For example, a food drive is a common service project in elementary schools. A food drive could become *service learning* if students were to delve in to exploring nutrition facts of donated items and determining what types of foods will provide the best nourishment for recipients, researching where the food goes, who determines who gets it, possible issues leading up to a person requiring food donations, etc.

While various configurations exist in different sources, it is generally agreed upon that service learning has **five phases** including:

- **Investigation:** Researching the issue at hand and potential solutions, including meeting with and interviewing relevant experts and gathering community opinions.
- **Planning:** Engaging students in developing the plan of action. In service learning, students do not just necessarily follow steps laid out by their teacher. Rather, their learning is advanced by their ability to engage in the process of planning.
- **Action:** Taking action. Real service learning is always centered around a product that has some true value or purpose to some authentic audience (your class, school, neighborhood, region).
- **Reflection:** Because service learning is designed to reinforce academic concepts, reflection is necessary for cementing new knowledge and skills gained.
- **Demonstration/Celebration:** Students should feel good about their work and have the opportunity to demonstrate their competence with their subject matter

through displaying and celebrating their accomplishments (Youth Service America, 2012).

Besides using these five steps to ensure rigor in the academic portion of service learning, the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC, 2012) developed service learning **Standards of Quality Practice** to help further define service learning and formulate learning experiences that are meaningful and educational. The **NYLC Standards of Quality Practice** are:

<p>Meaningful Service Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities.</p>	<p>Link to Curriculum Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.</p>	<p>Reflection Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one’s relationship to society.</p>	<p>Diversity Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.</p>
<p>Youth Voice Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.</p>	<p>Partnerships Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.</p>	<p>Progress Monitoring Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.</p>	<p>Duration and Intensity Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.</p>

Note. The above chart was taken from “K-12 Service Learning Standards for Quality Practice,” by the National Youth Leadership Council, (2012).

Service learning is similar to **project-based** and **experiential learning** in that it is rooted in students interacting with and asking questions about real-world stimuli, and, like project-based learning, is largely driven by student curiosity. Service learning also lends itself to an **interdisciplinary approach** in which students integrate multiple content and subject areas in to the exploration of one topic. For instance, in the food drive example, students would use math skills to discern nutritional information on food labels, reading and communicating skills to research where the food goes, and social studies concepts to understand the cultural and demographic information about people who receive the food.

Delimitations

I will only review literature and implement projects that reflect the definition of service learning in which students are not just doing service, but using their service experience to learn their subject matter in greater depth, i.e. *service learning*.

Procedures

To carry out this research project, I will review, analyze and evaluate scholarly peer-reviewed articles and credible (research-based) teacher resources. I will integrate my past experience of implementing service learning in the community of Silverton, Colorado where I led a school-wide service learning initiative to make progress on a town river park and compare this rural but very community driven project with a smaller, school-based urban project through my Masters of Teaching (MAT) internship experience. These applied research experiences will be evaluated through pre and post student surveys, content assessments, and anecdotal stories.

I will explore both the academic and civic benefits of service learning in one class of 28 Gifted and Talented fourth graders in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The students will be guided

through a series of activities to develop their definition of community and what issues they feel are relevant. Through these activities, they will be responsible for brainstorming and selecting a project that I will then align with content standards. They will take a pre- and post- survey about their attitudes towards community service and also a pre- and post- test about the academic content related to their project. The pre- and post- surveys will be the same as the surveys administered to the Silverton School students. Silverton School students did not choose their project so comparisons can be made as to the role student choice plays in the effectiveness of service learning. Academic growth was not measured in the Silverton case study and thus the results of the Colorado Springs project in that area will stand alone.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Through this paper I will explore the following meaningful questions as I attempt to understand the most effective ways to implement service learning in classrooms:

- 1) To what extent can service learning be used to teach state standards?
 - a. Links to curriculum
 - b. How can we assess this?
- 2) Does having an authentic audience and purpose truly increase students' motivation and interest in school?
 - a. Specifically, how much of a factor does student choice play in student's motivation and interest level?
4. Is there time in schools dominated by testing for "extra" activities such as service learning that require a significant amount of student time and teacher planning?

- a. How many of the NYLC Standards for Quality Practice can be applied successfully in an already full academic year?

In Chapter Two, I will define service learning as it exists in the literature today. I will explore what research exists showing the benefits of service learning and how to implement best practices, including various case studies demonstrating different techniques. In Chapter Three, I will describe, with the use of lesson plans, how I implemented service learning practices during my student teaching, and compare this experience with the Silverton service learning case study. I will share the results of my pre- and post-surveys. In Chapter Four, I will reflect on my experiences with service learning and how I can continue to incorporate service learning in my curriculum to improve as an educator in the future. I will make suggestions for how service learning can fit within public schools today.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Theory and History of Service Learning

Service learning as a concept first emerged in the early 1900's. Its core philosophy is typically linked to John Dewey, who advocated for pragmatism in school reform, meaning that students needed the opportunity to apply *intelligent practice* in their studies (Conrad & Hedin 1991). Service learning also shares strong philosophical connections to the developmental theory of constructivism, in which Jean Piaget purports that learning happens through direct interactions between the learner and the world and then building on those experiences. Service learning can also fall under the educational theory of humanism, which challenges educators to teach the “whole person” and not just academic information. Humanists claim that in order for learning to occur, a strong emotional connection must be made between the learner and the content and thus content should be specifically focused on real world problems (Patterson, 1977). In *Carl Rogers and Humanistic Education*, Patterson (1977) writes:

Education, says Rogers, is facing challenges the response to which will be one of the major factors in determining whether mankind moves forward, or whether man destroys himself on this planet, leaving this earth to those few living things which can withstand atomic destruction and radioactivity...Can education free itself from the past and past goals and prepare individuals and groups to live in a world of accelerating change?... Can the traditional, bureaucratic, rigid educational system break out of the shackles of pressures for social conformity and deal with the real problems of modern life? (p. 17-18)

Thus, at least in part, service learning is one response to the recent century's educational theorists and reformers who have sought to place experiences and the subsequent development of values and ideas at the heart of academic learning. In the last century, and specifically within the

last thirty years, service learning has fallen in and out of vogue by educators and reformers (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). Starting in the 1950's and reviving in the 1970's as humanism gained a philosophical stronghold, experimental service learning programs were implemented in schools as reformists condemned the "passive" disinterested lives that students led in school and their disconnection from their communities. There was growing national concern that youths were not developing in a civic-minded way that would be productive to democratic society (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). At this time, President Kennedy and then Johnson established the Peace Corps, and subsequently, the domestic version of the program in the form of AmeriCorps as a way for high school and college graduates to engage full time in service, actualizing the dream of American philosopher William James who called for a form of non-military national service to develop civic responsibility in young people, without forcing them to engage in violence (National Service Learning Clearinghouse, 2012). The most significant moves towards sweeping service learning implementation came when President George Bush signed the National and Community Service Act of 1990 (National Service Learning Clearinghouse, 2012). This legislation provided funding for school-based service opportunities, more service corps options for graduates, and the establishment of the National Service Learning Clearinghouse, to this day the largest service learning resource for practitioners (National Service Learning Clearinghouse, 2012). Throughout the past century, service learning has been driven and developed by policy-makers, schools, and private sector interest groups such as the Carnegie Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and more recently Youth Service America, which is largely supported by State Farm Inc. As popularity and implementation has grown, more and more questions have risen. One of the leading researchers on the topic, Billig (2002) writes, "Is it a model, a program, a pedagogy, or a philosophy?" Research showed that while educators, policy-makers, and

community members generally feel that service learning was positive and important, a wide variety of programs were being implemented under the over-arching term “service learning.” (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). The first attempt at consolidation came in 1995 when the Alliance for Service Learning and Educational Reform created the standards for quality practice (Conrad & Hedin, 1991), which have evolved over time and been taken up by various private, non-profit organizations, with the most current iteration being NYLC’s Standards for Quality Practice referenced in Chapter 1 of this paper.

Purpose and Benefits of Service Learning

The diverse history of service learning and its various supporters, from schools to government, reflect its appeal to various groups with various purposes in mind. Service learning, as its name suggests, can truly be used to encourage a wide variety of outcomes, most typically divided into the categories of personal/social development, academic achievement, and citizenship (Billig, 2002).

Original motivation for the implementation of service learning in schools was catalyzed by staggering statistics that youth are less likely to vote, volunteer, or take an interest in developing personal value systems to live by (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). Again, as reflected in its history, service learning has adapted to educational trends during given time periods, and thus now in our test-driven culture greater emphasis is being placed on proving service learning’s ability to foster academic growth. The main reason given that a service project could accomplish academic ends is that it gives students an authentic reason to learn, thus increasing their buy in, and in-depth knowledge of the curriculum covered. That said, researchers have had difficulty proving a causal relationship between service learning and academic gains (Billig, 2000).

Certainly it is possible and many studies reflect this. However, because so many types of projects

have been implemented being called service learning with various implementation methodologies therein, research has shown that projects that do not align with standards of quality practice, do not necessarily improve academic knowledge (Billig, 2000). The truly important factors to incorporate to show academic growth, are a high level of student responsibility, a clear link to curriculum, duration and intensity, and structures reflection time to allow students to process what exactly it is they are learning (Billig, 2002).

Various studies show improvements on norm-referenced standardized achievement tests, improved grades, increased completion of homework, less school absences (Melchior, 2000) and even improvement on state standardized tests (Anderson et. al, 1991). Research has shown academic gains can not necessarily be expected unless the assessments are specifically geared towards content integral to the project itself, for example, plant part knowledge gained through a community garden service experience. And some studies showed that content knowledge was not significantly improved by participation in service (Billig, 2000). Where service learning truly shines in academic gains is shown in students who have participated in service learning increased problem solving abilities, critical thinking skills, higher level communication, and ability to consider multiple perspectives when considering an issue (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). One study shows that students in a service learning classroom are also more likely to ask questions (Billig 2000). All very important skills when you consider Rogers' original question of whether schools can educate students to become citizens capable of addressing modern issues.

While academic achievement is certainly an emphasis in today's schools, the effect service learning can have on a student's personal/ social development and, by extension, their civic life in youth and adulthood is equally powerful. When looking at this area, students consistently report that they enjoy stepping in to adult-like roles during their service. The

experience contributes to higher self-confidence, self-efficacy, perseverance, cultural sensitivity, and ability to avoid “risk” behaviors (Billig, 2002). One study even shows that service learning projects can actively reduce teen pregnancy in at-risk girls (Billig, 2000).

Potential Issues

While the evidence supporting service learning certainly seems positive, even early advocates Conrad and Hedin (1991, pg. 746) claim, “Advocates of almost any practice...can find research evidence in its favor.” Major criticisms of service learning research include the fact that most data is based off of pre- and post- surveys only, and often do not include a control group because the surveys target actual participants. Additionally, if a supporter is specifically drawn to the civic and social development aspect of service learning, very few service learning practitioners have a way to track participants over time, thus raising questions about whether service participants will continue to display positive lifestyle choices in to the future. Will they vote more, will they continue to volunteer, will they continue to approach situations with compassion and care?

Melchior, who did a sweeping national survey to assess the impacts of the federally funded Learn and Serve program enacted by George Bush, found very little uniformity across programs, which is problematic for comparing results (Melchior, 2000). Even with the adoption of standards for quality practice, area content for various service learning projects can be so varied it can be difficult to assess academic gains in any sort of uniform way. For example, the two case studies presented in Chapter 3 offer very different learning opportunities in the form of peer to peer tutoring and a wider community/environmental revitalization initiative. To date, there are millions of inspiring and successful case studies from which to draw rich inspiration, and yet these results are not always easily replicated. This speaks to the highly place-based

nature of the practice. If one of service learning's standards for quality practice is to meet an authentic community need, this inherently recognizes the diversity and variation across communities and the need for flexibility and creativity. Researchers described this problem as an inability to isolate or even predict dependent and independent variables (Conrad & Hedin 1991).

