Service learning in Lutheran schools

Establishing partnerships

Home, school, local, national and global

'Effective service-learning forms partnerships with community members and organizations … that are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community priorities. Partners see each other as resources and collaborate to establish shared vision, set goals and community priorities.' (Roehikepartain and Bailis, 2007: 8)

What makes a partnership work?
Effective partnerships typically have the following characteristics:
- shared leadership, responsibility, and oversight
- relationships are central
- inclusion is intentional
- an appropriate balance is struck between trust building and action
- mutual understanding and benefits are understood
- mutual learning objectives and educational activities
- being attentive to planning, communication, training, orientation, and preparation

Getting started
A partnership can be simple or complex, depending on each partner's comfort level, readiness, needs, and resources – and the nature of the shared work that is envisioned. Here is a commonly accepted basic framework for understanding a continuum of relationships:
- Cooperate – projects may be centered in one organisation with support from the other. This is where many partnerships start out.
- Coordinate – work together in planning a specific effort or program.
- Collaborate – collaboration typically requires a shared decision-making group, comprehensive planning and communication, and formal agreements on roles, responsibilities, and commitments.

Explore community priorities and needs by engaging all parties involved:
- Research and understand the issues
- Interview key people in community
- Visit/tour community
- Surveys
- Interpret findings to develop goals to ensure project is appropriate and meaningful for
- everyone
- Focus on developing 'learning' goals
- Listen and learn from each other

Some key questions to consider:
- What needs or priorities stand out? What are the underlying issues?
- What could be done to respond to what we have seen or heard?
- What other questions do we need to investigate before taking action?
- What service options might work for our group, its skills, interests, and experience?

- What could we do that is attainable within the time and resources we have?
- In what ways might we partner with other people or organisations in the community to reach these goals?
- How will we share what we've learned with other stakeholders (particularly those who would benefit) to ensure that what we do will really be valued?

Sustaining partnerships

Nurturing strong partner relationships beyond the project can ensure sustained partnerships:

- Work with partners to develop formal, cohesive, long-term vision for the service learning partnerships that aligns with both the organisation and schools missions
- Communicate regularly with all stakeholders – make regular visits and get involved in other ways that meet community needs
- Make it integral to your culture … maintaining commitment to service and engagement.
- Reflect on projects to guide future plans, building on what has been done. Help people find ways they can use own gifts and interests
- Evaluation is an essential part of the program – document your progress

References

Roehikepartain, E.C., & Balis, L. (2007). Developing Partnerships for Service-Learning: Starting Points for Community-Based Organisations. Scotts Valley, CA: Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse www.servicelearning.org/instant_info/fact_sheets/cb_facts/developing_partners hips/

Roehikepartain, E.C. Service-Learning in Community-based Organisations: A Practical Guide to Starting and Sustaining High-Quality Programs. Scotts Valley, CA: Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2009.

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