

Social and Emotional Learning and Service-Learning

Service-learning has been identified by the CASEL, the Education Commission of the States, and the Laboratory for Student Success as one of the most important elements of high-quality social and emotional learning programs.²⁵ A body of evidence is building in support of service-learning as one of the most powerful and effective strategies for teaching, modeling, and reinforcing SEL. The two practices are interrelated, and the research evidence supports the expanded use of both practices in the classroom. Service-learning is an educational methodology that:

- enhances and extends learning beyond the classroom;
- provides opportunities for students to learn and apply academic, social, emotional, and ethical skills to address real-life issues in the school and community;
- fosters a sense of empathy and caring for others;
- meets actual school and community needs;
- creates school and community linkages;
- integrates service-learning projects into the academic program;
- provides time for reflection about what was learned during this service.²⁶

Quality service-learning can build SEL competencies, while SEL can strengthen the ability of students to be capable service providers. When used together, their effectiveness are enhanced. For example, service-learning experiences have strong academic and personal impacts when there is deliberate integration with reflection activities.²⁷ These activities build upon social and emotional skills such as problem solving and relationship skills with peers and adults. On the other hand, SEL skills are most firmly established when they can be put into practice in a variety of real-life settings through service-learning experiences. Students who perceive opportunities for involvement in prosocial activities, possess the skill for success and are appropriately rewarded, are more likely to develop strong bonds to schooling, and develop standards, beliefs, and behaviors that lead to greater academic achievement and less antisocial behavior.²⁸ The integration results in social and emotional learning providing the skills that help young people act in caring, respectful, and responsible ways, while service-learning provides the opportunity for them to apply those skills and values to improving the lives of others in their school, community, and society.

Lions Quest programs integrate the educational methodology of service-learning with social and emotional learning to create learning experiences in which young people have the opportunity to use the prosocial and academic skills they are learning in school to address real needs in the school and community. In the process of developing and carrying out service-learning projects, students make real use of and reflect on their social and emotional skills of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship management, and responsible decision-making competencies. They reflect on which skills they needed, when they applied them, why they were necessary and effective, and where they can refine and improve them. In addition, service-learning prepares students with the skills needed to participate in projects and integrate them with academic subjects. It provides the crucible for applying and assimilating social and emotional competencies in a real-world setting and may be one of the strongest venues for teaching and reinforcing them.

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