All of this raises questions about how service learning should be assessed. As mentioned above, the traditional method involves pre- and post surveys that explore student attitudes towards their community, their own ability to affect positive change, and their interpretations of various issues. Academic growth is best shown through assessment geared specifically towards content covered in the project, thus emphasizing the need for strong alignment to standards and curriculum throughout the process.

The prolific and insightful Conrad and Hedin (1991) once again articulate issues within service learning and assessment by saying,

The gap between what quantitative and qualitative methodologies uncover about community service suggests that a practice so varied and complex demands equally complex and varied types of assessment. Sometimes the rigid reliance on paper-and-pencil surveys and tests can obscure the most obvious and meaningful data of all (p. 748).

Conrad and Hedin (1991) found in their seminal work that 75% of service learning participants claim to have learned "more" or "much more" than through their typical school experiences. However, they were often at a loss to articulate exactly what that "more" was. Service learning practitioners have had success in capturing qualitative data by asking participants to keep service learning journals. These journals capture rare insights in to what a service learning experience ultimately feels like, with one articulate students claiming, "As I step

through the door I transform from student to person.” (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). This type of qualitative data cannot be ignored when assessing service learning. Truthfully, there may be no one right way for evaluation. NYLC’s service learning journal, which provides research, case studies, and tips for the successful implementation of service learning sites focus groups, surveys, interviews, academic measures and many others all as appropriate ways to evaluate the success of a service learning project (NYLC, 2008). However, in advising practitioners they only say to select the appropriate method of assessment related to the specific project’s goals (NYLC, 2008). They also warn teachers that program monitoring is different than student monitoring, the methods selected should be designed to creature the overall efficacy of the project, not necessarily individual students (NYLC, 2008).

Ultimately, research and assessment can tell us much about service learning, and begin to legitimize the method as a way to improve academic achievement and attitudes about school. However, in a national survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education that the most common reason, 53%, given by administrators and teachers for participating in service learning was simply to help students be more active in their community and overall better people (Skinner & Chapman, 1999). That same survey proved that 84% of public schools nationally implemented some form of service learning (Skinner & Chapman, 1999). It would appear that this widespread acceptance happens mostly because people have some sort of sense that it is a good thing to do.

Despite the mostly positive reception to service learning as evidenced by the above numbers and statements, some parents have expressed concern over the idea of mandatory service, comparing it to “involuntary servitude.” (Billig, 2000). While that is a rather extreme viewpoint, many have drawn attention to the fact that organizing large groups of students towards some sort of social outcome brings up some inherent democratic and cultural tensions.

Cress & Donoahue (2011) in their work *Democratic Dilemmas of Teaching Service Learning* describe how various student project ideas may violate another person's ethical or political beliefs. An example used in that text refers to a student who thinks they should get a particularly violent book banned from their school library as a service to their school community. Other teachers and students felt this idea violated principles of freedom of expression and thus, for them would not count as genuine service. Indeed, many "good deeds" could be construed as negative through different viewpoints. In my own experience, in Silverton, one fourth grader had serious conflicts over contributing to a community revitalization trail project because he worried that any sort of development in the town could compromise the town's rural character. In his words, "I don't know if I want Silverton to look nicer, I don't think we want to be some sort of fancy, snobby Aspen." This student was developing his own value system for how he wanted his community to be, look, and feel, and his own ability to have an effect on this process. After discussion with his peers he decided trail development did not contribute to a "fancy, snobby" character, but experienced democratic tensions in working through those thoughts and feelings.

Another issue raised by Stewart & Webster (2011) are the cultural, racial, and socio-economic tensions that can arise when one group decides that another group is worthy of "service." Students involved in service learning must learn to be compassionate while conscientious and respectful. Service learning should explore diversity in such a way that opens students' minds as opposed to creating more boundaries within our society (Stewart & Webster, 2011).

Strategies for Best Practice

One of the major objectives of this paper is to determine not just the effectiveness of service learning, but also the achievability of it within our current educational system. Certainly

the staggering statistics of its frequency can make a case for the latter. Unfortunately, as discussed above, not all service learning programs can be considered “quality” as delineated by the agreed upon standards (Billig, 2000). So the question then becomes, if the standards are 1) meaningful service, 2) link to curriculum, 3) youth voice, 4) diversity, 5) reflection, 6) partnerships, 7) duration and intensity, and 8) progress monitoring. Is there time for all of *that* in today’s current school system? Research tells us that specifically without student autonomy, reflection on their experiences, and clear academic goals, service learning really cannot produce meaningful outcomes (Billig, 2000).

A particularly fascinating challenge of the service learning pedagogy is the concept that the ideas for the projects should come from the students themselves (YSA, 2012). This presents challenges in multiple ways. First, for elementary students, the ideas of community and service may need to be developed for students and thus a significant amount of preparation work may be required to even reach a meaningful point to generate or choose a service idea. Resources suggest community mapping, media surveys, and classroom discussions to get students thinking about what community means to them and problems they may have observed (YSA, 2012). Students are rarely asked to make big decisions such as, ‘What would you like to change in the world?’ In this scenario, their deliberation process and methods development may need significant support. Often students’ ideas of what may be problems do not seem like authentic community needs, which is supposed to be a core tenet of the process. Students may choose something that is less easily linked to curriculum by educators. Or, if the students are working with community partners, that partner will most likely have an investment in how and what they think will be an authentic service and thus would need to guide students’ idea development. As was the case in the Silverton case study, students may not be able to choose the service project,

but may then be responsible for certain aspects of the direction of the project as they learn more about the issues and solutions already at play within their community. In many ways, there may not be a need for teachers and students to invent service ideas when community organizations may be able to provide some structure in that area. Practitioners suggest a spectrum of types of service learning that can leave room for both teacher and student input, including “discipline based” service learning that is initially developed by teachers from their curricula to enhance specific learning goals (Colorado Department of Education, 2009). Billig, Root, & Jesse (2005) found a significant, moderately positive correlation between increasing youth voice and post-service knowledge. As with many things in service learning, “There is no black and white in how to incorporate youth voice, rather youth voice is a beautiful shade of grey.” (NYLC, 2, March 2008). Strategies for youth development can be as simple as holding class votes, creating “passion lists,” involving students in project evaluation, agenda or strategy setting, and creating leadership roles. Teachers are not absent in this process, but ask probing questions, create intermediate structures, and receive feedback from youth (NYLC, March 2008).

A host of text and online resources exist to help guide teachers who want to implement service learning. Everything from project ideas, steps, scripts for reaching out to community partners, planning charts, calendars, and student activities are available. Perhaps the most salient piece of advice for all teachers would simply to be to keep the big picture in mind, attempt to incorporate as many standards of quality practice that fit within your given curriculum and project idea, choose an evaluation strategy and see where your students and community takes you. As discussed, it is seemingly impossible to eliminate all independent and dependent variables when schools open their doors to the wider community. Outcomes may appear that have deep value but were not originally anticipated. Arguably, this would all be part of

answering Roger's challenge from the beginning of this chapter; to prepare our students to engage in an ever changing world.

Chapter 3: Application

Introduction

During the 2012-2013 academic school year, I worked with a group of 26 fourth graders to carry out a service learning project that sought to incorporate as many of the Service Learning Standards for Quality practice as possible and specifically explore and measure the impacts of student choice and rigorous alignment with academic standards on academic performance and civic dispositions and attitudes. To incorporate a strong component of student choice, the students were led through seven short (seven minute) introductory activities designed to promote the selection of their own topic and project. At that point, I, the facilitator, aligned the selected project with Colorado State Standards and created a series of lessons that would guide the students to the successful completion of their selected project in a meaningful way to achieve mastery of the related core academic skills. Students were given a pre-survey developed by Youth Service America to capture their attitudes on some of the believed leading benefits of engaging in service learning including academic engagement, civic knowledge, school attachment, social responsibility, and workforce readiness (see Appendix A). After the introductory activities were complete and a project was selected, I randomly selected a writing sample from the students' first semester and averaged their scores. The scores from their writing developed as part of their service learning were compared to these scores to measure academic growth.

Context

Research was conducted at a public elementary school in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The school is considered to serve an at risk population with 67% of the total school population

qualifying for free and reduced lunch. The school was a 2009 National Blue Ribbon award winning school for improving academic performance for at-risk youth. The school also serves as the district's magnet school for gifted and talented youth. Each grade level has one class that is designated a Gifted and Talented class and teaches accelerated curriculum.

This project was carried out with the fourth grade gifted and talented magnet class. The class consisted of 26 students, seventeen of which were identified as gifted through the Stanford-Binet test for giftedness. The remaining students were other high performing students from within the grade level. The seventeen identified students were all on Advanced Learning Plans (ALPs) created to challenge them in their identified area of giftedness (oral reasoning, writing, or mathematical logic). The ALPs were designed to provide targeted academic goals as well as social and interpersonal goals such as working in groups. Two of the students were on the autistic spectrum and qualified for special education services. Two of the students were English Language Learners (ELL) who had received Fluent English Proficient (FEP) designation. The class was evenly split by gender with thirteen girls and thirteen boys. The racial demographic breakdown was ten Caucasian students, nine Hispanic students, five African American students, and two students of Indo-Asian descent. This class was selected for this project by supervising teachers because their curriculum is the most flexible due to the accelerated rate that this class can move through curriculum.

Given the social and community aspect of this project, I feel it is also important to address the context of current events that surrounded this project. In July of 2012 the violent Aurora shooting took place in a Denver, Colorado movie theater killing 12 and wounding 70 other innocent theatre goers. In the fall of that school year another high-profile case unfolded in the Denver area when 10 year old Jessica Ridgway was abducted on Oct. 5 and then found

murdered one week later. A neighborhood incident involving a car-jacking and police chase lead to the elementary school featured in this paper to be put on low-level lockdown for about thirty minutes in which all of the fourth graders were required to come in from recess and stay in their locked classroom. The semester wrapped up with another highly publicized tragedy with the Sandy Hook Elementary school massacre in Connecticut in which a gunman entered an elementary school where he was formerly a student and murdered 20 children and six staff members (Wells, 2013). These incidents were much discussed amongst the participating fourth graders, and many cited these events as their motivation for selecting their project.

The lessons outlined in this chapter will provide a framework for implementing all five of the service learning phases; Investigation, Planning and Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Demonstration. After all five phases of the service learning process have been completed, the post survey (which mirrors the pre-survey) will be administered and analyzed. In Chapter 4, I will discuss the results of the both the pre- and post surveys as well as the scores given to the writing completed during this project as measures of the academic and personal growth. This data will help answer my primary question concerning whether or not service learning can be used to promote personal and academic growth. I will rate all of my lesson plans on Youth Service America's planning rubric and how many of each of the Service Learning Standards for Quality Practice were actually implemented in the course of this program. This will address my second investigation question about the usability of the standards of quality practice. Finally, in Chapter 4, I will draw comparisons between the results of this service learning project and the previous service learning project carried out in Silverton, Colorado. This comparison will be used to answer my final question about the impact of student choice on service learning

outcomes. The students in this case study were given complete choice over their project while students in Silverton carried out a project selected for them.

Part 1: Selecting a Project

All of the preliminary activities were done during brief, once-a-week, twenty minute sessions for seven consecutive weeks. The majority of ideas were taken from existing service learning manuals designed to encourage students to start thinking about their community and their role within it.

Activity 1: Community Mapping

Summary: Students will begin to think about the concept of community by drawing their own community.

Time Frame: 20 minutes

Service Learning Phase: Investigation

Objective: Challenge students to define community in their own terms through oral and artistic expression.

Students engaged in a whole class discussion to define the word community. The class created a mind map to define the word.

The students were given an assignment to draw their community. The drawings were supposed to include:

- 1) Important places within the students' own community.
- 2) Depictions of things that they like within their community.
- 3) Things they do not like within their community or might want to change.

Students were allowed to use drawing and words and the main requirement was that the drawings incorporate both positive and negative aspects of the students' community. For an example a community map that a student created, see Appendix A.

Activity 2: Narrowing Down the Issues

Summary: Students will begin to focus their selection of a topic an project through voting.

Time Frame: 20 minutes

Service Learning Phase: Investigation

Objective: Challenge students to evaluate issues and make choices based on their evaluation.

