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Study of Fifth Grade Service Learning

Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of the service learning implemented within the fifth grade curriculum of a small private school in the Midwestern United States with the goal of fostering civic responsibility and altruism within the fifth grade students. Data was collected from sixth grade students within two private schools; one group was the experimental group that had been involved in weekly service learning throughout their fifth grade year and the other group was the control group that had not been involved in service learning the previous year. Nominal-polytomous questionnaires, qualitative scenario-response questionnaires, and personal interviews were used to collect data. These were then analyzed using a grounded theory process. The study found a 24% higher tendency towards civic responsibility amongst the experimental group but an 8% higher tendency towards altruism amongst the control group. The results of this study lead to the conclusion that fifth grade service learning is effective in fostering civic responsibility, but is not effective in the development of altruistic attitudes.

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A Study of Fifth Grade Service Learning

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B. A. Northwestern College, 1992

Action Research Report
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Education

Department of Education
Dordt College
Sioux Center, Iowa
April, 2014

A Study of Fifth Grade Service Learning

by

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Table of Contents

Title page..... i

Approval ii

Acknowledgements..... iii

Table of Contents iv

List of Tables.....v

Abstract..... vi

Introduction.....1

Literature Review.....5

Methodology20

Results.....23

Discussion.....28

References.....32

Appendixes35

 Appendix A35

 Appendix B37

 Appendix C40

 Appendix D.....41

Vita.....42

List of Tables

Table	Page
1. Displayed Attitudes of Altruism.....	24
2. Displayed Attitudes of Civic Responsibility.....	24
3. Displayed Attitudes Within Experimental Group After 6 Months Towards Acts of Service.....	25
4. Displayed Attitudes Within Experimental Group After 18 Months Towards Acts of Service.....	26

Abstract

This study examined the effectiveness of the service learning implemented within the fifth grade curriculum of a small private school in the midwestern United States with the goal of fostering civic responsibility and altruism within the fifth grade students. Data was collected from sixth grade students within two private schools; one group was the experimental group that had been involved in weekly service learning throughout their fifth grade year and the other group was the control group that had not been involved in service learning the previous year. Nominal-polytomous questionnaires, qualitative scenario-response questionnaires, and personal interviews were used to collect data. These were then analyzed using a grounded theory process. The study found a 24% higher tendency towards civic responsibility amongst the experimental group but an 8% higher tendency towards altruism amongst the control group. The results of this study lead to the conclusion that fifth grade service learning is effective in fostering civic responsibility, but is not effective in the development of altruistic attitudes.

Service learning, as we know it today, has roots that go as far back as the 1800's when volunteerism groups, such as the Red Cross, Community Chest, and the American Red Cross were founded. These groups were followed by the organization of Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Girls and Boy Scouts of America, United Way, Rotary Clubs, and many others. During the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's and 70's, grassroots movements such as Habitat for Humanity, the Peace Corps, the Senior Companion program, VISTA, and others began to sprout up throughout America and the world. (Titlebaum, 2004)

In 1990, President George Bush signed the *National and Community Service Act* and in 1993, Senator Edward Kennedy sponsored the *National and Community Service Trust Act* that was also authorized by President Bill Clinton ("*Imagining America*," 2007). The definition of service learning as used by Lankard is compatible to the vision of this act. Lankard (1995) stated that, "Service learning is a teaching/learning method connecting meaningful community service experiences with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility" (p. 3).

Today, there are countless service learning programs throughout the United States that continue to follow in the footsteps of the *National and Community Service Trust Act* of 1993. They have branched out from universities and colleges to include high schools, middle schools and, more recently, elementary school campuses (Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Cooper, 2010).

Problem

High school and college service learning programs are becoming acceptable, and even preferred, learning tools. However, there are far fewer service learning programs at the upper elementary educational levels, especially amongst private Christian schools. Programs such as enrichment and remedial services, music, art, and sports are now expected and even required

within elementary schools. These programs are often in competition for the availability of already limited classroom time in today's educational institutions. With the growing demands for higher academic standards, stronger athletes, and more gifted artists and musicians, service learning has often been non-existent or has fallen to the background of many elementary schools.

As a fifth grade classroom teacher in a small private elementary school, the researcher began to notice an increase in attitudes of entitlement and self-absorption amongst the students. In an attempt to counteract this trend and instead promote altruistic attitudes and civic responsibility within the students, the researcher organized a weekly service-learning project. Each week throughout their school year, a third of the researcher's fifth grade class traveled to a local women and children's shelter to assist for 45 minutes with cleaning, baking, childcare, and other various forms of service. Throughout the school year, each group of students was able to work at women and children's shelter approximately ten times.

The researcher began the fifth grade collaborative service learning project with the women and children's shelter based on three overall goals: to guide the students to develop compassion for others in need, to provide the space for compassion to grow into passionate altruistic service for others, and to develop genuine Christian love that overflows into action or civic responsibility. The basis for this service learning project was the Biblical command given in Micah 6:8, "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

The work at the women and children's shelter was also integrated into the fifth grade curriculum through the areas of social studies, Bible, language arts, and math. The students learned that assisting others builds relationships within the school and the local community. They were lead to understand that the Bible instructs and empowers them to assist others through

actions of loving service. The fifth grade students were also given opportunities to journal, write skits, debate, budget, discuss, and to explore the history of service learning. Appendix D outlines a variety of ways that the fifth grade service learning experience was connected with the rest of the fifth grade academic curriculum. (See Appendix D)

These activities allowed the students to learn how their service, and service done in the past, enriched the lives of others. It was the researcher's hope to find validation through this educational research project that the classroom time given to service learning is a valuable learning tool in accomplishing the development of the values of altruism and civic responsibility within the fifth grade students.

Research Questions

This study examined the effectiveness of the service learning done throughout the school year with fifth grade students that were enrolled in a small private school in the midwestern United States. To evaluate the three goals of guiding students to develop compassion for others, providing space for compassion, and developing genuine Christian love that overflows into action or civic responsibility, this study specifically sought to answer the overarching question of whether fifth grade service learning positively impacts the development of civic responsibility and altruistic attitudes of fifth grade students. In order to do so, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Did an ongoing and regular service learning project designed for fifth grade students have a measurable impact upon their attitudes of civic responsibility after being involved in this type of learning?

