

# Observations

## Long-Term Effects of Community Service Programs

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There is a need to develop connections between life in the school and that in the community is a recurring theme in educational literature. Of the many ways for doing this, one of the more prominent is experiential learning or planned opportunities for learning outside the classroom" (Hamilton 1974). Within the experiential learning concept, one variation which has attracted a good deal of attention is youth participation programs or community service projects (Olsen 1946; National Society for the Study of Education 1953; Harnack 1974; Coleman 1974; National Commission on Resources for Youth 1974). Such programs involve the active engagement of youth in attempts to improve local communities, and while these programs may be carried out under the auspices of any community agency, the focus here is on those sponsored by the school. Specific projects might include conducting surveys of community attitudes, making recommendations on environmental problems, and helping older persons and the handicapped.

Numerous examples of community service projects have been reported (e.g., King 1953; Atonstein and Olsen 1974; National Commission of Resources for Youth 1974; Wigginton 1979), but to date there has been little research on the effectiveness of these kinds of programs. What evidence is available suggests that community service projects are effective in helping youth with psychological, social, and intellectual development (Goodyear 1953; Hedin and Conrad 1980). Studies of the effects of such programs, however, have generally involved assessment of student outcomes during or immediately following the project. While such studies offer useful data, the real effectiveness of community service projects would more likely be demonstrated after students have left school and have opportunities to participate in community affairs as adults. Furthermore, "persuasion" effects (e.g., influence of community service projects on attitudes) which are long term differ from immediate effects both quan-

tively and qualitatively; thus comprehensive evaluation requires long-term as well as short-term study (Campbell and Stanley 1963).

The present research was undertaken to explore methodological considerations and to gather data that might suggest directions for further research on the strength of community service project effects considered over time. Within this context, a study was conducted which attempted to examine the attitudes and experiences of adults who had participated in a particular community service project program during the years 1945 to 1949 and to compare these to attitudes and experiences of same-year graduates who had not participated in such a program. Since the study was carried out in 1979, it was separated from the actual program by a period of thirty or more years. For this reason, it was fraught with difficulties in design and implementation. Such difficulties included reconstructing the original program, identifying students who had participated in the program, and gathering information from enough participants to support directional hypotheses. In the end, the latter proved to be a problem in that the responsive population constituted a relatively low percentage of the potential sample. Thus results of the exploratory study must be viewed with caution. Nevertheless, the study was undertaken in the hope of turning up evidence that would warrant further investigation. It is described here in terms of reconstruction of the original program, methodology, results, and, finally, suggested hypotheses and methodological recommendations.

### *Reconstructing the Program*

The initial phase of the research centered on an attempt at comprehensive reconstruction of the original community service project. A brief description of the project was found in *Developing the Secondary School Curriculum* (Leonard 1960), and attempts were made to verify its accuracy and add to the description. Interviews with local citizens and professionals who had lived and/or taught in the community during the 1945-1949 period were conducted to ascertain personal recollections. These proved mostly sketchy except insofar as identifying the name of one teacher involved. In the hope that Leonard may have originally read of the program in professional journals, the *Current Index to Journals in Education* was researched using that teacher's name as a reference. Several references were found (e.g., Moore and Walker 1951; Walker 1951). These sources provided more complete descriptions of the program as well as several names of other teachers involved. Finally, one teacher from the original group was located in another geographic area and contacted.

Telephone conversations and correspondence with this former teacher again provided only sketchy recollection, but did produce a school district document describing the program's purposes and operation between 1945 and 1949 (Moore and Walker 1949), as well as additions to the descriptions made in subsequent years (1952, 1956, 1959, 1961). A search of local school board minutes also turned up a descriptive account of the program in its

first year (1945-1946). These documents, along with journal articles, newspaper accounts, and personal recollections, served not only as verification of the program's existence, but also as curriculum artifacts for identifying objectives and activities.