After evaluating the drawings, I narrowed down the students' concerns about their community in to eight main categories. Because our class sits in seven desk pods, I wanted to be able to organize students into seven teams to further explore these issues. The list of issues that I generated from their drawings included global warming, mistreatment of animals, school not being fun/engaging, people having negative attitudes, bullying, neighborhoods not being safe, pollution, and missing parents who are deployed in the military.

To prepare the students to take a preliminary vote, we had a class discussion about how to choose whether or not an issue had importance. Students could select issues that personally affected them or that they had not experienced but they felt were important. After looking at our lists, students decided they wanted to add hunger to the list.

They put the issues in order of importance by labeling them 1-8.

Activity 3: Issue Exploration Trees

Summary: Students will visually represent their issues by drawing their causes as roots and possible solutions as branches.

Time Frame: 20 minutes

Service Learning Phase: Investigation

Objective: Analyze issues based on their causes and solutions to promote deeper understanding of why these issues happen and how citizens can take action.

After tabulating the results of the students' scores on the issues, the seven issues the class chose to explore further were global warming, hunger, bullying, mistreatment of animals, unsafe neighborhoods, pollution, and missing deployed parents. At this point students were broken into teams based on the interest they expressed on the survey. All students were placed with an issue that they had either given a 1,2, or 3 on during the original survey. The teams then began to discuss their issue in terms of causes and solutions to fill out the issue tree worksheet (see Appendix A). This worksheet was adapted from resources from the Prudential Youth Leadership Institute.

Activity 4: Targeted Research

Summary: Students will do some supported research to learn more about their issue of interest.

Time Frame: 20 minutes

Service Learning Phase: Investigation

Objective: Conduct research to find evidence that demonstrates why their teams' issue is important.

To add depth to their tree worksheets, students were given an article to further research their topic. Students were given highlighters and instructed to find important facts that prove their issue is important and interesting causes or solutions in the text. They were given the parameter that a good fact must include numbers or statistics.

After given time to read, students had a group discussion with their team. Students went around the circle sharing facts they found. If other students had highlighted that same fact they

could raise their hand and the team knew that that might be an important fact for their presentation.

Activity 5: What Makes a Good Service Learning Project?

Summary: Students will explore other service learning projects that students in their age group have undertaken.

Time Frame: 20 minutes

Service Learning Phase: Investigation

Objective: Explore and discuss solutions that other students within their age group have carried out.

Teams were given short paragraphs about various service learning projects students had carried out of similar ages and related to similar issues as their team. Students took turns reading a paragraph. After each paragraph, students used a “talking stone” to pass around the circle and share one thing that they felt was interesting or beneficial about the student projects they had read about.

Activity 6: Preparing Presentations

Summary: Students will explore other service learning projects that students in their age group have undertaken.

Time Frame: 20 minutes

Service Learning Phase: Investigation

Objective: Apply knowledge of facts and opinions to develop presentation skills by preparing to present their issue for their whole class.

Students were coached to prepare short class presentations that covered the following material:

1. Two facts that demonstrated the importance of their issue (facts were to be taken from their articles and had to include numbers).
2. A short statement (1-2 sentences) that expressed why their group believed that their issue was important.
3. A possible solution-oriented service learning project that the class could carry out to address this problem if the class chose to vote on their issue as their service learning project.

Please see Appendix A for a sample presentation preparation worksheet.

Activity 7: Team Presentations

Summary: Students will explore other service learning projects that students in their age group have undertaken.

Time Frame: 20 minutes

Service Learning Phase: Investigation

Objective: Challenge students to evaluate issues and make choices based on their evaluation.

Before presentations began students were told to listen critically and that by the end of the presentations they would be allowed to vote for the one issue they most wanted to work on. They were instructed that they could base their decision on the facts that showed the importance of the problem, how convincing their peers' presentations were, and/or the project idea that sounded like it had the potential to make the most difference.

After each presentation, students were allowed to ask questions of their peer presenters. The most lively discussion and questions followed the students' presentations about unsafe neighborhoods. Students asked questions like, "Do you know how much bad stuff is happening in our neighborhood?" or, "This reminds me of Jessica Ridgway." A majority of 12 students

(nearly half the class) voted for this issue, making it the focus of our future service learning endeavors.

Part 2: Taking Action!

After going through the process of understanding what students most wanted to study, I looked at the Colorado State Standards to determine which content area standards to which this project would best lend itself. I decided that the project lent itself well to the development of oral and written skills in terms of researching the issue and solutions, reaching out to the community, and persuading others of the importance of this issue. I decided to create three service learning experiences that aligned with the Colorado State Standards content area of reading, writing, and communicating. To avoid obtaining results that could potentially be attributed to the effectiveness of interdisciplinary instruction, the service learning activities were aligned with only one content area. This way, hopefully, all results can be attributed to growth and development caused by service learning.

Activity 8- Interviewing a Police Officer (Creating an Interview Plan)**Basic Information**

Summary: Students will further research the issue of neighborhood safety by creating an interview plan to interview a police officer as a primary source.

Time Frame: 20 minutes

Subjects: Oral Communication/Research

Service Learning Phase: Preparation and Planning

Colorado State Standards

4. 1.1 Oral Expression and Listening- A clear communication plan is necessary to effectively deliver and receive information

a. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 4 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (Common Core State Standard (CCSS: SL.4.1)

- i. Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion. (CCSS: SL.4.1a)
- ii. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles. (CCSS: SL.4.1b)
- iii. Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others. (CCSS: SL.4.1c)

4.4.2.d. Ask primary questions of clarity, significance, relevance, accuracy, depth, and breadth

4.4.1 Research and Reasoning- Comprehending new information for research is a process undertaken with discipline both alone and within groups

- a. Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic. (CCSS: W.4.7)
 - i. Identify a topic and formulate open-ended research questions for further inquiry and learning. (CCSS: SL.4.3)

Objectives

Part A: Students will understand that a clear communication plan can help them obtain important research information from a primary source.

Part B: Students will be able to ask clear, concise questions that further develop their

understanding of neighborhood safety and what they can do for their service learning project.

Materials and Resources:

- Notebook paper
- Pencils

Introduction:

- Review the results of the student vote and for our class service learning project we will be exploring neighborhood safety.
- Review the potential project ideas that came out of the student presentation.
- Ask the students what information we might still need to move forward with our project.
- Tell students that we will be interviewing a police officer as the next phase of our research.

Development:

- Model how to develop an interview question.
- Provide students with ten minutes of independent work time to write as many important interview questions as they can think of.
- Review the brainstormed questions and organize them in to three main categories, or main “goals” or outcomes for the interview.

Assessment:

- Collect the questions. Highlight the questions that are particularly salient and hand back to students so they can contribute to the next class discussion/interview.

Activity 9- Interviewing a Police Officer**Basic Information**

Summary: Students will further research the issue of neighborhood safety by following an interview plan to interview a police officer as a primary source.

Time Frame: 1 hour

Subjects: Oral Communication/Research

Service Learning Phase: Investigation/Preparation and Planning

Colorado State Standards

4.1.1 Oral Expression and Listening- A clear communication plan is necessary to effectively deliver and receive information

- a. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 4 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. (CCSS: SL.4.1)
 - i. Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion. (CCSS: SL.4.1a)
 - ii. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles. (CCSS: SL.4.1b)
 - iii. Pose and respond to specific questions to clarify or follow up on information, and make comments that contribute to the discussion and link to the remarks of others. (CCSS: SL.4.1c)

4.4.2.d. Ask primary questions of clarity, significance, relevance, accuracy, depth, and breadth

4.4.1 Research and Reasoning- Comprehending new information for research is a process undertaken with discipline both alone and within groups

- a. Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic. (CCSS: W.4.7)
 - i. Identify a topic and formulate open-ended research questions for further inquiry and learning. (CCSS: SL.4.3)

Objectives

Part A: Students will understand that a clear communication plan can help them obtain important research information from a primary source.

Part B: Students will be able to ask clear, concise questions that further develop their understanding of neighborhood safety and what they can do for their service learning project.

Materials and Resources:

- Notebook paper
- Pencils

Introduction:

- Review the results of the student vote and that for our class service learning project we will be exploring neighborhood safety.
- Review the potential project ideas that came out of the student presentation.
- Ask the students what information we might still need to move forward with our project.

Development:

- Allow students to ask their questions.
- Students will take notes on a closed note worksheet that requires them to find at least six answers to their main objective questions (see appendix for example).

Assessment:

- Ask students to share interesting information they gathered from the interview.
- Ask students to rate their skills as interviewers.
- Collect the note taking worksheets.

Activity 10: Creating Service Learning Proposal**Basic Information**

Summary: Students will use information from the interview to create their service learning proposal.

Time Frame: 20 minutes

Subjects: Oral Communication/Research

Service Learning Phase: Preparation and Planning

Colorado State Standards

4.4.2 Research and Reasoning- Identifying implications, concepts, and ideas enriches reasoning skills

- a. Consider negative as well as positive implications of their own thinking or behavior, or others thinking or behavior

4. 1.1 Oral Expression and Listening- A clear communication plan is necessary to effectively deliver and receive information

- c. Identify the reasons and evidence a speaker provides to support particular points
- iv. Review the key ideas expressed and explain their own ideas and understanding in light of the discussion. (CCSS: SL.4.1d)

Objective A: Students will understand that research can help inform their decisions and that we can work together using a plan.

Objective B: Students will be able to articulate a goal for their service learning project and create a plan that will help them achieve that goal step by step.

Materials and Resources:

- Kagan© spinner
- Document Camera
- “Talking Stone”

Introduction:

- Review the results of the interview.

Development:

- Facilitate a series of table top discussions around deciding on an action and the steps necessary to achieve the articulated goal.

Conclusion:

- Students will participate in a fun action or handshake to “seal the deal” and commit to achieving their goal.

Activity 11: Writing to our Neighbors

Summary: Students will begin the action phase of their project by beginning the writing process for the letters to the neighbors inviting them to be “window watchers” helping kids get home safely.

Time Frame: 45 minutes introduction with continued revision throughout the week (five class periods total)

Subjects: Writing

Service Learning Phase: Taking Action

Colorado State Standards

4.3.2 Writing and Composition- Informational and persuasive texts use the recursive writing process

- a. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly. (CCSS: W.4.2)

- i. Introduce a topic clearly and group related information in paragraphs and sections; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension. (CCSS: W.4.2a)
- ii. Choose planning strategies to support text structure and intended outcome
- iii. Identify a text structure appropriate to purpose (sequence, chronology, description, explanation, comparison-and-contrast)
- iv. Organize relevant ideas and details to convey a central idea or prove a point
- v. Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic. (CCSS: W.4.2b)

Objective A: Students will understand that writing can be used to achieve real world goals.

Objective B: Students will be able to apply their knowledge of persuasive and informative writing to write letters to distribute throughout our neighborhood.

Materials and Resources:

- Lined paper
- Document Camera
- Writing room resources- thesaurus, dictionary, “Banish Boring Words” etc.

Introduction:

- Have students practice giving convincing reasons for people to participate in their service learning project.

Development:

- Model the format of the letter and how you can plan for a writing piece that contains informative and persuasive elements.
- Brainstorm with the students important big ideas and details that can be included in the letters.
- Allow students to begin their writing process.

Assessment:

- Students will follow their standard revision and editing process for this piece of writing.
- They will each participate in short individual conferences to create the best piece possible.
- Students will participate in peer editing to finalize their letters.

Please see Appendix A for a sample final letter generated through this project.

Activity 12: Demonstration

Objective: Students will demonstrate their knowledge of neighborhood safety and persuade parents to sign their safe neighborhood petition at a family literacy night.

Service Learning Phase: Demonstration

Students set up a greeting table at a K-3 literacy night at their school. They decorated the table with persuasive posters they made themselves and distributed the letters they prepared. They prepared simple 1-2 sentence persuasive arguments for parents as they walked in and asked them to sign up to be a “Soaring Safety” volunteer, meaning that they would take a pledge to look out for students on their way home from school. While every student made a poster and prepared a letter, actually coming to the evening activity was completely voluntary. Seventeen out of twenty six students volunteered to be part of the event, a great indicator of high engagement and buy-in for the project.