2. Did an ongoing and regular service learning project designed for fifth grade students have a measurable impact upon the altruistic tendencies of these students after being involved in this type of learning?

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions will clarify the terms as they are used in this study. Unless otherwise indicated, the definitions are those of the author.

Altruism: Feelings and behavior that demonstrate a desire to help others without selfish motives.

Civic Responsibility: The responsibilities of a citizen to one's country, state, or community.

Service Learning: Service learning is a method by which young people learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that:

1. meet actual community needs.
2. are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community.
3. are integrated into each young person's academic curriculum.
4. provide the structured time for a young person to think, talk, and write about what he/she did and saw during the actual service activity.
5. provide young people with opportunities to use newly acquired academic skills and knowledge in real life situations in their own communities.
6. enhance what is taught in the school by extending student learning beyond the classroom.
7. help to foster the development of a sense of caring for others. (Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform, 1995, p. 4)

Literature Review

High school and college service learning programs are fast becoming acceptable and preferred learning tools, but service-learning programs at the upper elementary and middle school levels are not as prevalent. The researcher examined literature related to the service learning that is being performed within the curriculum of upper elementary and middle school classrooms in both public and private schools, along with evidence of a variety of benefits for such programs. Finally, the researcher sought to reveal the stated benefits to the community as a direct result of service learning initiated by the schools.

According to a comprehensive meta-analysis study reported on by the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, the benefits of service learning are as extensive and varied as the programs themselves. The results of many studies show measurable progress in the cognitive skills of the students involved in service learning in schools around the United States. Measurable gain in civic engagement and attitudes has also been recorded, mainly in programs where civic responsibility was a goal of the learning. Studies showing social and personal impact as a result of service learning have also been documented frequently. The outcome areas for social and personal impact that have shown the greatest gain are self-efficacy, respect, self-confidence, collaborative skills, resilience, and avoidance of high risk behaviors. Studies in these areas have declined in recent years, but researchers have strongly embraced service learning as a key strategy in accomplishing social-emotional competency in youth (Impacts of Service-Learning, 2007).

Public School Service-Learning Programs in the United States

Public schools across the United States are embracing a variety of types of service-learning projects that appropriately meet the developmental levels of upper elementary and

middle school students. In 2008, 68% of all K-12 public schools in the United States were involved with service learning (Spring, Grimm, & Dietz, 2008). Many projects supported their school's core curriculum of social studies, science, and language arts and were connected to real world issues.

Some schools combined the focus of their service learning with the development of the cognitive skills of their students. In Lebanon, Pennsylvania, teachers at Hardings Elementary School integrated community service projects into a character education literacy program (Adams, 2007). The students from this disadvantaged coal town began to write letters to soldiers overseas and to raise money for victims of Hurricane Katrina.

The Alliance for Children Collaborative Exceptional Peer Tutors (ACCEPT) is a program designed for, and implemented with, middle school students under the direction of school counselors (Stott & Jackson, 2005). The students perform community service projects and, in turn, develop critical thinking skills. The program successfully targeted issues that are unique to the physical, psychological, and social changes of early adolescence students.

Many service-learning projects also seek to foster civic responsibility. Elementary and middle school students, studying with teachers that were involved in CiviConnection, a national civic educational program, were exposed to community service learning projects that were connected with current social or environmental issues (Ohn & Wade, 2009). After researching a variety of historical injustices, the students then created a book and a CD-ROM, organized a fundraiser to celebrate cultural diversity, and sent money to organizations that promote literacy for new immigrants. They also joined with a Marine Resource Council to replant trees in a lagoon area. Another group, in response to a study of the historical roots of North and Middle

America, organized food drives to fill up food pantries that serviced compromised people groups (Ohn & Wade, 2009).

In New Albany, Indiana third and fourth grade students designed and implemented the restoration of Freedomland Cemetery (Morris, 2008). They raised money and public awareness for a dilapidated antebellum black cemetery. This multifaceted project allowed the students to be directly involved with civic responsibilities such as collecting statistical data, studying archaeology, installing monuments, running newspaper ads to collect information, and hiring professionals to perform specialty services. They were eventually awarded a United Nations Aspire Award for peacemakers who raise awareness for differing cultures (Morris, 2008).

Fourth grade African-American students in the Miami Valley area in the state of Florida were also involved in a hands-on community service landscaping/gardening project based on the STEM Educational Coalition program (Ramey, 2012). The students worked together to design a plan, purchase materials, plant and care for an outdoor landscaping project positioned around the flagpole at the entrance of their school building.

Health advocacy is also being promoted within K-12 service learning throughout the United States (Wyatt & Peterson, 2008). Linking eight health educational standards to various forms of service-learning activities, the K-8 students coordinated drives for food, coats/clothing, books, eyeglasses, and toys, organized a clean-up day, volunteered at a health agency, organized and participated in a fitness walk, raised money for health issues, and more. In Nebraska, civic service learning included sixth grade students with special needs along with the rest of their sixth grade class (Olness, 2008). All the sixth grade students chose from a variety of seven project areas writing letters to soldiers, creating and sending care packages, adopting grandparents,

implementing food drives and bake sales, creating cards and giggle bags for hospitalized children, assisting an animal shelter, and befriending preschool children.

Civics-based education is being implemented in all K-12 classrooms and academic disciplines in Seattle, Washington (Hutchins, 2012). It is changing the lives of hundreds of children across the city as the students work through current events that extend into a variety of service-learning projects. These projects eventually lead to high school student involvement within government lobbying.

Another area embraced by service-learning projects is that of social justice. Lead Peace is an urban middle school service-learning project which partners with community agencies to meet genuine needs throughout Minneapolis, Minnesota (Bosma, Sieving & Ericson, 2010). This program successfully aims to reduce violence and school failure through support, motivation, and skill building. A key element to the success of Lead Peace is the development of collaborative partnerships between the school and community.