Finally, it was learned that the graduates of the class of '49 were holding a reunion, and it was hoped that the event might be used to gather additional information about the program. For this purpose, one of the researchers who was employed by the district attended the reunion as an invited guest. It was decided beforehand that the researcher would not directly ask any of the alumni to recollect the program, but would instead listen to conversations in which the community service projects were recollected. Fortunately, one such discussion was encountered, and the researcher was able to ask simple clarifying questions such as "Which teachers and students participated?" "What activities were involved?" This incident yielded some helpful information, such as the fact that the participating students were those in the classes of one particular teacher and that accounts of project activities were written by students for the local newspaper.

In sum, the curriculum reconstruction phase in this kind of research is a complex matter, and standard educational research methodology offers little assistance. The procedures and events described were guided by suggestions from other fields typified by such problems (e.g., Wilson 1975; Kessler 1974; Hsu 1963). In the end, the process may be likened to that which might be used by a detective in reconstructing decade-old events which are related and relevant to a contemporary crime (the detective novels of Ross MacDonald are specifically illustrative).

### *Community Service Project Program (As Reconstructed)*

The community service project that is the focus of this study was carried on in a small Northeastern city. The city had a population of approximately 17,000 in the early 1940s and was expected to grow dramatically since it was surrounded by oil-rich land. The previous development of the city had been relatively haphazard; thus in 1945, the City Planning Commission decided that a master plan should be developed to guide future development as well as redevelopment. Evidently one member of that group suggested that the schools be approached for help in this endeavor. Thus, in the spring of 1945 the commission approached the high school social studies department, and plans were made to involve senior students in development of the city master plan.

Beginning in 1945 and continuing for several years thereafter many, but not all, twelfth graders undertook a series of projects related to the master plan through their Problems of Democracy course (this course was required for that grade). The students who participated had two characteristics in common: they were grouped in the "academic" or college preparatory track and they had the same teacher. Projects undertaken by the participating students were part of the ongoing curriculum of the

course. They included a survey of citizens regarding ideas for the city's future; studies of, and recommendations for, land use, zoning ordinances, traffic patterning, stream and bridge placement; and development of parks and playgrounds. In addition, the students developed an overall relief map showing their plan in detail, engaged in city cleanup projects, prepared newspaper articles about various phases of the project, and made presentations to local government, civic, and service groups.

As near as can be determined, the most substantive work took place between 1945 and 1949, although the project and the continuing development of the city continued to be a social studies topic at least through 1959. In fact, the report ("It Pays to Plan") in its original and revised editions was apparently used as a text in Problems of Democracy classes in the later years. Further, while the students involved were under the supervision of only one teacher, other teachers were involved as resource persons, and some portion of the "community study" concept undoubtedly carried over into classes that were not directly involved.

As noted earlier, community service projects may take many forms, of which this was certainly one. The short-term objective was to help in development of the city master plan, but the various documents gathered indicated that those involved envisioned larger purposes. Specifically, it was suggested that graduates be "missionaries of planning," show interest in community affairs, be sympathetic to the need for citizen involvement in community improvement, and be volunteers for community service projects. The present study was undertaken to ascertain whether the adult lives of the graduates were characterized by those ideas.

### *The Exploratory Study*

Studies of the relationship between adult characteristics and prior school experiences might generally be done in one of three ways. The first type involves longitudinal follow-up studies of graduates of particular kinds of programs. In this case, one might, for example, follow the participants in a community service project from graduation through adulthood, periodically recording their experiences and attitudes. This method has the obvious advantages of program and graduate certainties. In addition, the analysis of data may provide statistical control for events which might supersede original attitudes (e.g., family or occupational influence) as these occur in subjects' lives. This method, however, may suffer from survivor bias (e.g., participants drop out) or from subject bias (subjects are aware of the study). Finally, this method may not participate in present decision making or debate since researcher and subject cannot come together before data are available (Bales and Golder, 1971).