Activity 13: Measuring Success and Celebrating Achievements

Objective: Student will understand the impact of their actions based on numerical evaluations of their results and celebrate their accomplishments.

Service Learning Phase: Celebration and Reflection

After the students presented their project at the family literacy night, they counted up how many people signed up to be a volunteer for their project. They evaluated whether or not they had reached their goal and then celebrated. To reflect on their service learning experience we worked together to create a commemorative *wordle* (www.wordle.net) . Students shouted out words that they associated with the project and I entered them in to a computer program that

made a graphic word scramble of their thoughts. I then printed out one for each student to have as a bookmark. They then got to have a service learning party in which we got out games and snacks! Finally, after all five phases of the service learning process had been completed (Investigation, Planning, Tasking Action, Reflection, and Demonstration and Celebration) the students took the post survey on their attitudes towards school, civic engagement and workforce readiness.

Overall, the students loved this project and participated eagerly through each of the phases. Students made claims such as, “I hate writing but this is the hardest I am going to work on writing all year.” They eagerly presented to adults at the Literacy Night, politely introducing themselves and passionately speaking about their project. Many parents mentioned how impressed they were with the students and how happy they were that we were building a school culture around safety. Chapter Four will discuss the results of these activities on the students academic achievement and civic/social attitudes.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter I will discuss the results of the four main areas of investigation that I explored; the impacts of service learning on civic/social attitudes, the impact of service learning on academic growth, the impact of student choice on service learning outcomes, and the applicability of the NYLC Standards of Quality Practice. Please see Appendix B for results graphs in each of these areas.

Civic/Social Attitudes

To measure the impacts of service learning on a student's civic/social attitudes, I administered a pre- and post-survey developed by Youth Service America designed to measure growth in five areas that research has shown service learning to impact the most; Academic Engagement, Civic Knowledge, School Attachment, Social Responsibility, and Workforce Readiness. Each area included various statements that students could indicate that they don't know, agree, strongly agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with.

Academic Engagement: Nearly all responses had a positive upward trend in this area. The only questions that garnered an increase in negative responses (strongly disagree or disagree) were the statements, "Time seems to pass quickly when I am at school" and "I like schoolwork best when it is hard." I believe this increase in negative attitudes could be attributed more to the timing of the final survey than feelings about service learning. Service learning activities were concluded after a long two-week state standardized testing session.

Other indicators of academic engagement showed many positive signs of growth. Twenty-one out of twenty-six students claimed to either agree or strongly agree with liking to be at school as opposed to sixteen at the beginning of the study. Nineteen students out of twenty-six

agreed or strongly agreed to be interested in school work as opposed to sixteen at the beginning of the year. And twenty-four students agreed or strongly agreed that what they learn in school is useful as opposed to just twenty at the beginning of the study. Those three indicators, liking school, being interested in the work, and believing that schoolwork is useful showed the greatest growth overall. Other indicators such as confidence in school work, the belief in the importance of schoolwork, and claiming to pay attention in class stayed relatively the same between the pre- and post-surveys. This may be attributed to the fact that this particular group of students are already in a gifted and talented class and may already value school at a relatively high level. It would certainly be interesting to see if service learning could help boost confidence and buy-in for students who are not considered high achieving students.

Overall, many factors contribute to a student's academic engagement. This service learning project did not generate significant growth in all indicators of academic achievement but did show an increase in three very important factors that have a direct correlation with service learning activities; enjoyment of school, interest in school work, and the belief that their studies are important.

Civic Knowledge: Overall, indicators in this area showed mixed results. Responses to the statement, "I care about what happens in my neighborhood or community" stayed roughly identical. Perhaps this indicates that a school program cannot adequately alter or change overall value based statements (which may not be the role of schools in the first place). The area that showed the most positive improvement was the indicator in which students had to answer whether or not they felt that they did something to make their community a better place. Before service learning activities began, seven students disagreed with this statement. After the project only two students disagreed with this statement. The statement that actually showed an increase

in negative responses was, “I talk with my friends about what happens in my community.”

Before service learning, only four students disagreed with this statement. At the end, seven did. I believe this increase may be due to the fact that through the course of service learning students learned how to have actual conversations about community issues and realized that they were not actually doing this outside of service learning.

School Attachment: It is important to assess school attachment during a service learning project because some research indicates that service learning can help decrease drop-out rates. Within this area, results from this study were very mixed. Areas of positive improvement include a strong increase in positive responses to the statement, “I feel like I belong to this school.” Before service learning only seven students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. After service learning fourteen students agreed that they felt like they belonged to their school. There were only slight increases (1-2 students) in positive responses to the statements, “I contribute to this school,” “I feel proud of this school,” and “I do things to make this school a better place.” There were more overall students at the end of service learning who felt that their teachers valued them as part of the school. Before service learning only eighteen out of twenty six students felt their teachers valued them as part of the school and after service learning twenty three either agreed or strongly agreed that they were valued as part of the school.

Doubling the amount of students that felt like they belonged to the school is certainly encouraging in terms of developing school attachment for low-income and at-risk youth. It is also positive to increase the amount of students who feel valued by their teachers but many other factors outside of service learning could have certainly contributed to that growth. None of the other indicators showed significant growth but neither did they show a trend towards an increase

in negative attitudes. This shows that service learning can perhaps play a part in developing school attachment but may not be the biggest factor in school attachment.

Social Responsibility: This area showed the most positive results. All indicators showed a positive upward trend. Before service learning seven students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “I can make a difference in my neighborhood.” This number dropped down to two students at the end of service learning. Before service learning only twelve students felt they could make a difference and after service learning twenty-one out of twenty six students felt that they could make a difference. Before service learning sixteen out of twenty six agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I feel responsible for helping others,” and after service learning twenty-three out of twenty-six students agreed or strongly agreed to feeling responsible for helping others. Smaller gains were made in responses to the statements, “Students my age can do things to make the world a better place,” and “Everyone should help to make their neighborhood or community better,” with each of these indicators generating three more positive responses each on the post-survey results.

These results show that service learning can be used as a tool to help build social responsibility within youth but that it will be more successful in building confidence and engagement as opposed to changing actual values statements.

Workforce Readiness: Workforce readiness is another area that is important to assess during a service learning project because one of the goals of service learning is to prepare students to solve real world problems. Indicators in this area that showed the greatest positive increases were the statements, “I am good at talking to people,” “I am good at making decisions,” “I am good at coming with ideas,” and “I am good at being the leader of a group.” All of these indicators had a

positive increase of 4-5 students who agreed or strongly agreed to those statements. The statement “I am good at talking in front of people” had perhaps the strongest impact on the students. Before service learning 10 students disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. After service learning only six students still felt they would not be successful at speaking in front of a group of people.

Because such a large portion of this project dealt with writing, I expected to see a greater positive increase in responses to the statement, “ I am good at writing about my ideas.” Before service learning sixteen students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, “I am good at writing about my ideas,” which increased to nineteen out of twenty six students feeling confident about their writing. One possible reason that this number wasn’t higher is that over the course of the year the fourth graders were expected to take on much more challenging writing projects including writing their first five paragraph essays as well as this service learning writing project which had many of its own unique challenges, including the students being able to incorporate various genres into one writing piece. Indicators in this area did not show a significant increase in positive responses and did in fact in a few cases generate an increase in negative responses but only by about a difference of one student.

Responses to the statements, “I am good at working as part of a team,” and “I am good at solving problems,” generated similar upwards if insignificant positive responses. Before service learning 3 students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “I am good at working as part of a team.” This dropped to only one student after service learning. Overall twenty students before service learning started claimed they had positive responses to the team statement, which increased to only twenty one out of twenty six students. Before service learning three students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, “I am good at solving problems,” and that

number dropped to only one. Seventeen students before service learning agreed or strongly agreed with that statement and that number rose to nineteen after service learning.

These results show that improvement in areas of workforce readiness will be most significant depending on which skills students explicitly developed as part of their project. It may not be possible to address each of these areas of workforce readiness within one service learning project. Because this project was designed to emphasize student choice, these students has many opportunities to make decisions, come up with their own ideas, take leadership roles, and present in front of people and that is reflected in their increased confidence in those areas.

Academic Growth

Academic results were mixed. The service learning writing sample produced more higher total scores than the sample assignment. Thirteen students received better scores on their service learning writing sample than their sample classroom assignment, nine received lower scores, and four students stayed the same.

The service learning assignment also had a wider range of scores, with some students earning significantly lower scores on their service learning assignment than their average classroom work. I would attribute this variability to two main challenges the students faced in completing their service learning assignment. First, students completed their service learning assignment on computers. For some of them, this was their first time using a computer word processor and though we followed the same basic steps that they were used to in their writing class (plan, draft, revision, final copy), it was still a departure from what they were used to in a typical writing class. While it was my desire for their writing to be completed following their

exact classroom process, there was more available time during their allotted computer time each week than in writing class, thus the reason for the change.

The second reason I believe there was greater variability in range of scores for the service learning paper is that it was an overall higher-level writing assignment. In fourth grade, students have learned how to construct five paragraph essays for the first time and their writing samples typically fall within one of five specific genres: informative, comparative, persuasive, narrative, and explanatory writing. I presented the service learning letter mostly as a persuasive writing piece, but to truly successfully complete the assignment, the letter had to capture aspects of the informative and explanatory genres as well. First, to demonstrate what the students knew about neighborhood safety (informative), and then to successfully explain exactly what the students were asking the volunteers to do (explanatory). Throughout the writing process, there were much more questions about organization than I had previously experienced during other writing assignments. However, when you analyze the results by the breakdown of the six traits you can see that there is only a difference of one less student scoring a four in organization, and more overall scores of the three in the organization category. This tells me that the organizational challenge presented by this service learning writing piece was within the students' zone of proximal development given that scores did not suffer more dramatically. There is a significant difference when comparing scores in sentence fluency. Six more 4's were awarded in sentence fluency on the average classroom sample. However, I believe this drop in fluency scores can be attributed to the fact that trying to string together higher level concepts and aspects of multiple writing genres is a greater fluency challenge for a fourth grader.

The three writing traits that showed significant increases in scores on the service learning assignment were Ideas and Content, Word Choice, and Voice. I think these results provide

excellent evidence for the benefits to students' writing development when they are writing for an authentic purpose and to a real audience. Their engagement with the material was higher than an average writing assignment. One student who typically disliked writing and often flat out refused to write during the writing block claimed, "This is the most effort I am ever going to put in to a writing assignment. Ever." This particular student received a higher overall score of 4 points.

Overall, results demonstrate that service learning can have a positive impact on academic performance. Because of the "real world" nature of service learning activities, the products (or writing pieces) you may be trying to create may not fit in neatly to one standard or skill but provide excellent opportunities for students to take their skills to another level.

Impact of Student Choice

In this section of the analysis, I will draw some loose comparisons between my service learning experiences at the Colorado Springs school, and the school in Silverton, Colorado mentioned in Chapter 1. The two projects are statistically similar in age group and socio-economic level, but vary in racial and gender demographics and sample size. The 4th grade class in Silverton represents a very rural population (versus urban in Colorado Springs) and thus even though the sample size is all fourth graders from Silverton, Colorado in 2012, there are only twelve students represented. The key difference that I would like to explore in comparing the two projects is the impact of student choice. The project in Silverton followed a needs based model in which students carried out a project selected for them by a local non-profit and the project in Colorado Springs followed a purely student driven model in which the students were solely responsible for selecting the topic and project. Other than that, the service learning projects had significant similarities. Both groups of students engaged in year-long projects, had the

opportunity to present to their community at large, and created writing pieces as their final project. The students in Silverton created interpretive signs about geology, which was their science unit for the year so they benefitted from having more interdisciplinary instruction and from staying more within one genre of writing (informative). Both groups were administered the exact same pre- and post-surveys. To draw comparisons I generated the percentage of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” responses within each five areas of impact; Academic Engagement, Civic Knowledge, School Attachment, Social Responsibility, and Workforce Readiness to see which experience generated overall higher positive impacts. Please see Appendix A xiii for the comparison graphs.