In Montpelier, Vermont, an Independence Day parade float was created by the seventh and eighth grade students to promote a school-wide bike safety fair (Gonsalves, 2011). This project was created by the middle school students as a reaction to a tragic bike accident involving a student from the school who was struck by a drunk motorist and badly injured. By raising awareness of the danger of driving drunk, the students hoped to prevent further senseless accidents.

Public School Service Learning that Reaches Across the World

Other service learning projects reach across the globe. Fifth and sixth grade students from Franksville, Wisconsin, made no-sew blankets for students in China that were left homeless due to earthquake destruction (Gonslaves, 2011). They implemented social studies, science, math,

and reading into the yearlong project as they raised money to purchase fabric through a two-day rummage sale, and also wrote letters to businesses requesting discounted products and services for this project.

Service learning is also an integral part of education in some public schools in China. China's Compassionate Heart Program provides service learning to some of the country's highest achieving students with the goal of transforming China into a modern nation that will develop a sense of pride in its ability to solve problems effectively. Over two thousand students in grades 7 and 10 were provided with service-learning opportunities such as taking poor children to museums, visiting the elderly, and cleaning community areas (Renfu, Yaojiang, Linxiu, Chengfang, Rozelle & Sharbono, 2011).

An interesting contrast between the American-based service-learning programs and those in the Chinese study is that the students chosen for the study in China have the privilege of being the most advanced students. In the studies done in the United States, student involvement was equally dispersed amongst students from a variety of ability levels and socioeconomic situations.

Private School Service Learning Programs in the United States

Private schools, from Catholic-based to international interdenominational schools, are also embracing service learning in a variety of ways throughout the world. Their goals are varied but they tend to focus more on moral and spiritual development rather than academic progress.

The goals of service-learning projects in many Jesuit schools in the United States are for the students to become more open to growth, intellectually competent, religious, loving, and committed to doing justice (O'Keefe, 1997). In a survey involving 50 principals of Catholic-based schools, most of them had ongoing community service programs for their K-12 students. Urban Catholic elementary schools have experienced academic improvement with at-risk

children through a strong supportive community that is developed through consistent community service programs (O'Keefe, 1997). The younger students were involved with pre-established programs, while many middle school students found their own placement in ongoing programs. Many of the programs were responses to immediate local community needs and one-third of the schools were involved in international awareness. St. Mark's, also a Catholic elementary school located in a midwestern city in the United States, believes that faith shows itself in action (O'Keefe, 1997). Every student in the school works on a monthly community service project with the assistance of a parent or guardian. Periodically throughout the year, the entire school works together on a collaborative service activity.

Other private schools throughout the United States also embrace a variety of service learning opportunities to assist the development of their students. Hampton Elementary School in Maryland started a service-learning club that involves students in grades 1-5 (Ivey, 1995). This service-program club promotes the honoring of those who do good deeds. An eighth grade private school home economics class in Colorado Springs, Colorado, travels monthly to an elderly care center to make crafts with the residents (Ivey, 1995). In Kansas City, second grade students from a private school host adults with physical and mental disabilities, and third graders offer a classroom coffee time for retired teachers with whom they have been writing throughout the year (Ivey, 1995). Another teacher in the same school coordinates the participation of her students with the Meals on Wheels program. Each of her 30 students is paired with an adult with whom they deliver one meal a month to a shut-in community resident.

Private School Service Learning that Reaches Across the World

Private Christian schools in other parts of the world, such as Canada, Australia, and China also provide service-learning experiences for their students. The goals of these programs are also focused on service through a faith-based rationale.

Cedar's Christian School in British Columbia, Canada, purposely taught their students to live a life of service (Beeksma, 2012). The sixth and fourth grade students participated in an ongoing service project to visit seniors at a local elderly care facility. The goal of the students was to provide an enjoyable and meaningful time for the residents through games, crafts, socializing, and refreshments. Parents accompanied the group to assist with the program.

St Paul's Grammar School, located in Sydney, Australia, is an interdenominational K-12 Christian school of 1,350 students (Collier, 2009). The desire of the school was to become more than a veneer that hides the school's actual intent of secular success. Based on Ephesians 2:10, Micah 6:8, and Matthew 25:37-40, the school adopted the International Baccalaureate Program to focus on global mindedness and intercultural understanding. They appointed a service-learning coordinator that was released from face-to-face teaching for three hours a week to focus on a formal school plan for service learning. The program eventually led to the culmination of several senior students working in Tanzania and Rwanda. Upon their return, these students shared their experiences with the school and the community through journals, PowerPoint presentations, and photos, with the goal of encouraging other students to put their Christian faith into action. The school also assisted those in need in the Congo through financial support.

An international Christian school in Hong Kong, China, modeled intentional service in all grade levels (Norton & Auty, 2009). They desired to put God's commands into their hearts, impressing them on their children, talking about them continually, and using written words and

symbols to constantly be aware of God's word. Deuteronomy 6:6-9 was their model for the service learning that put faith into action. The school employed three full-time staff to organize and implement service learning throughout the school. The elementary students participated in preparing 300 gifts for children of poor families in Hong Kong, and the middle school students participated in forming a relationship with a local primary school and reading with the students there several times a year. Service to others was an expected learning outcome for all of their students (Norton & Auty, 2009).

Benefits of Service Learning

Even when the core focuses of service learning are varied, there are similar benefits to those involved in community service learning projects. Some of the benefits include improved attitude toward school, academic performance, social responsibility, self-esteem, compassion, and behavior. The previously stated meta-analysis study done by the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse included all of these as benefits of service learning (Impacts of Service-Learning, 2007).

Attitude improvement

One of the major benefits of service learning is that children involved in this type of learning begin to display a more positive attitude toward their school work and their teachers than they did before the experiences (Celio, Durlak & Dymnicki, 2011). A child's attitude towards school controls much of the likelihood of academic and social success. Students in Hardings, Pennsylvania, a disadvantaged coal town, who were previously bored with reading, not engaged, and acting out in class made a dramatic turn around when they were immersed in community service projects that enhanced the curriculum (Adams, 2007).