A second method involves the analysis and categorization of school program recollections by adults who have particular characteristics. In this case, the researcher would, for example, identify adults whose lives are characterized by the patterns proposed in community service project goals and ask these persons to identify the kinds of school experiences they had or

which they thought might have influenced their present lives (hoping, of course, that they might mention community service projects). This method offers the advantage of sample certainty since only those persons who actually demonstrate the desired characteristics would be included. In addition, this method may offer the opportunity to gather data nonreactively since participants need not know why they were chosen or that the researcher is focusing on particular school program characteristics. On the other hand, this method is open to serious question inasmuch as it hinges upon subject retrospection, which is highly tenuous as a data source (Yarrow, Campbell, and Barton 1970). In the end, the research would need to involve program reconstruction to verify recollections, an overwhelming task if subjects are graduates of multiple schools.

A third method involves analysis of characteristics of adults who are known to have participated in particular kinds of programs. In this case, graduates of a community service program are studied at some time afterward to ascertain whether their lives are characterized by the goals of the original program. If program reconstruction is done carefully, this method offers the advantage of a strong degree of program and graduate certainty and, like the second method, nonreactive data collection. In other words, the researcher may focus on known graduates of a specific program and proceed to gather data without risking response bias. This method differs from the first (longitudinal) in that it is a cross-sectional technique, is done once rather than periodically, and may be done on the basis of a program that was planned without follow-up investigation in mind. The third method, however, may be disadvantaged by the lack of control for intervening influential experiences. On the other hand, it may be applied as time and circumstances warrant, that is, when there is a need to offer data to expedite decisions about the desirability of certain types of proposed programs, particularly if long-term longitudinal data are not available. The present study is of this third type and is offered as an exploratory sample of its use. Broader consideration will be given to methodological issues in this type of study later in the article.

### POPULATION

The population used in this study fell into three groups. The first group consisted of those persons who had participated in the community service project during the years 1945-1949. The second group consisted of persons who graduated from the same school during the same years, who were also in the "academic" track, but who did not participate in the project since they were assigned to a teacher other than the one directly involved in the project. The third group consisted of persons who graduated during the same years from a high school located in a similar community which had no community service program. The latter community was selected as a comparison setting because its general geographic location, population, potential for oil-based growth, school enrollment, and other features were essentially the same as those of the community in which the service project was carried on.

One problem in selecting graduates from the control setting was that the high school did not have a grouping track labeled "academic" or "college preparatory." This was resolved by computing the percentage of senior students (in each year) from the community project school who were assigned to the academic track and then selecting an equal percentage (for each year) from the comparison school based on class rank. While it would have been more convenient to have had "track" information available, the method used was relatively satisfactory, since those students selected for an academic track are typically also those who are in the upper percentile of class rank.

Furthermore, from the total possible sample for each group a specific population was identified, namely those alumni who had moved away from their respective communities. Persons who move to new communities appear to be more likely to select and volunteer for participation in community activities as a result of interest or skill (Sanders 1966; Barber 1973). On the other hand, those who remain in childhood communities may participate as a result of others' expectations or encouragement, such as family or friends (e.g., joining an organization because a parent had belonged to it). Since one purpose of the study at hand was to determine eventually whether the community service project was related to actual adult participation in community activities, this final sample selection procedure was presumed to offer a more "severe" test of the hypothesis.

#### INSTRUMENTATION

In order to gather data from the sample, a questionnaire was developed. The instrument was based upon the program purposes and consisted of two sections.

(1) The first section included statements pertaining to community service project concepts (e.g., "Schools can play a vital role in improving local communities"). Subjects were asked to respond to each using a Likert-type scale (5 = strongly agree to 1 = strongly disagree).

(2) The second section consisted of two open-ended questions. The first asked subjects to list office(s) held in formal community organizations (e.g., service or civic). The second asked subjects to list nonformal community organizations to which they had belonged (e.g., work on environmental problems, improving community recreation).

The instrument was mailed to subjects with a cover letter from the university department indicating simply that a survey was being conducted of persons who graduated from area high schools since the 1940s and that a response would be greatly appreciated since the instrument was being sent only to a selected group (anonymity and confidentiality were also guaranteed). Of the 465 subjects to whom the questionnaires were sent, 123 (27.5%) returned them. Of these, 46 were from the comparison school, 26 from community service project participants, and 56 from graduates of the community service school who had not actually participated in the project.