When comparing overall positive responses (responses of “Agree” and “Strongly Agree” added together), the Colorado Springs school is slightly higher in three areas and only slightly lower in two. However, when you look at just “Strongly Agree” responses, which indicate a higher level of impact of the project on the student, the Silverton students gave a higher percentage of “Strongly Agree” responses in all areas except Workforce Readiness. The areas where the Silverton school gave significantly higher responses was in Academic Engagement and School Attachment. These increases could be attributed to various other factors about how the Silverton school engages and includes its students, specifically class size.

However these results show that student choice may not have a significant impact on the benefits of service learning and in fact carrying out a project that is selected for them but may have a higher level of community visibility/impact may even impact students more in spite of the fact that they had less control of the project.

Applicability of Standards of Quality Practice

In this section, I will rate my lesson plans according to the NYLC Service Learning Standards for Quality Practice. I will use an adapted version of a chart found in the YSA Semester of Service Guide that encourages teachers to place their service learning lessons on a chart and select which of the standards each lessons is addressing. YSA suggests that each activity address at least four of the eight standards to be a high-quality service learning program.

	Meaningful Service	Link to Curriculum	Reflection	Diversity	Youth Voice	Partnerships	Progress Monitoring	Duration and Intensity
Lesson 1: Community Mapping	X		X	X	X			X
Lesson 2: Narrowing Down the Issues	X		X	X	X			X
Lesson 3: Issue Exploration Trees	X		X	X	X			X
Lesson 4: Targeted Research	X	X		X				X
Lesson 5: What Makes a Good Service Learning Project?	X		X	X				X
Lesson 6: Preparing Presentations	X	X		X	X			X
Lesson 7: Team Presentations	X	X	X	X	X			X
Lesson 8: Creating an Interview Plan	X	X		X		X		X
Lesson 9: Interviewing a Police Officer	X	X		X		X		X
Lesson 10: Creating a Service Learning Proposal	X		X	X	X		X	X
Lesson 11: Writing to Our Neighbors		X			X		X	X
Lesson 12: Presenting at Literacy Night	X	X			X	X		X
Lesson: 13 Analyzing Results/ Celebrating!	X		X				X	X

This project was carried out in relatively modest time increments and during an already very full academic schedule. The majority of the project was carried out during weekly 20-30 minute time increments with several additional longer sessions (team presentations and the police officer interview) and one week full time during writing class each day. However, the above chart shows that even with limited time it is possible to implement the NYLC Service Learning Standards for Quality Practice. All of the lessons addressed at least four of the standards with the average number of standards being addressed per lesson being five. All eight of the standards were addressed at least three times each and the average number of times that each standard was addressed was also five. Each lesson was marked for duration and intensity because YSA considers any service learning project that spans a full semester or year sufficiently intense. I believe that if teachers can plan activities to address all five phases of service learning, then many of the Standards for Quality Practice will naturally fall in to place. To me, the most important things to keep in mind is that service learning must address an actual community need, and provide a rigorous academic experience, and empower students to take ownership of the project and if a teacher agrees to keep these ideas at the forefront of planning, the Standards for Quality Practice are realistically applicable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, service learning can certainly be used as a tool to help students improve academically while improving their civic/social attitudes and their own sense of empowerment to make a difference. In terms of civic and social attitudes, the areas that this study demonstrated the most impact one were Academic Engagement and Social Responsibility. In order for service learning to improve workforce readiness, the desired workforce skills need to be explicitly addressed over the course of the service learning project. This study did not show significant

positive trends in the areas of school attachment and civic knowledge in all areas but within those areas showed a significant increase in positive responses to a students feeling of belonging to their school and their ability to make a difference. Significant growth in those two areas certainly demonstrates service learning's ability to serve the purpose of developing a students sense of their place in the world.

Service learning activities in this study did produce an increase in academic performance in the area of writing and even challenged students to take on a writing task more challenging than they would have done otherwise.

Results on the impacts of student choice were mixed. It appears that both projects driven by students and the community can generate positive results for students. In some cases, a project that is selected for students but has a high level of community impact may in fact have a greater impact on the students involved due to the high level of visibility of the project. I would recommend that whether a teacher has an opportunity to work with a community organization on a project selected for their students or has time to guide them towards a project they select themselves, both scenarios will produce positive results for their students. Collaborating with a community organization may result in a more visible final product and thus empower the students in that way. Projects driven by students will build skills in the areas of decision-making and leadership as the students in the Colorado Springs study did.

Lastly, implementing the NYLC Standards of Quality Practice is attainable within an academic school year. There are a variety of ways to plan lessons that address more than one standard at a time. Voting can be used as a tool to encourage youth voice while saving time so that the project can move forward. If a teacher is flexible and willing to invite their students in to

the planning process, then there are many ways for them to facilitate high-quality service learning experiences while still meeting the demands of a busy academic calendar.

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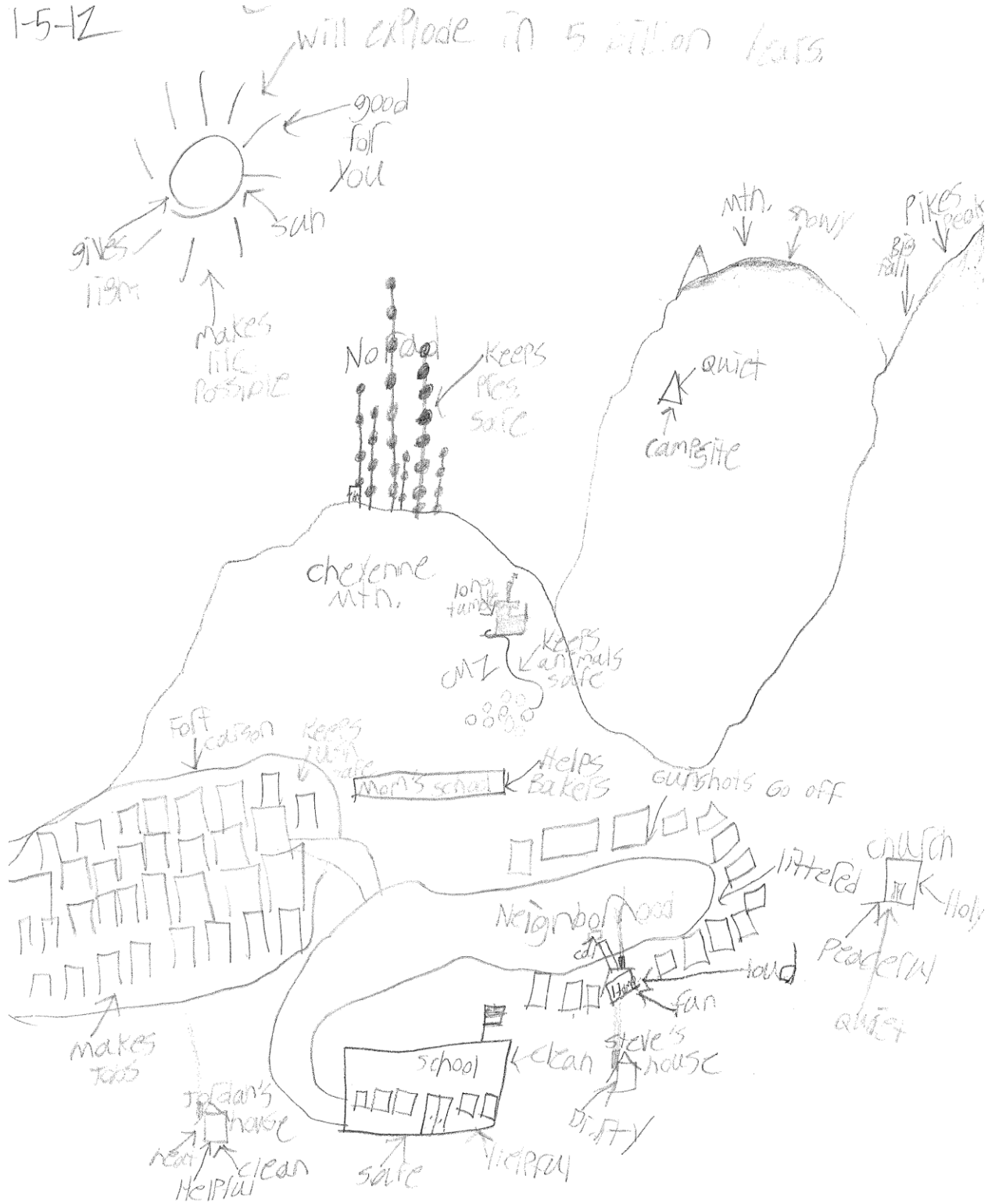
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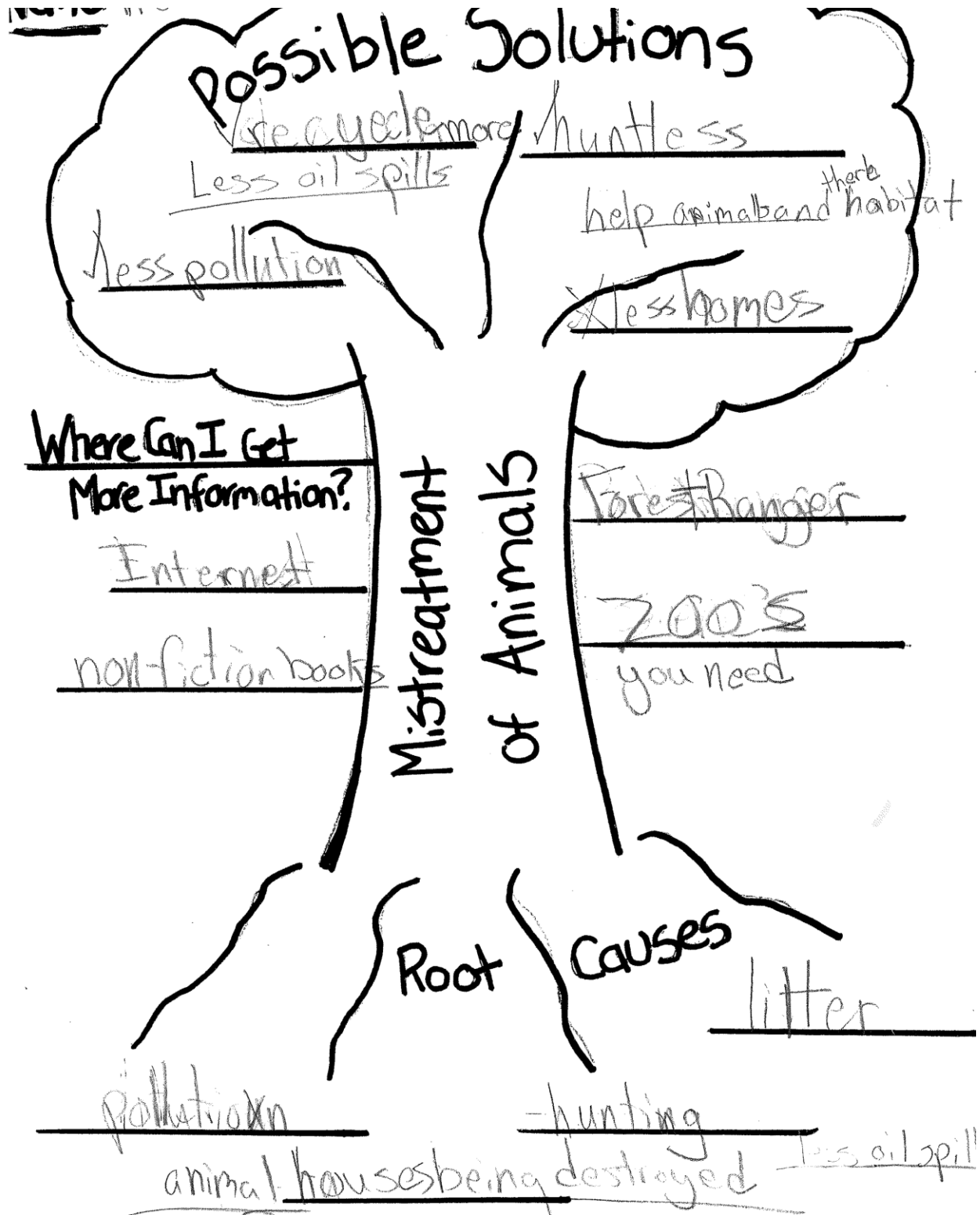
Appendix A: Student Work

Sample Student Community Map (Activity 1)

1-5-12



Sample Student Issue Exploration Tree (Activity 3)



Sample Student Presentation (Activity 6)

As a group, prepare for next week's presentation. Every presentation must include the following and everyone must present.