Teachers involved in elementary and middle school CiviConnections integrated historical inquiry into community service learning and found that their students became more excited about learning (Ohn & Wade, 2009). Middle school students that were involved in the Alliance for Children: Collaborative Exceptional Peer Tutors (ACCEPT) program, reported a new respect for their teachers because they now knew what it felt like to be in the teaching position (Stott & Jackson, 2005).

Engaging students in civic education through service-learning projects also allows them to experience the feeling that their actions have the power to propose and even elicit change (Ponder, Vander Veldt & Lewis, 2011). This becomes a very motivating experience for the students, encouraging them to speak out against injustices. When students take ownership for their actions and witness that they have the ability to perpetuate positive change within their communities, attitudes towards school, teachers, and others, they become more positive and encouraging.

Jeff, a sixth grade student with learning disabilities and a speech language impairment, showed improvement in his attitude toward schoolwork after being involved in a variety of projects such as a bake sale, adopting grandparents, setting up the school Christmas tree, volunteering to be on the Walking Club committee, and writing letters to soldiers (Olnes, 2008).

Cognitive improvement

Another area where measurable improvement is shown through studies is that of cognitive progress in students that have been involved in service learning. The research disputes a common misperception that time spent by students in community service activities may have a detrimental affect on academic performance due to a loss of educational class time. Instead, extensive studies have shown that students who engage in community service activities tend to

have higher grades (Renfu et al, 2011). Service learning that is directly linked to an area of the curriculum improve students' grades and test performances much more than service learning that is disconnected from the curriculum (Celio, Durlak & Dymnicki, 2011).

Time spent away from the classroom in service learning does not result in reduced learning, but instead enhances academic achievement. Service learning promoted by CivicConnections helped students apply academic knowledge, use problem-solving skills, enhance critical thinking and reasoning skills, and enhance academic achievement (Ohn, 2009). Student literacy scores at Harding Elementary School in Pennsylvania improved dramatically when teachers combined reading with character education and service-learning projects (Adams, 2007). The Fowler Unified School District in California has been involved in service learning for 10 years. They have witnessed a 10% increase in the state Academic Performance Index scores of their students and have received numerous honors in the past five years (Gonsalves, 2011). Students that are involved in on-going service learning programs also demonstrate higher levels of problem-solving and critical-thinking skills (O'Keefe, 1997).

Students with special needs and those that come from lower socioeconomic status areas also display dramatic academic gains when involved in service-learning programs. The ACCEPT program taught the students skills that enhanced their academic performance (Stott & Jackson, 2005). One student stated that his GPA improved from a 'D' to an 'A' average after being involved in the ACCEPT program (Stott & Jackson, 2005). When urban fourth grade students in Miami were involved in the STEM program through a gardening community service learning project, the quality of their responses on a posttest, when compared to a pretest, displayed measurable improvement (Ramey, 2012). Darlene, a sixth grade student with a learning disability and a speech language impairment, received many more proficient district and

state assessment scores after volunteering to be on the Walking Club committee, writing letters, sending care packages to soldiers, and assisting with a food drive (Olness, 2008).

High achieving students that were involved in the Compassionate Scholars Program in Northwest China also improved academically by a 10% greater margin than the rest of the students who were not involved in the program. Even though these students had less instructional time in comparison with their peers, their improvement on standardized tests outpaced the rest of the students (Renfu et al, 2011).

Civic responsibility improvement

There is also a direct link between community service projects and the positive development of social responsibility. There are three factors that affect the development of civic identity: opportunity to be involved, opportunity to work with others to cause change, and reflection on what is happening in contrast to what should happen for social change to occur (Ponder, Vander Veldt & Lewis, 2011). Community service learning provides the opportunity for students to develop civic mindedness. Students that are involved in service learning demonstrate significant gains in civic engagement, leadership, and empathy. Having direct contact with those in need influenced adolescents' feelings about being helpful, which lead to greater civic engagement (Celio, Durlak & Dymnicki, 2011). When collaboration with community agencies is successful, students feel empowered to meet community needs through service learning programs (Ohne & Wade, 2009). As students participate in authentic learning experiences, they learn how to solve real life social problems.

Social awareness was enhanced when elementary and middle school students from Catholic schools were directly exposed to those in need. The students were taught

that the school needs to reach out in faith, rather than to be closed in upon itself, through a variety of community service learning projects (O'Keefe, 1997). Similarly, students that were involved in the Compassionate Heart Scholars Program in Northwest China also showed a 10% increase in social responsibility when compared to their peers who were not in the program (Renfu et al., 2011).

When third through fifth grade students were involved in an ongoing service-learning project to restore Freedomland cemetery, they were exposed to multiple layers of civic responsibility as they worked for the just respect for buried freed slaves (Morris, 2008). As they fixed up the grounds, brought in rocks for roads, raised money to hire a variety of professional workers, raised awareness through various forms of media, installed monuments, erected benches and signs, installed fencing and a flagpole, and more, they learned about how to work for justice through social responsibility.

Students that worked together to advocate for personal, family, and community health, and volunteer at a health agency, or raised money to donate to the improvement of health, learned about social responsibility, as well as better health practices (Wyatt & Peterson, 2008). They displayed higher levels of care for others after their service learning experience than prior to this experience.

Directly involving students in the political realm and allowing them to advocate for change also teaches them that their voice matters. Students in Seattle, Washington, experienced a dramatic increase in desiring to make the world a better place and in believing that they were able to do so after being involved in political service learning (Hutchins, 2012).

Self-esteem improvement

Another area that is directly enhanced when students work together to positively impact their communities is that of self-esteem. Community service-learning projects that were completed by sixth grade students with disabilities and language barriers significantly enhanced their self-esteem. While working on a variety of service-learning projects, as well as after their work, the students displayed an attitude of believing they could make a difference. They felt stronger emotionally and happy about helping others. Their social skills and self-confidence improved as they worked alongside their classmates in community service (Olnes, 2008). Students that assisted with promoting social health also displayed a more positive self-image after being involved in community service learning (Wyatt & Peterson, 2008). As their self-esteem improved, the students also developed a positive work ethic and a more respectful attitude towards adults.

