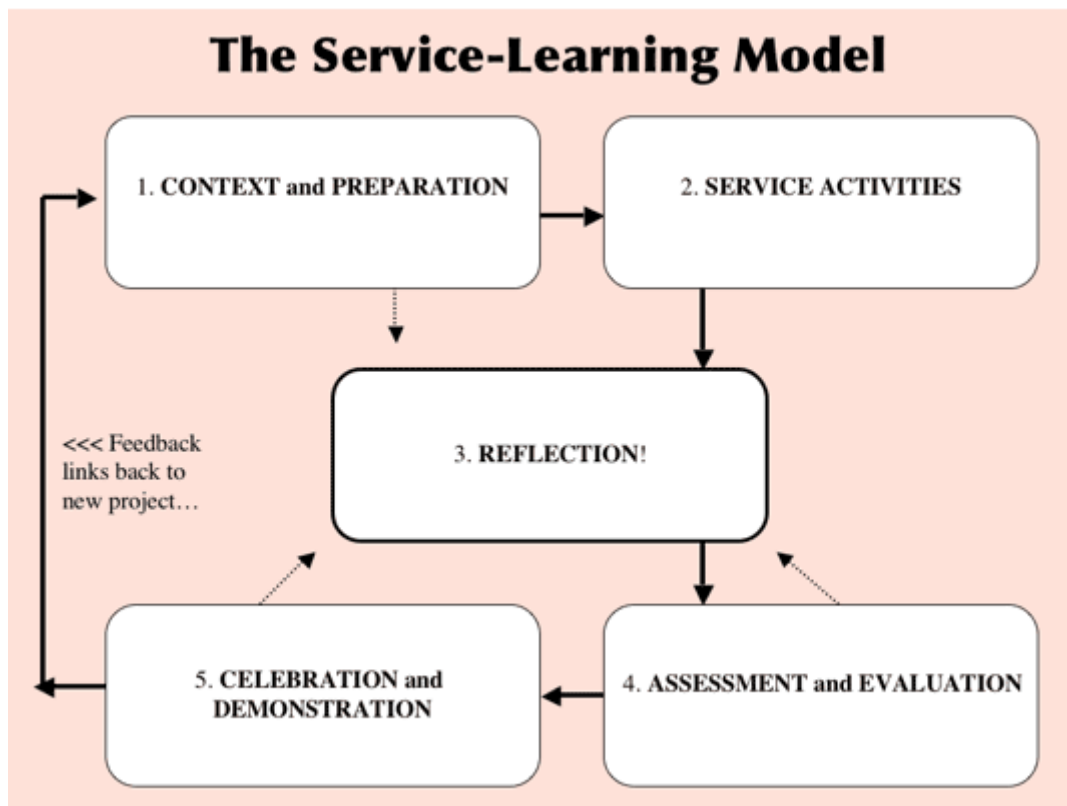# What is Service-Learning?

From the Teachers College at Columbia University

Service-Learning offers a unique opportunity for America's young people -- from kindergarten to university students -- to get involved with their communities in a tangible way by integrating service projects into the curriculum. As a form of experiential education, Service-Learning connects theory to practice by applying classroom academic learning to "real-world" social, economic, and environmental problems in the community. As a pedagogy for democracy, Service-Learning contributes to building and revitalizing communities at the school, neighborhood, city, or even global level, while students learn about democratic participation, leadership, and active citizenship. As a fun and stimulating teaching method, Service-Learning promises to strengthen academic skills and increase motivation for educational achievement.

Service-Learning can be applied across all subjects and grade levels; it can involve a single student or group of students, a classroom or an entire school. Collaborating with community partners, students create service projects that tackle issues in such areas as health education, public safety, hunger and homelessness, immigration and discrimination, and the environment. Projects can take place over the course of two weeks, a semester, or even a year.

THE SERVICE-LEARNING MODEL

The Service-Learning model involves five key project phases:

The Service-Learning Model

1. CONTEXT and PREPARATION

2. SERVICE ACTIVITIES

3. REFLECTION!

<<< Feedback links back to new project...

5. CELEBRATION and DEMONSTRATION

4. ASSESSMENT and EVALUATION

WHY IS SERVICE-LEARNING IMPORTANT?

Certainly, Service-Learning can be challenging for teachers to integrate into classroom instruction. Your school may have a strict, standardized curriculum, and there may be tremendous pressure to lead classrooms in a specific way. So, why is Service-Learning important? Cathryn Berger-Kaye explains that the objective of Service-Learning programs is to educate the whole child, and to encourage students to apply academic learning outside of school. Research demonstrates that Service-Learning promotes multiple learning objectives:

First, effective Service-Learning projects help students to learn and retain core academic content. Students learn in diverse ways, and Service-Learning can engage different students in different ways. Research determines that creative or experiential education can increase student achievement on targeted core content. For example, many explain that we learn only 10% of what we hear, but up to 80% of what we experience and 90% of what we teach.

Second, Service-Learning promotes positive youth development. For example, research explains that participating students demonstrate increased agency, awareness, esteem, and resilience. Further, participating students are more likely to believe they are able to effect positive change than students who do not participate in service learning programs.

Third, Service-Learning is an important tool for classroom and community development. For example, a successful project promotes student cooperation, partnership, and teamwork. Service-Learning also fosters social capital, strengthening connections between students, communities, and schools. Further, Service-Learning actively engages students in democracy: select research demonstrates that students with experience in Service-Learning are more like to volunteer and to vote.

Fourth, service/learning can help new teachers to plan teaching and learning over time. Erick Gordon explains that early in his career he invented new tricks to engage students each day. He felt it was exhausting. Over time, Erick learned that integrated lessons help streamline planning, manage classroom behavior, and encourage sustained cooperative learning.