1. Two facts that show why your topic/issue is important.

Who is presenting? (1 or 2 people)

Write the two facts here:

- 1) In 4 children under the age of 18 in the US go to bed hungry.
2) 60% all said that they could not afford to eat balanced meals.

2. Why your groups thinks it is important and wants to change it.

Who is presenting? (1 person)

Write a 1-2 sentences about why you believe this is an important issue.

Hunger is a terrible issue that needs to be fixed immediatly.

3. What type of project you would propose we do as a class to help solve this problem.

Who is presenting? (1 person)

Write 1-2 sentences about the project your group would propose:

I found a website and everytime you get a question right you get 10 grains of rice that goes to a real families in need. It is call free rice.com.

Sample Student Final Letter

Dear Citizen.

I am a fourth grader from Soaring Eagles Elementary and my class's service learning team A.K.A Soaring Safety is starting a program to help neighborhood safety. We are trying to help neighborhood safety around Soaring Eagles. Although I am young, I would like you to join Soaring Safety to make a difference.

To begin, we want kids to be safe. There is a lot going on around the world. Crime happens everywhere and we don't want innocent kids to be victims. Also, there are lots of news stories on about bad things happening around the world involving kids. For example the shooting in Newtown Connecticut involved a devastating event where children died and we don't want that in our neighborhood. Soaring Safety gives kids security knowing there are there are people there to make sure nothing happens.

Furthermore, there are multiple things that make neighborhoods safe. Service learning is any time that kids do a project that helps the Earth and people like you. Our team did lots of research on the subject of unsafe neighborhoods. We did presentations, read articles, and even interviewed a police officer so we could do this severely, important project. Starting a Neighborhood Watch is a stupendous idea. Neighborhood Watch has proven its self very successful. Knowing planning and communicating is important. Being familiar with your neighbors is important. Planning means knowing what to do in case of an emergency. Communicating with your neighbors is a very wise thing to do also.

Finally there are things you can do to help us. Keeping an eye out for suspicious or unnatural behavior is one thing you can do. Watching out for kids walking home for school is something you can do to help us out a lot. Also, when you see something going on you can call the police or ambulance. That will be a great help to students and parents. Remembering cars and their license plates is a good idea. If things are suspicious with your neighbors or the children around Soaring Eagles you can be as quick as a cat to quick to respond. Signing up would help us a lot and it gives us an idea of how many people are participating so please email or mail us back. The email is wgaskill@hsd2.org.

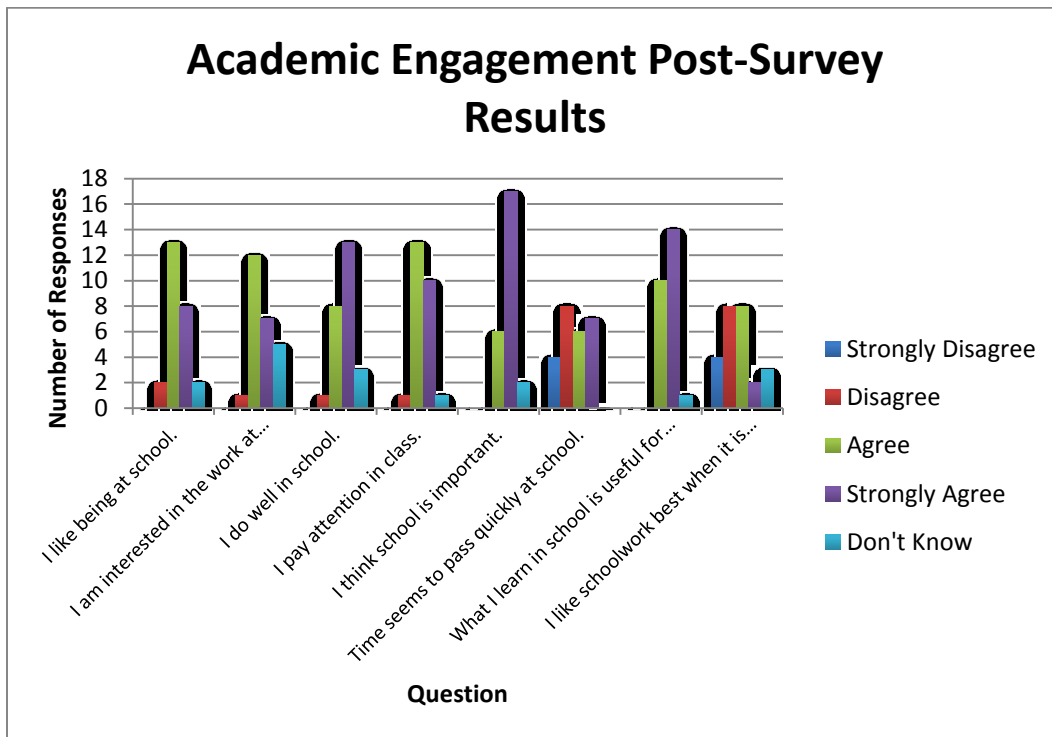
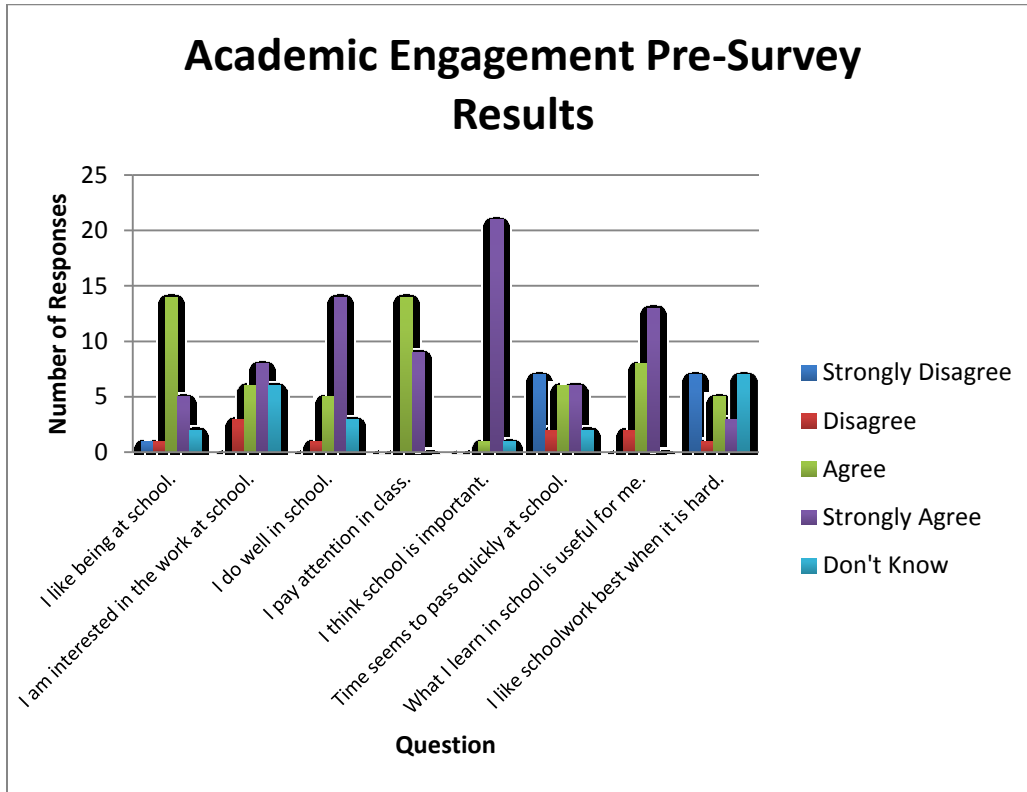
Joining Soaring Safety helps kids be safe, makes your neighborhood safe, and helps Soaring Safety with our service learning project. Help us keep everyone safe! Don't you think safe neighborhoods are important in your community?

Sincerely,

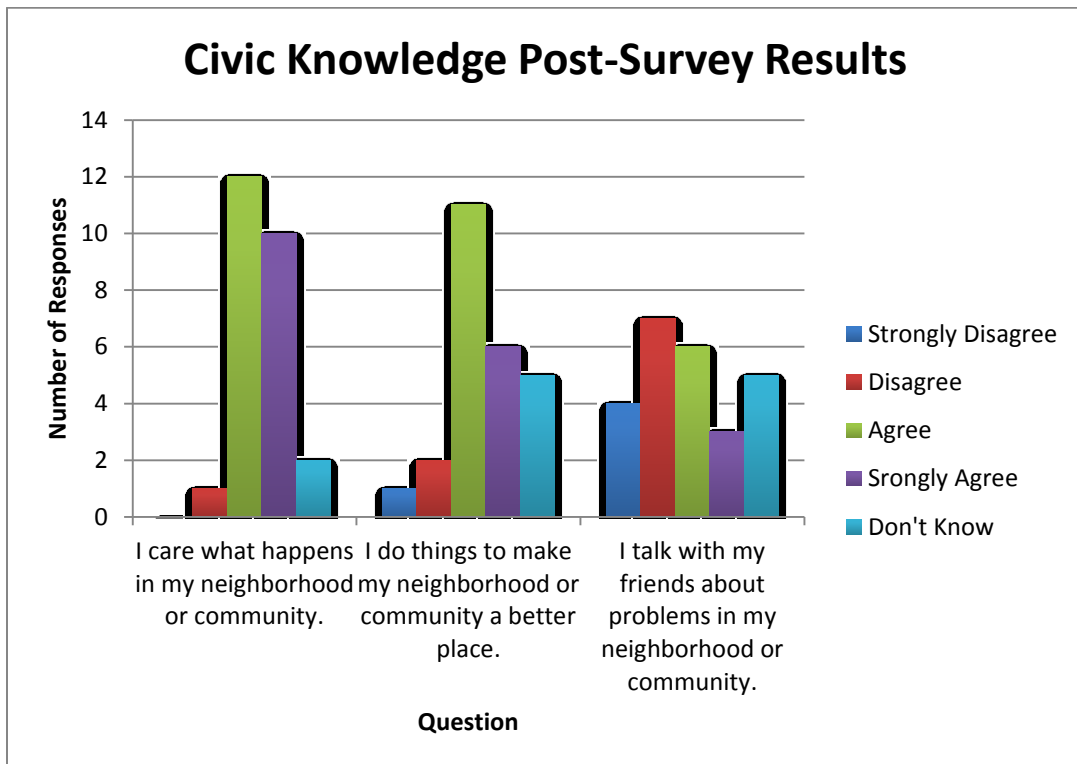
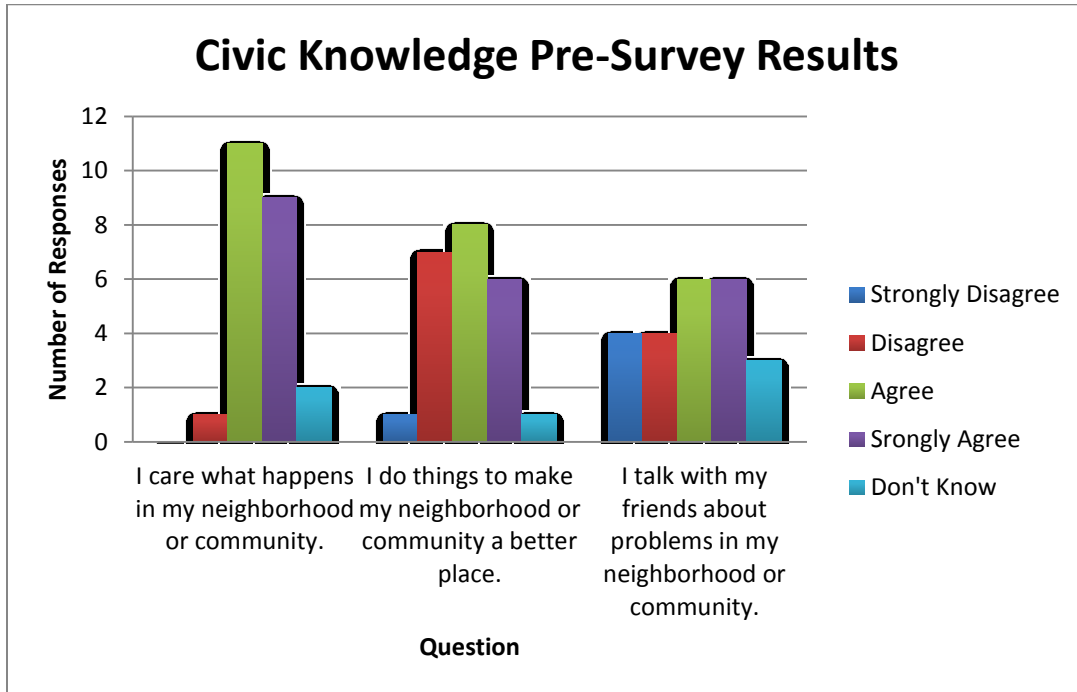
A Soaring Safety Fourth Grader