Empathy development

Community service learning also allows students to understand the feelings and points of view of others, which in turn, develops empathy and compassion (Cooper, 2010). Compassion is not a feeling of pity, but is rather a commitment to justice. True compassion leads to action that rights the wrongs in our world. Education that allows students to experience the injustices around them and then allows them to take action, teaches compassion (Ruiz, 2004).

One example of service learning that allowed students to develop a compassionate attitude was a partnership project between Spanish class participants and local Mexican farm assistants. These two groups partnered together for five years in an effort to build authentic relationships between the Mexican laborers on a farm in Vermont and the students. They met together regularly on the farm to eat lunch and play games. The students showed evidence that

they had become compassionate towards the workers because they authentically befriended the Mexican workers in an attempt to ease their loneliness (Gonsalves, 2011).

Behavioral improvement

Student involvement in community service-learning projects also leads to improved behavior from many students. For example, elementary-aged students attending Harding School combined reading lessons with character education along with service learning. This led to discipline referrals being dramatically reduced (Adams, 2007). Middle school students that were involved in the ACCEPT program, a regional nonprofit educational organization founded in 1974 to promote excellence and innovation in educational practice for school districts, began to respect teachers more after being involved in service-learning projects (Stott & Jackson, 2005). Studies also showed that at-risk young adolescence that are involved in community service-learning programs displayed a lower amount of antisocial and violent behaviors (Bosma, Sieving & Ericson, 2010).

Community Benefits and Support

Local communities also benefit from the community service that the schools provide through service-learning projects. Community service learning is a partnership that ideally results in a benefit to all parties involved. The students were enabled to learn and grow as a result of the authentic work that they were involved in, and the community benefits directly from the students' efforts. Programs, such as CiviConnections, reach out with a goal of meeting actual needs of social and environmental issues that are important to the community (Ohn & Wade, 2009).

Since the 1960's, the United States federal, state, and municipal governments have recognized the benefits of service learning. An example of strong government and court support

occurred in 1996 when two students and their parents objected to the service-learning requirement of Chapel Hill High School in North Carolina. Eventually, the Supreme Court upheld the decision of the state court that ruled in favor of the school. Both courts supported the value of a service-learning requirement for the students attending Chapel Hill (O'Keefe, 1997).

When urban Catholic schools reached out to the community with ongoing and mandatory service learning, many areas of the community benefitted. The students and their parents reached out to other schools, soup kitchens, neighborhoods, food pantries, nursing homes, local hospitals and more (O'Keefe, 1997). Their efforts produced a dramatic and positive impact on the urban community. When third and fourth grade students restored the Freedomland Cemetery in New Albany, Indiana, the community also benefitted in many ways. Firstly, the restoration of property was a benefit to all. Then, many of the businesses grew from gainful employment as a result of the project (Morris, 2008). Thirdly, the community also benefitted from local and global media attention resulting from the community service-learning project.

Service learning that promotes community health and cultural integration always benefits the general public, as well as the local health agencies. Through clean-up projects, food drives, volunteering at health agencies, raising money for health causes, and more, the students improve the health of their communities (Wyatt & Peterson, 2008). Spanish students reaching out to Mexican farm workers that are isolated due to language barriers benefitted both the workers and the agencies that they worked for by translating documents and befriending those that were lonely (Gonsalves, 2010). Lead Peace, a school-based service-learning program for urban middle school students, worked closely with community organizations to develop partnerships with them. They ensured that the core missions of the schools and businesses were compatible. This

allowed for positive and productive working relationships that benefitted all parties involved by reducing risk for adolescent violence and school failure (Bosma, Sieving & Ericson, 2010).

Conclusion

As evidenced by the wide variety of studies surveyed within this literature review, there is clearly an inherent value of many types of service learning done with upper elementary and middle school students. The meta-analysis study provides a landscape of convincing representation of the benefits of service learning done within the educational system of the United States (Impacts of Service-Learning, 2007).

Methodology

Participants

Sixth grade students who attended two private schools in the Midwestern United States from similar communities in close proximity to one another participated in the study. The experimental group of 23 sixth grade students had previously been involved in weekly service learning throughout their fifth grade school year. The control group of 43 sixth grade students had not been involved in weekly service learning. These two groups completed a survey to determine attitudes of altruism and civic responsibility. (Appendix A)

The fifth grade students from the private school where the service learning took place were also surveyed for attitudes towards acts of service. (Appendix B) The first group of 23 students completed the survey before their service learning experience in fifth grade and then completed the identical survey again 18 months later, during their sixth grade year, for comparison. The second group of 23 students completed the identical survey before and then six months into their service learning experience, for comparison.

Finally, four students from the private school where the service learning took place, two from sixth grade and two from seventh grade, were interviewed about their experience in the fifth grade service learning project. (Appendix C) Two of these, one male and one female student, were from the sixth grade class, and the other two, one male and one female, were from the seventh grade class.

Research Design

Two surveys were used in this study: one to test for attitudes of altruism and civic responsibility, and the other to test for attitudes towards acts of service. Interview questions were also used to allow for a deeper understanding of the success of ongoing service learning.

The first survey consisted of six qualitative questions. Each question presented a scenario for the participants to respond to. The goal of this type of survey was to analyze the answers of the participants revealing attitudes of altruism and civic responsibility using the grounded theory method. Two groups of sixth grade students participated in this survey. The experimental group had been exposed to consistent fifth grade service learning at the women and children's shelter, and the control group had not been involved in this program during their fifth grade school year. (Appendix A)

The second survey consisted of 10 multiple-choice questions. This was used to survey fifth and sixth grade students who were previously involved in the fifth grade service learning project at the women and children's shelter. This survey analyzed the student attitudes towards acts of service with the goal of further evaluating the success of the stated goals for the service-learning program. (Appendix B)

Lastly, four students from the sixth and seventh grades who had previously participated in the fifth grade service-learning project at the women and children's shelter were interviewed.