#### RESULTS

As noted earlier, the low questionnaire response rate constituted a limitation of the sample study and thus the results must be viewed with extreme caution. In the discussion which follows, the three groups involved in the study will be designated as follows:

(A) Comparison group; graduates of the school which had no community service program ( $n = 46$ ).

(B<sub>1</sub>) Graduates of the school which had the community service program and who participated in it ( $N = 26$ ).

(B<sub>2</sub>) Graduates of the community service program school who *did not* actually participate in the program ( $N = 56$ ).

The presentation of results is divided into two sections, one for each of the hypotheses examined in the study. Since the sample was relatively small, it was decided that statistical analysis would be done at a descriptive level. Furthermore, the purpose in reporting the results is not so much to present a convincing argument in support of the hypotheses but rather to demonstrate the need for further research of this type. Hence, the comparison of groups with regard to the hypotheses is reported in terms of frequencies, means, and percentages of responses to various items included in the questionnaire.

*Hypothesis 1. Adults who participated in community service projects in high school demonstrate higher levels of community involvement than adults who did not engage in community service projects.*

Data gathered in the study suggest support for the first hypothesis. As noted in the questionnaire description, respondents were asked to list formal community organizations in which they had held leadership positions and nonformal organizations in which they had participated. Responses were tabulated by group according to range of mentions per respondent, average number of mentions per respondent, and per-group percentage of no mentions (see Table 1).

TABLE 1/ Analysis of Formal Organization Leadership and Nonformal Organization Participation Mention by Group

Mention	Group		
	A	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>2</sub>
<i>Formal Organization Leadership</i>			
Range of mentions per respondent	0-6	0-5	0-6
Per-respondent average of mentions	1.47	2.23	1.03
% of each group indicating no involvement	17.3	15.3	30.9
<i>Nonformal Organization Participation</i>			
Range of mentions per respondent	0-5	0-5	0-5
Per-respondent average of mentions	0.80	2.19	0.51
% of each group indicating no involvement	26.0	0.03	38.1

The range of mentions per respondent was essentially the same for all groups. However, fewer respondents in group B<sub>1</sub> than those in the other groups had no mentions of formal group leadership or nonformal organization participation, particularly with regard to the latter. In addition, group A had fewer "no mentions" in both categories than group B<sub>2</sub>.

The most revealing difference among groups in the "actual participation" responses was illustrated by tabulation of per-respondent average. In the case of formal group leadership instances, group B<sub>1</sub> respondents averaged substantially more than the other groups. With regard to nonformal organization participation, this was also the case. Again, group A had a higher per-respondent average than group B<sub>2</sub>.

Additional support for the first hypothesis was suggested by analysis of the type of organization in which respondents reported involvement. Group B<sub>1</sub> respondents indicated leadership activity in substantially more service-type organizations (e.g., Rotary or Kiwanis Club), while the other groups concentrated in school organizations (e.g., school board) and professional associations (e.g., medical groups). With regard to nonformal organizations, group B<sub>2</sub> respondents indicated comparatively more involvement in civic groups (e.g., to improve local government or services) than the other groups.

*Hypothesis 2. Adults who participated in community service projects in high school demonstrate higher levels of agreement with program related concepts than those who did not.*

As indicated in the previous questionnaire description, data was gathered in relation to the second hypothesis by asking respondents to indicate their degree of agreement to three statements using a Likert-type scale. The actual responses suggest mixed support for the hypothesis (see Table 2).

The three groups responded similarly with regard to whether community problem study can influence students in later life. Group B<sub>1</sub> respondents indicated relatively greater agreement with the idea that schools should become more involved in community study. Group A respondents, however, indicated greater agreement than either of the other

two groups, with the idea that schools can play a vital role in improving local communities.

Data gathered in the sample study suggest that the purposes of community service projects do carry over to adulthood in terms of actual experiences and, to some degree, attitudes. The idea that the project participants were somewhat less optimistic than others about the prospects of the school's power in community improvement might be explained by the fact that the recommendations made by students for the city planning project were mainly not implemented. The reasons for this were undoubtedly complex but probably embedded in the maze of local politics.