Appendix B: Results

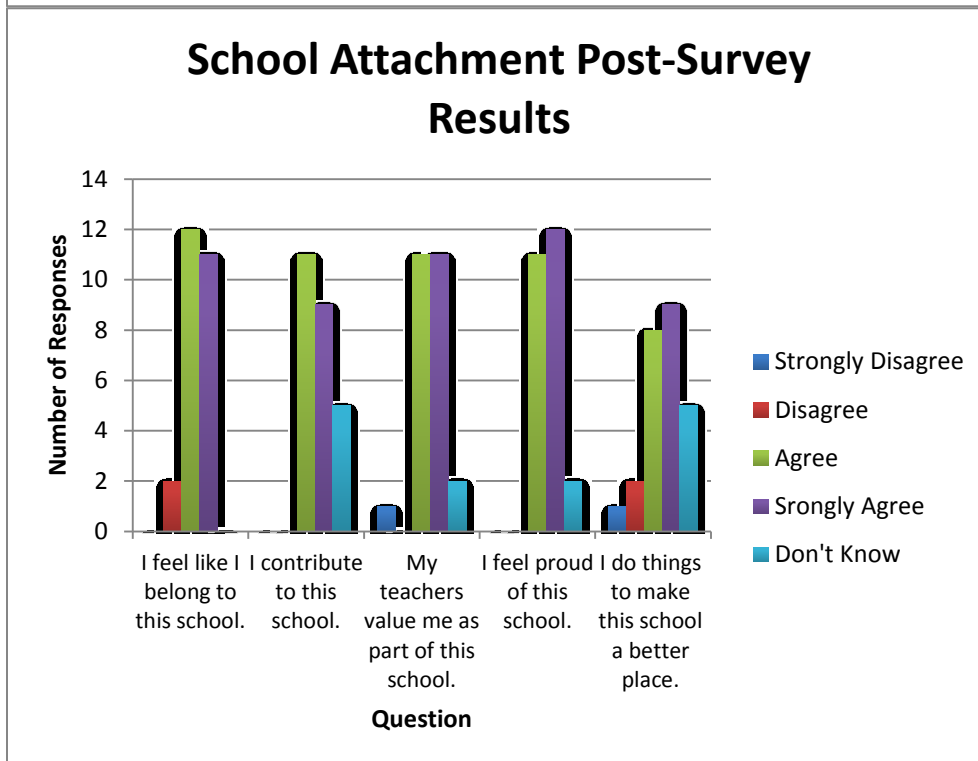
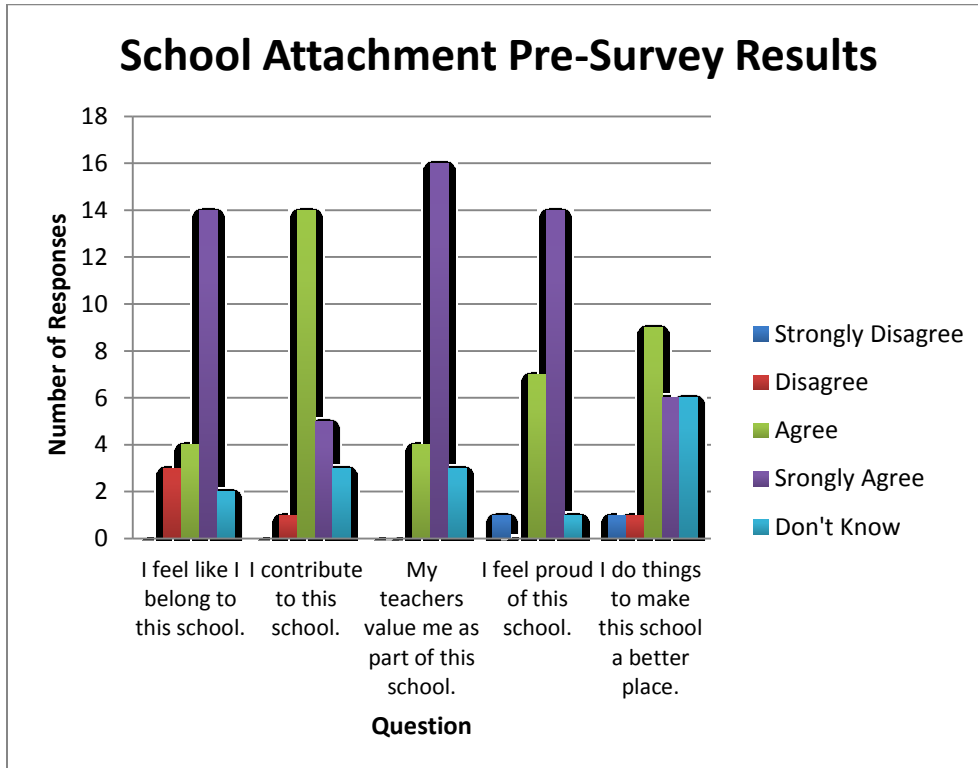
Academic Engagement Pre and Post Survey Results



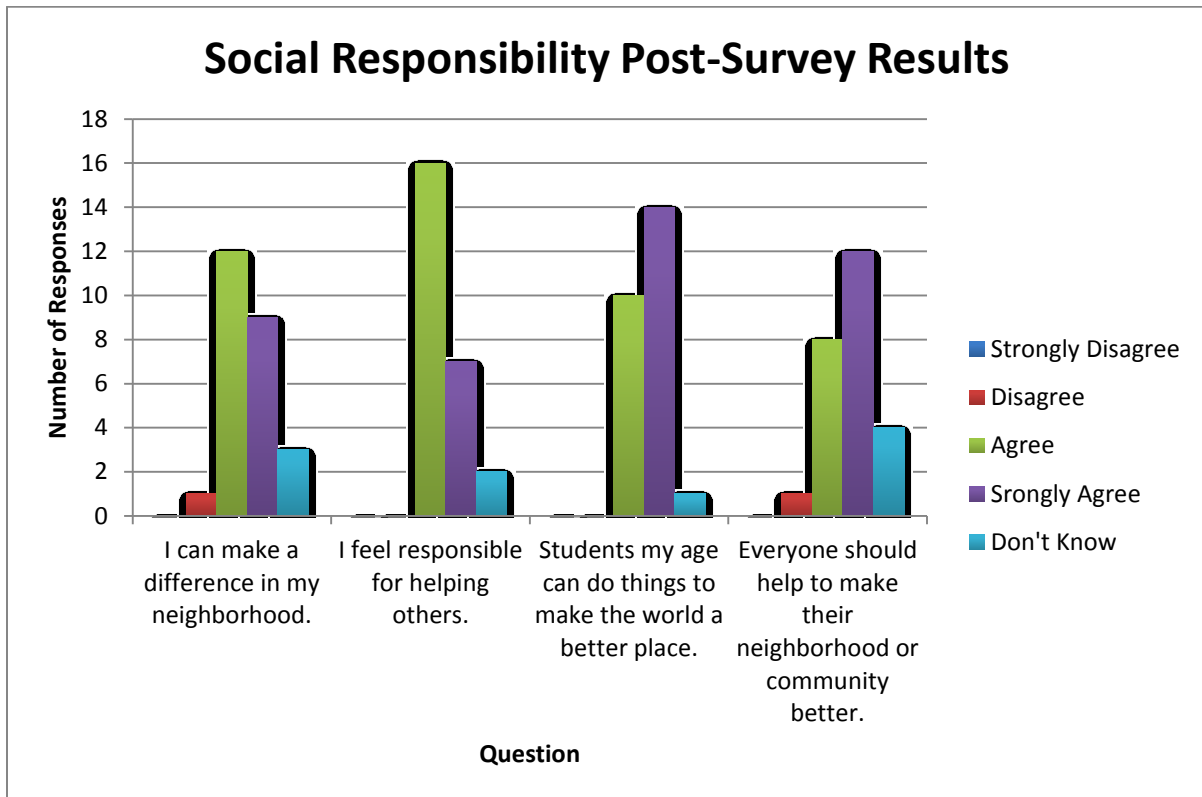
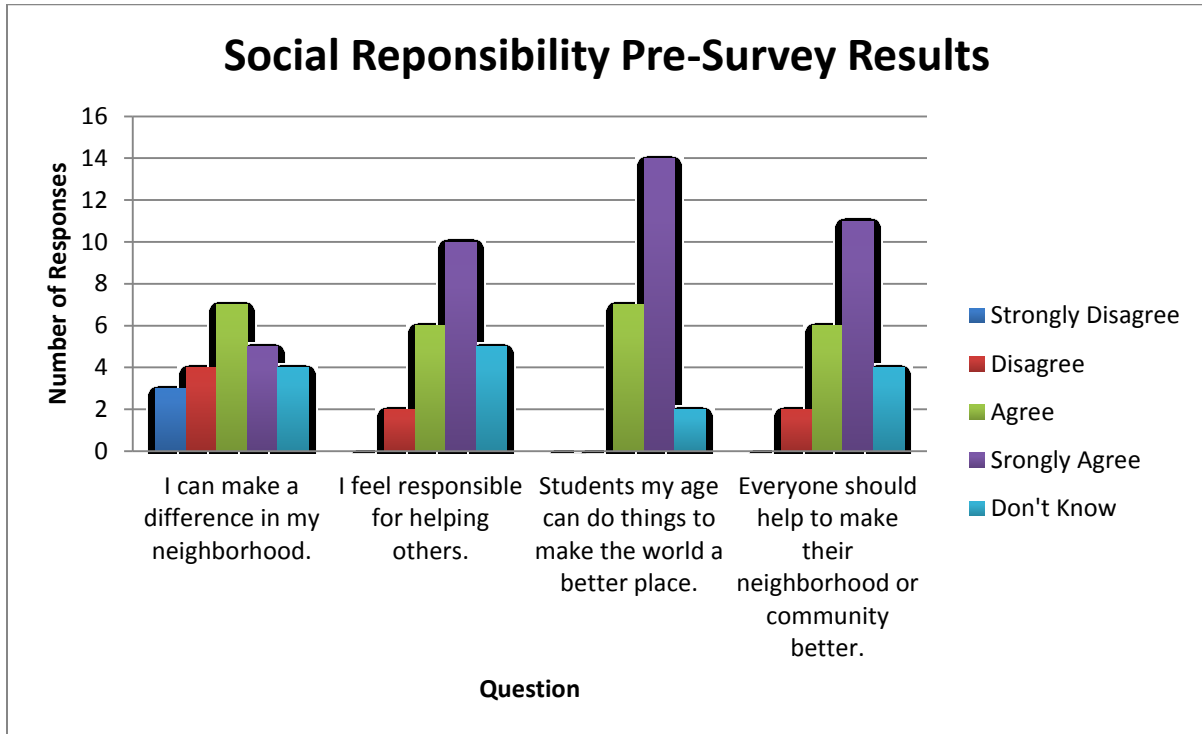
Civic Knowledge Pre and Post Survey Results