This was done to better understand the impact of this experience on the lives of the students and to understand the attitudes of the students towards service learning. (Appendix C)

Materials

Two surveys were used in this study. A survey to test for attitudes of altruism and civic responsibility amongst sixth grade students consisted of six qualitative questions. (Appendix A)

A survey to test for attitudes towards acts of service amongst fifth and sixth grade students consisted of 10 multiple-choice questions. (Appendix B) Eight interview questions were also used when interviewing the four individual sixth and seventh grade students to gain a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of the fifth grade service-learning project. (Appendix C)

Procedure

The researcher surveyed two classes of sixth grade students that were enrolled in two separate private schools using a survey that consisted of six qualitative questions. (Appendix A) These questions focused on revealing the student attitudes towards civic responsibility and altruism. The experimental group was located within the school where the students had been involved in the weekly fifth grade service-learning project during the prior year. The control group of sixth grade students attended a school of similar location, culture, and theological belief. The control difference was that the second group of students had not been involved in consistent fifth grade service learning during the prior year. The researcher then compared these surveys for attitudes amongst the students of altruism and civic responsibility.

The researcher also surveyed 23 fifth grade students, and 23 sixth grade students who had been a part of the fifth grade service learning project at the women and children's shelter, before and after their service learning experience. The researcher developed a survey that consisted of 10 questions focusing on attitudes towards acts of service. (Appendix B) The researcher asked

the students to respond to these 10 multiple-choice questions and then analyzed the results, comparing them for attitudes before and after their service learning experience.

Lastly, the researcher interviewed four students, two from the sixth grade and two from the seventh grade, who had previously been involved in the fifth grade service learning project at the women and children's shelter during their fifth grade school year. The researcher used eight interview questions. (Appendix C) The researcher then analyzed the answers given by the students to better understand the impact of the service learning experience on the lives.

Results

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of integrating a consistent and on-going weekly service-learning project within the curriculum of fifth grade. Specifically, the researcher was focusing on the potential development of attitudes of altruism and civic responsibility within students that had been involved in this service-learning program at the women and children's shelter during their fifth grade school year.

After surveying two classes of sixth grade students enrolled in two separate private schools, the researcher compared the results of these surveys that consisted of six qualitative questions. (Appendix A) As previously stated, the experimental group of 23 sixth grade students was located within the school where the students had been involved in the weekly fifth grade service learning project during the prior year. The other class of 43 sixth grade students was located in a school of similar location, culture, and theological beliefs. The control difference was that the second group of students had not been involved in consistent fifth grade service learning during the prior year. The researcher then compared these surveys for attitudes of altruism and civic responsibility amongst the students.

Table 1 shows evidence of altruistic tendencies based on the answers given to the first three scenarios that were posed. (Appendix A) The sixth graders that had been involved in service learning throughout their fifth grade year displayed attitudes of altruism 58% of the time in their response to the initial three questions on the survey. The control group displayed attitudes of altruism 66% of the time based on their response to the same three scenarios. The control group displayed a 8% greater tendency towards altruism than the students that had been involved in service learning.

Table 1

Displayed Attitudes Of Altruism

Experimental Group	58%
Control Group	66%

Table 2 shows evidence of attitudes towards civic responsibility based on the responses given to the final three scenarios. (Appendix A) The sixth grade students that had been involved in service learning throughout their fifth grade year displayed attitudes of civic responsibility 81% of the time based on their response to the final three scenarios. The control group displayed attitudes of civic responsibility 57% of the time in their response to the same three scenarios. The experimental group displayed a 24% higher inclination towards civic responsibility than the control group.

Table 2

Displayed Attitudes of Civic Responsibility

Experimental Group	81%
Control Group	57%

The researcher then surveyed a group of 23 fifth grade students that had been involved in the service learning program for six months by giving them a survey that consisted of ten questions focusing on attitudes towards acts of service. (Appendix B) When comparing the results of the identical survey before and after the students had been involved in service learning, Table 3 shows a 9% increase in the opinion that volunteers can help those in need and that people can change most when they feel loved. Table 3 also shows a 13% increase in the realization that bad choices are made due to giving in to temptation and that making good choices leads to rewards. The students also displayed an increase in an attitude of thankfulness for the opportunity to help those in need and in the realization that people in the United States don't always have enough food to eat. The other areas of the survey displayed no change in attitude.

Table 3

Displayed Attitudes Within Experimental Group After 6 Months Towards Acts of Service

Volunteers are helpful	9% increase
Choices affect the future	13% increase

The researcher then surveyed another group of 23 sixth grade students that had been a part of the service learning program during their fifth grade school year by giving them the same survey that consisted of ten questions focusing on attitudes towards acts of service. They were surveyed before their service learning experience in fifth grade and then again after six months into their sixth grade year with a total lapse time of eighteen months. These results had a greater range of change.

Table 4 shows a 30% increase in attitudes that volunteers can help those in need and that people can change when others help them. Table 4 also shows a 22% increase in the student opinion that people are homeless because they make bad choices rather than a result of bad

things happening to them and making good choices leads to rewards. These students also displayed an increase in an attitude of thankfulness for the opportunity to help those in need and in the realization that people in the United States don't always have enough food to eat. The only area that showed no change was in the attitude of obligation. All the sixth grade students remained consistent with their previous fifth grade attitude that it was their obligation to help others in need.

Table 4

Displayed Attitudes Within Experimental Group After 18 Months Towards Acts of Service

Volunteers are helpful	30% increase
Choices affect the future	22% increase

Lastly, the researcher interviewed four students that had previously been involved in the service-learning program at the women and children's shelter during their fifth grade school year using eight interview questions. One male and one female sixth grade student were interviewed, and one male and one female seventh grade student were interviewed. (Appendix C)

All four of the students expressed the attitude that it had been fun to work at the women and children's shelter and that they felt good about helping others in need. Three of them especially enjoyed taking care of the young children. Three of them also enjoyed the baking activities and the other expressed that he had not enjoyed baking because "he was not good at it." They all said that even the cleaning was enjoyable because they were helping others. One student said, "It was hard to see poverty," and another said, "It felt good to help people get back on their feet."