While the data did generally support the hypotheses, it is possible that factors other than participation in community service projects may account for the data. The low response rate in the study may have resulted from self-selection based upon the form or content of the questionnaire or by the likelihood that community activists are more predisposed than nonactivists to assist in projects of all types, including research. Furthermore, during the thirty or more years which elapsed between participation and data collection, the participants naturally must have had a wide variety of experiences. Involvement in higher education, work, and family, social experiences, and other factors may have influenced the current activities and attitudes of these adults. Additionally, the fact that all were placed in academic tracks may have pointed them toward certain kinds of educational work and work experience levels which encouraged participation in community affairs. It is the control of these kinds of factors which poses the greatest design problem in this type of study. It should be noted, however, that other studies (e.g., Hedlin and Conrad 1980) have found similar short-term effects for a cross section of students. Also, unlike those in most community service programs studied, the participants in this study were not volunteers, since assignment to the particular teacher's classes brought automatic involvement. Thus, original predisposed attitudes typically related to voluntary self-selection may not have been factors.

In any event, data gathered in the sample study seem to revolve around three themes. The first theme involves comparison of group data on an attitudinal basis as opposed to an actual or experiential basis. On the one hand, respondents who were not actually involved in a community service project program tended to view such programs at least as optimistically as respondents who had been involved directly, and, in some cases, more so. On the other hand, respondents who had been directly involved reported more frequent instances of the kinds of actual adult behaviors and experiences which are associated with the suggested outcomes of this type of program. Furthermore, those who had attended a school that had no community service project program tended to respond on both attitudinal and experiential items at the same level, and occasionally at a higher level than respondents who had attended the school which had such a program, but who were not directly involved. These data thus raise questions about the nature of outcomes which can be posited with regard to community service programs. For example, do such programs tend to have a positive influence on actual adult experiences, but limited influence on attitudes? If

TABLE 2. Mean Response by Group to Three Statements Related to the Concept of Community Service Projects<sup>a</sup>

Statements	Group		
	A	B <sub>1</sub>	B <sub>2</sub>
Community study can influence later lives	3.9	4.0	3.7
School should become more involved in community study	3.9	4.6	3.9
Schools can play a vital role in solving community problems	4.2	3.6	3.9

<sup>a</sup> 5 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree.

indeed the spirit, but not the practice, of such programs is carried over into proximate student groups, does attitudinal encouragement of adult behaviors make much difference in subsequent life experiences? Also, is attitudinal encouragement rather than actual experience any more influential than no encouragement at all?

A second theme in the data involves the concept of "TINSET" or tendencies-in-situation (Cottu 1949). This idea suggests that as a person grows older, patterns of behavior are at least partially conditioned by previous personal and social experiences even though new contacts and events are confronted. Thus, learned patterns of social identification tend to continue although they may be modified in degree. The data gathered in the sample study suggest support for this concept at least with regard to actual experience patterns in adult life. Again, however, several questions arise: To what degree, if any, does this phenomenon differ across various kinds of community service programs? Is the later life pattern a function of the particular nature of the earlier program experience? Under what conditions, if any, do attitude orientations persist?

The third theme involves the time lag between the original program participation and the study of effects. In the case of the sample study, this period was in excess of thirty years. Since the questionnaire did not request time-related responses, it is not known whether reports of experiences reflected the entire period of adulthood or some segment of it, for example, a recent portion. Thus, a question occurs as to whether the quantity or quality of behavior indicators are related to specific time periods following participation (e.g., after five years, ten years). Further, one might wonder whether the attitude-related effects might vary over time as general social attitudes toward schools and communities vary (Yarrow et al. 1970).

These considerations and the data gathered in the sample study suggest several hypotheses which warrant further investigation:

(1) Participation in community service project programs promotes attitudes toward community participation, but the nature of the attitudes (positive or negative) depends upon such factors as the nature of the program and perceived success of the program.