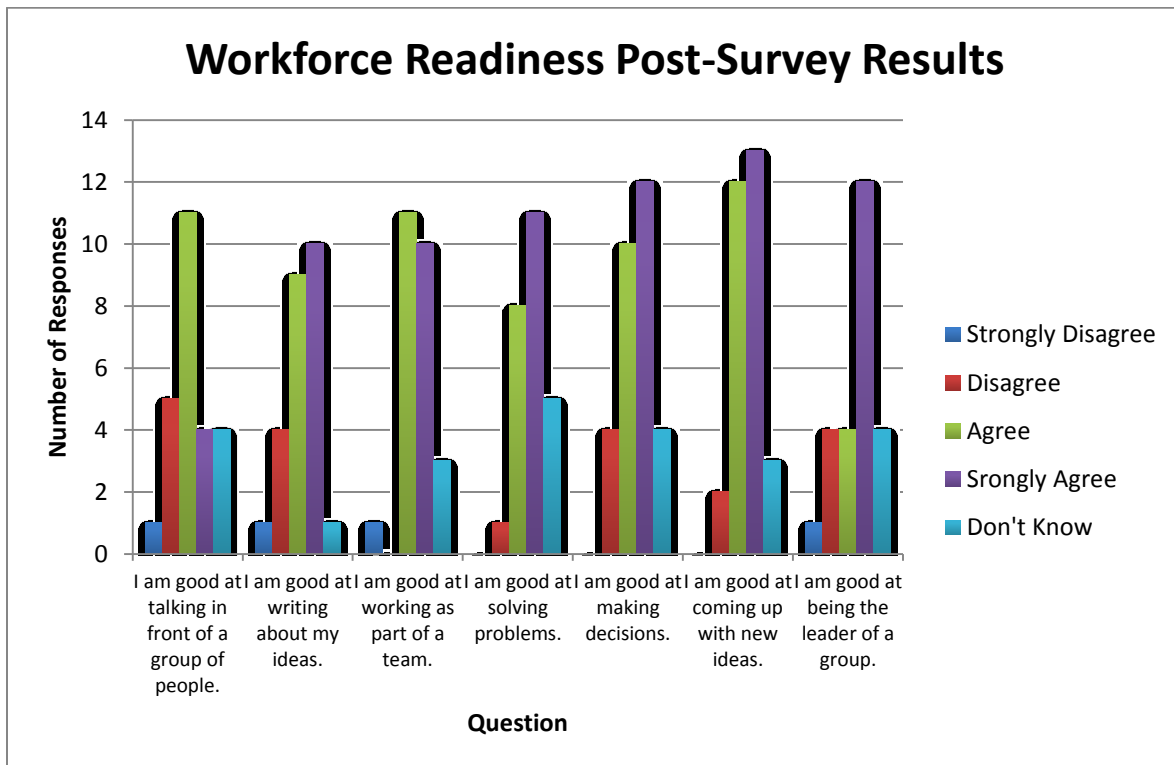
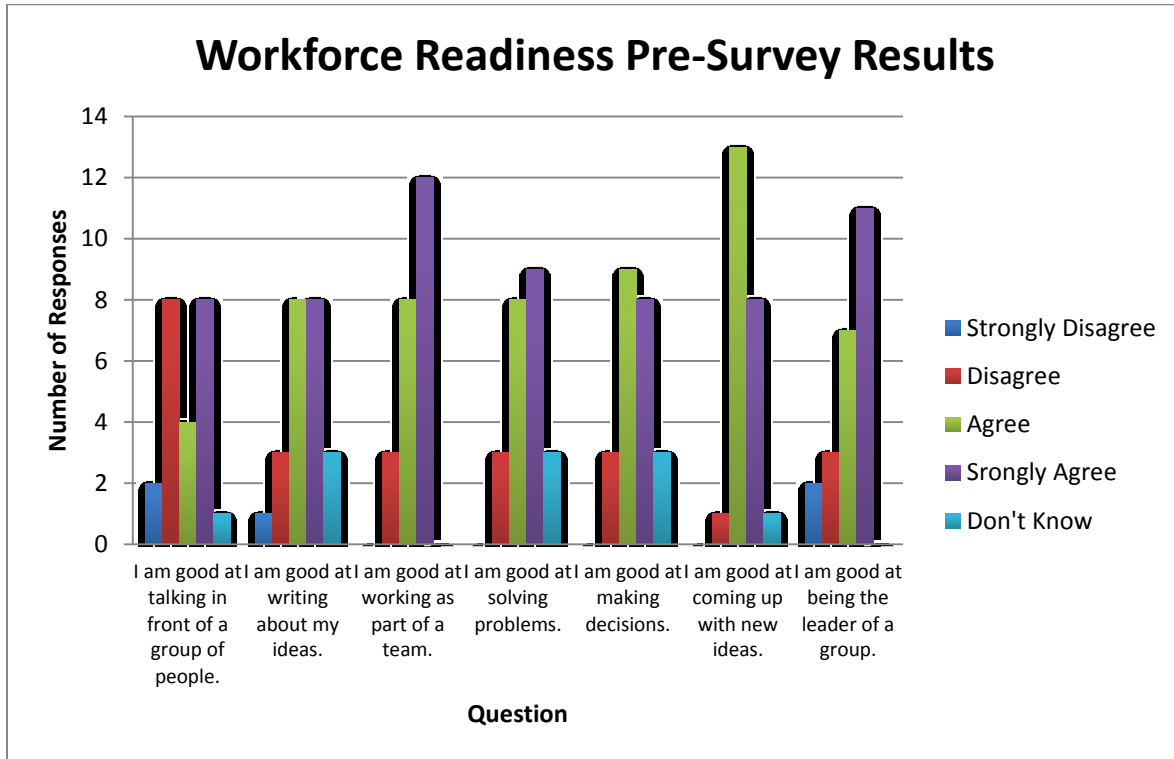
School Attachment Pre and Post Survey Results



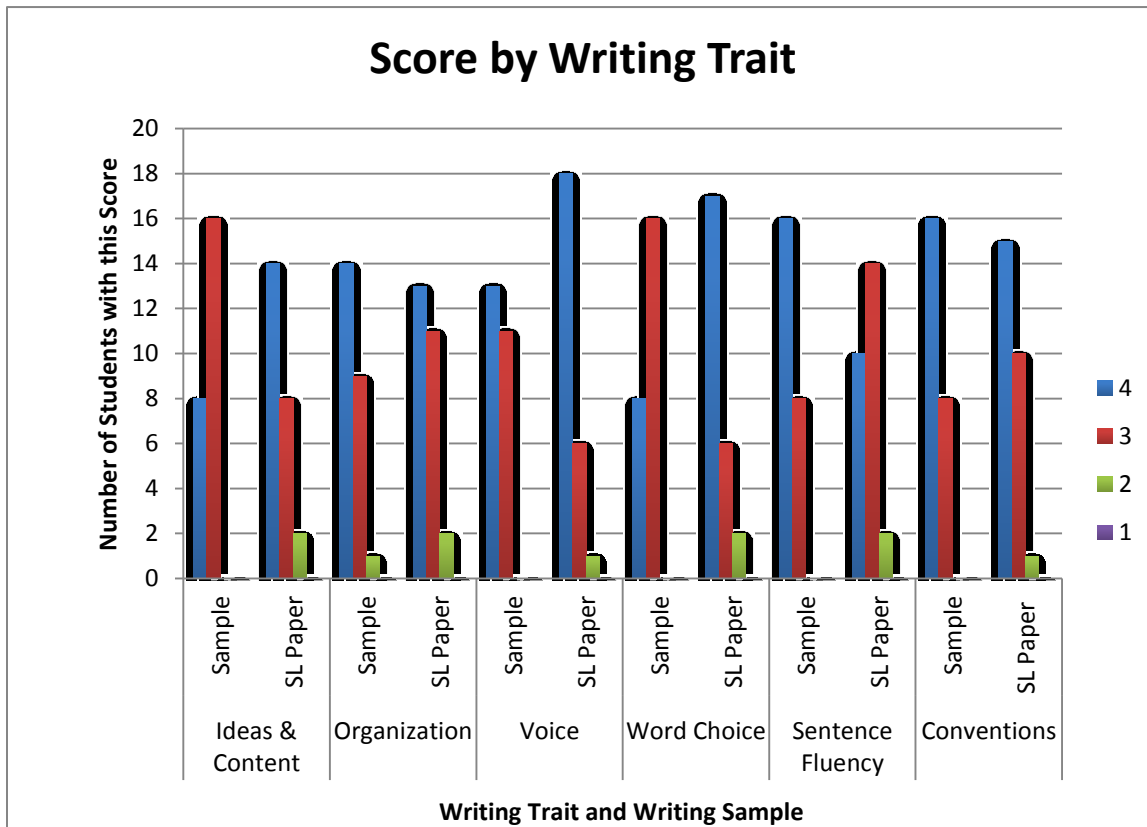
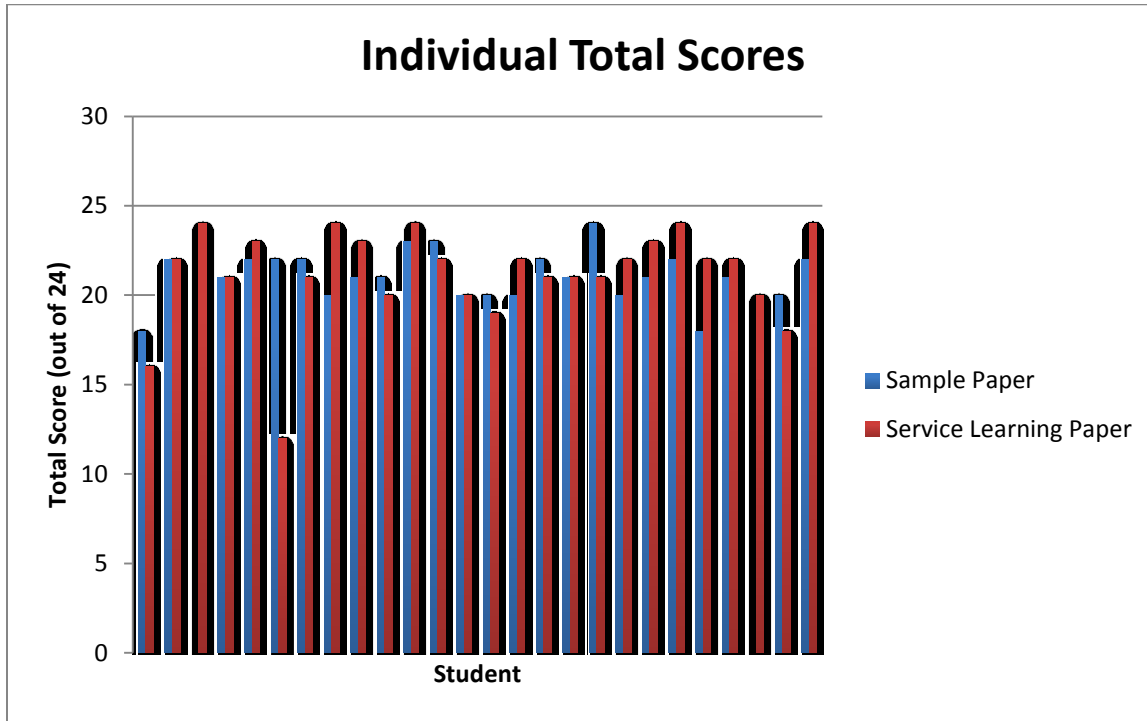
Social Responsibility Pre and Post Survey Results



Workforce Readiness Pre and Post Survey Results



Writing Scores



Silverton and Colorado Springs Comparison Graphs