When asked if there were any negative experiences with the service learning project, three of them responded that the only thing that they didn't enjoy was that they had to miss

recess, but they added that this was “not a big deal” and that they would prefer to help others and miss the occasional recess time.

One student stated, “I would do it again because it was a great way to get out into the world, hands-on, instead of someone else just telling you about their experiences.” Another expressed, “I actually loved being there volunteering. I could do a whole lot more of that. It’s a great way to give back.” A third said, “It’s a good feeling helping others, not just giving money.”

All four of the students reported that they had been involved in other forms of service after their work at the women and children’s shelter. Some had written letters to prisoners to give them hope and had bought gifts for the children of prisoners. Another had served food at a soup kitchen and had worked at a native reservation. A third had fertilized a community garden and read to the elderly. The fourth had traveled to a larger city to assist poor people.

When asked if they were aware of other needs within their own community, only one student could think of any, other than those at the women and children’s shelter. This student suggested that there were people who needed jobs or may not have enough food to eat. All four of the students felt that everyone in the community was responsible for solving the problems that arise. One suggested that the people responsible for solving the problem depended on the problem itself. Some suggestions from the students as for ways to solve problems were to have a donation center, raise awareness through posters, “look at it squarely and then solve it, like math,” or have the mayor solve it.

Finally, these four students felt that working at the women and children’s shelter during their fifth grade year had changed their outlook on life. One stated, “It opened my eyes to giving back to those that are less fortunate. I am now more aware of other projects. God put us here on earth to help others.” Another voiced, “It made me more aware of people who have needs in our

own community.” A third said, “It helped me to realize that I can’t just sit back. We are all here to help. Jesus told us that when one part of the body suffers, all of us suffer. We need to help each other.” The fourth stated, “It definitely encouraged me to be a part of service projects when I grow up.”

Discussion

The researcher concludes that the fifth grade service-learning project was successful according to the standards of the *National and Community Service Trust Act* that was authorized in 1993, and the definition of service learning voiced by Lankard (1995), “Service learning is a teaching/learning method connecting meaningful community service experiences with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility” (p. 3).

Based on the student responses within this study, the researcher concludes that an ongoing and regular service learning project designed for fifth grade students does have a measurable impact upon their attitudes of civic responsibility after being involved in this type of learning. Also, based on the results of the survey that measured the student attitudes towards acts of service, the researcher observed a measurable increase in the student awareness of the benefits of volunteers, and the direct effect that personal choices have on the future of those persons. The researcher also observed a lasting and increasing change over a period of 18 months amongst the experimental students when compared to a period of 6 months. The student awareness of the benefits of volunteers and the direct effect that personal choices have on the future of those persons increased greatly over a period of 18 months amongst the experimental students when compared to a period of 6 months.

This may be due to that fact that many of the students who were involved in the fifth grade service-learning program indicated that they have been inspired and motivated to continue

to pursue opportunities for service within their communities in the years afterwards. The experience of serving others while the students were in elementary school appears to have empowered them with confidence and the desire to look for ways to be citizens that contribute to the needs of others in their communities. The four students that were interviewed all indicated that they have been involved in other service learning projects since the fifth grade project.

The researcher concludes that the curriculum time given to the fifth grade service-learning project impacted the attitudes of civic responsibility of the students in a positive and empowering way. The data indicated that the experimental group displayed a 24% higher tendency towards civic responsibility than the control group. The stated goal of service learning to improve civic responsibility, according to Lankard, is confirmed in this study (Lankard, 1995).

Based on the data that confirms a measurable positive impact on attitudes of civic responsibility, the researcher will plan to continue to implement service learning within the fifth-grade curriculum for the reason that service learning does indeed foster civic responsibility. The time given to service learning in the curriculum is worth the outcome.

This study did not confirm that ongoing and regular service learning at the fifth grade level has a positive measurable impact on the attitude of altruism amongst the students involved. The data instead indicated that the control group had an 8% higher tendency towards altruism than the experimental group of students that had been involved in the service-learning project. Based on these findings, the researcher concludes that service learning did not foster greater altruistic attitudes amongst fifth-grade students.

Limitations and Recommendations

The researcher believes that it may be that the benefits of service learning are more easily identified in attitudes of civic responsibility than in altruistic attitudes. As previously

defined in this study, altruistic feelings and behavior are demonstrated in a desire to help others without selfish motives. Thus, it may be that altruism is more difficult to test for because it is a feeling that motivates behavior, not the behavior itself.

If the researcher could continue this study, she would seek to observe the behavior of the students throughout their fifth grade year, looking for documented patterns of positive altruistic attitude development. Observing the development of altruism over time would further confirm the value of service learning within the formative years of students. The researcher would also interview more students individually so that she could hear more of the personal reflections of their attitudes towards service learning and acts of service, which may reveal altruistic motives.

Conclusion

This study has confirmed the researcher's decision to integrate regular and ongoing service learning into the fifth grade curriculum. The measurable increase in attitudes amongst the experimental students towards civic responsibility and acts of service confirms that service learning at the elementary level has a significant impact on the students' likelihood to participate in acts of service within their communities in the future.

The collaborative service-learning program between the fifth grade students and the women and children's shelter has been in operation now for five years. Over the past five years the researcher has seen positive attitudes from the fifth grade students as they assisted in cleaning, baking, childcare, and other tasks at the women and children's shelter. Even when the jobs were menial or undesirable, or when working with challenging childcare situations, the researcher observed positive attitudes amongst the fifth grade students.

Over the past five years, she also observed an eagerness in all the fifth grade students to participate fully in the aspects of service to the women and children's shelter. This service-

learning project has been beneficial to both the fifth grade students and the women and children's shelter. It is an educational opportunity that enhances the community it serves and the students that it seeks to empower. The data collected confirms the observations made by the researcher over the past five years that the opportunity for service learning was appreciated by the students, and that positive attitudes of civic responsibility were fostered through the service learning experience. The research shows that attitudes toward civic responsibility can be taught, developed, and put into action through service-learning.

