

***Discovering What Students Gain
From a Cooperative Service Learning Project***

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Primary purpose of the study:

To understand what first year and graduate students learn from participating in a service learning project.

Secondary purposes:

To provide graduate student role models for first year students

To provide an applied setting for graduate students to learn about first year students

Methodology:

Participants were *18 first year students and 15 graduate students* enrolled in courses taught by the same instructor

Students worked in teams of 2 undergraduate and 2 graduate students either *painting a home or painting and landscaping a childcare center*

All participants wrote *reflection papers* including:

- *how they felt about the experience
- *what they learned about themselves and others
- *whether they will participate in future service activities

Link to national events:

Originally the class was to paint a group home, but we learned right before the project that *our help was needed to ready a home for 2 families displaced by Hurricane Katrina*. This allowed for discussion in class about our connection in Illinois to others in need on the Gulf coast. To facilitate the discussions, we used the children's book, *Zoom* by Istvan Banyai, as a frame of reference.

OVER

Students reported:

***satisfaction with the project and the amount of work completed**

"The feeling I received after I looked back on the completed house gave me strong motivation to continue doing community service."

"It was awesome to know that Monday when the children arrive they would have clean blacktop on which to play basketball and a playground without weeds coming through the stones."

***enjoyment in helping others and working as a part of a team**

"If anything, I feel this experience has really motivated me to work towards getting involved and looking into campus and community service organizations to which I could donate some of my time."

"At the end of the day the school looked amazing, and I thought that all of us involved felt closer because of it."

***greater appreciation for what they had**

"By participating in this service project I learned how lucky my family, friends, and I were when we were growing up."

"I really do take things for granted, and I realized this when I was thinking of all the people that lost all of their belongings in the hurricane."

***awareness of the value and impact their work meant to others**

"Being involved in service projects helps people I am helping realize they are cared about, helps me reach outside of my comfort zone, and helps me meet other people."

"Helping paint the house for the victims of the hurricane reinforced the notion that students are a part of the Bloomington/Normal community."

"I learned that I am capable of assisting other members of the community by simply painting a house. It did not seem like that big of a deal to me at first, but looking back I understand that those six hours of my time really helped people in need."

***talking with people they never would have otherwise**

"Not only did it pull two classes together to work toward a common goal, there was a genuine task at hand. It was not something that was artificial such as a bonding or team-building game. I think that helped people let their true colors show, more so than trying to manufacture an activity would have."

"During this experience, it was important to see that in times of crises or when others are in need, no matter how different individuals are, in terms of age, viewpoints, and past experiences, everyone can pull together to complete a task that will benefit others."

***new awareness of personal skills and competencies**

"I learned that I enjoy 'taking in' students who seem to feel confused about their college lives, and I found out that I really enjoy making people feel at ease - like they can say anything without feeling judged."

"I think they [the first year students] learned a little about the benefits of diversity and that their opinion of different people is not as close-minded as it was before the project."