The basis for this service learning project was taken from the Biblical command given in Micah 6:8 "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." This Biblical text has been put into action through the fifth grade service-learning project. Even though the researcher was expecting to find an increase in the altruistic attitudes of the experimental students as they performed their service-learning and did not, the researcher still believes that this attitude may continue to develop in the future amongst the students. The researcher concludes that the heart attitude of altruism is a matter for the hand of God that cannot be controlled by human works.

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APPENDIX A

What Would You Do ????

Sixth grade students have valuable opinions. **Please answer the following survey questions**

honestly. The surveys are anonymous so you will not be judged for your answers in any way.

The results will be used to provide social studies education that relates to the world around us in a real way. Thanks in advance for your honest and valuable input!

1. One day as you are walking home from school, you meet a mentally challenged middle school student who is crying. You observe that there is a group of sixth grade students, some of whom you know from your summer recreation baseball team, mocking the student by laughing at him and calling him a retard. You are in a hurry to get home because you are hungry. What do you do?
2. You are at a Youth Group event, at your church with your friends. You notice that a girl from your class at school is there, as well, standing all by herself. You know that your friends don't like her because she is "not cool." She is not on the basketball team that you and your friends play on and she wears clothes that come from the second hand stores. You are having a great time with your friends. What do you do?
3. You just received your allowance for the week and you are excited to purchase some accessories for your new bike. Before you leave for the store, your mom opens the newsletter from your classroom teacher on her computer. She reads an announcement to you, asking for donations of money for the needy in Haiti. She then tells you that she will match any donations you make to this cause. What do you do?

4. You are on a hike along a local trail with your family. You are enjoying the outdoors and the weather is perfect for a long walk. You begin to notice a lot of garbage, such as plastic bags, drink cups, and other items, laying along the trail that are causing the trail to look trashy. Your father suggests that it would be a good idea for the family to stop their walk and pick up the trash. What do you say to him?
5. Your family is on vacation and the destination for the day is Pike's Peak. You are really excited to get there because this is your first trip to the mountains. Up ahead, you see a car that is stalled alongside the road. Your family notices that one of the tires is flat on the stalled car and the passengers are a woman with two young children. You know that if you stop to help, you won't arrive at your destination before dark. What do you say to your parents?
6. You are at the school playground after school hours with several younger students who are playing on the merry-go-round. As they are playing, you notice that several of the boards are loose, allowing the children to reach down through the boards to touch the ground. You notice that the children could injure their arms if they drag them while the merry-go-round is moving. What do you do?

APPENDIX B

10 Questions ????

Fifth grade students have valuable opinions. **Please answer the following survey questions**

honestly. The surveys are anonymous so you will not be judged for your answers in any way.

The results will be used to provide social studies education that relates to the world around us in a real way. Thanks in advance for your honest and valuable input!

1. Why are some people homeless?
 - a) They make bad choices.
 - b) They are not as smart as other people.
 - c) They are more sinful.
 - d) Bad things have happened to them.
2. Where do people who don't have enough money get the most help from?
 - a) The bank helps them.
 - b) The government helps them.
 - c) The church helps them.
 - d) Volunteers help them.
3. What makes people rich?
 - a) They are smart.
 - b) They are lucky.
 - c) They have rich families.
 - d) They are blessed.

4. Why do people make bad choices?
 - a) Bad things have happened to them.
 - b) They are bad.
 - c) They give in to temptation.
 - d) They are not smart.
5. When someone needs help...
 - a) I wait for other people to help them.
 - b) I ask my parents if there is something we can do.
 - c) I think a social worker should help them.
 - d) I tell other people about their bad situation
6. In the USA most people have enough food to eat....
 - a) all of the time.
 - b) most of the time.
 - c) some of the time.
 - d) never.
7. When I help someone out without getting a reward...
 - a) I feel cheated.
 - b) I feel very happy.
 - c) I feel thankful for the opportunity.
 - d) I feel good because I am not in that situation.

8. God loves.....
 - a) all people.
 - b) the people who do good things.
 - c) the people who love him.
 - d) the people that go to my church.
9. People in bad situations can change.....
 - a) when they want to.
 - b) when other people help them.
 - c) when they get enough money.
 - d) when they feel loved.
10. I should help and care for.....
 - a) only my family.
 - b) only nice people.
 - c) anyone that needs my help.
 - d) only the people who deserve it.

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. What do you recall about your work at the shelter in fifth grade?
2. What were the positive things about your fifth grade service learning experience?
3. What were the negative things about your fifth grade service learning experience?
4. How did you feel about your fifth grade work at the shelter?
5. Have you participated in other forms of service since your experience at the shelter?
If so, what have you been a part of?
6. Are there any needs in your community? If so, how do you feel about these?
7. Are the problems in your community and the country your responsibility?
8. What can you do about the problems that you recognize?

APPENDIX D

Service Learning and Curriculum Integration

1. **Bible lessons and faith applications:** Students were guided through discussion, drama, journaling, and scripture to apply the experiences of their work at the women and children's shelter to other areas of their life and their faith development. They were guided to recognize that real faith is displayed by putting love into action.
2. **Language Arts:** Students were given opportunity to journal and write stories about the outcomes and feelings that they have about their service learning experiences. Guided discussions also took place regularly concerning the students' work at the women and children's shelter.
3. **Social Studies:** The history of service learning, as far back as the 1800's, within the history of the United States was tracked throughout the teaching of the fifth grade American History curriculum. The students were also guided to participate on debate teams periodically throughout the year to discuss and explore issues of social justice throughout American history. Guided discussion also occurred throughout the year concerning current issues of social justice, including the reasons for the existence of homeless shelters, such as the women and children's shelter.
4. **Math:** The students were guided through possible financial scenarios of single parent homes and the homeless populations in the United States. They were guided to plan budgets for the everyday living realities of families working minimum wage jobs or for the unemployed. Their budget plans were used to illustrate why and how women and children need to live in a shelter such as the women and children's shelter.

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