(2) The degree to which community service program participation influences later life choices and attitudes is dependent upon the nature of particular types of such programs. For example, programs involving students in local government may promote effects different from those involving physical assistance to older persons.

(3) Emphasis in school programs on community service as a concept only, rather than through actual participation, has little effect on adult choices that act on that concept.

(4) Community service project programs that need not and do not let community government expose participants to political complications—the nature of which influences later attitudes about the potential effect of citizens in local government. For example, students may perceive that local political activity is, in some cases, insulated from grass-roots citizen participation or beyond the knowledge and skill of citizens.

(5) The degree to which students involved in a community service project program perceive it has impact on the local community influences the degree to which they believe schools in general can play a role in improving local communities. For example, if the program is seen as unsuccessful, participants will feel that schools cannot impact local communities.

(6) In addition to those, the three hypotheses in the exploratory study should be further investigated using a larger sample.

## *Methodological Considerations*

The dearth of research along the lines of that discussed here offers little by way of guidelines for methodology. The hypotheses suggested earlier warrant study, and the experiences encountered in the sample study may offer some guidance. The time lag between the actual program and follow-up studies in program-related, life-choice research makes such studies, in anthropological terms, etic rather than emic (Kessler 1974). In other words, the researcher must necessarily, by time, be an outside, rather than inside, observer of the program. Therefore, the program reconstruction or verification stage is crucial. For gathering information about original programs, the following sources may be helpful:

- (1) persons who participated in the program as students;
- (2) persons who served as teachers, supervisors, or coordinators of the program;
- (3) school documents such as class lists, school board minutes, program proposals or reviews, school newspapers, and the like;
- (4) published accounts of the program in professional literature written by participants, observers, or others who may use program accounts to exemplify a curriculum approach;
- (5) local media reports, particularly newspapers; and
- (6) records of public community meetings at which aspects of the program may have been considered.

As mentioned earlier, the type of methodology used in the exploratory study offers the advantage of being applicable as time and circumstances warrant. In general, the method falls under the rubric of quasiexperimental design (Campbell and Stanley 1963) inasmuch as the researcher can control the timing and sample data collection, but not the timing and population for the experiment itself (in this case, the original community service project). At a more specific level, the exploratory study fits the type which Campbell and Stanley labeled "static-group comparison" in which two groups are compared for effects assumed to be related to an event (the community service project) that only one group has experienced. While this design may also allow for control of instrumentation and timing, it is weakened in terms of internal validity by problems in selection of comparison groups and maturation effects. For these reasons, results of studies using this design must be interpreted with caution, particularly where they are to be generalized.

Retrospective studies of the type reported here could be greatly enhanced by cases where the randomness of comparison groups could be authenticated and where maturation effects could be carefully considered through collection of appropriate data from participants (the consideration of geographic mobility used in our exploratory study illustrates this concern). Another level of enhancement could be attained in terms of the data collected from the cross-sectional design if they were supported by those collected in longitudinal studies, since the disadvantages of each design would be offset by the advantages of the other (Campbell and Stanley 1963). Another source which needs to be considered is that pertaining to time lag, compressed time, and other time-related design issues (Baltes and Goulet 1971; Goulet 1975). The lack of long-term-effect studies, however, presents the initial problem in refining design features, that is, methodological considerations beyond those discussed here apparently, must await further studies of the kind described in this article. One can only imagine the strength such studies in refined form could add not only to the thinking about community service projects, but also to the wider field of curriculum inquiry as well.

This article has explored hypotheses and a methodology related to the study of adult life experiences and attitudes subsequent to participation in community service programs. In addition, data gathered in a sample study of this type were reported. Even though a particular kind of program served as a focus, the concepts presented certainly have broad implications for the study of long-term effects of curricular approaches or arrangements.

The cyclic nature of curriculum movements suggests that program types may differ over time more in degree than in kind. Further, as renewed efforts are made to employ old curricular concepts, debates and claimed outcomes are repeated. In order to construct rational arguments in these situations, there is a need to examine the long-term effects of "exhumed" general program types. It is suggested here that adult life-pattern studies of graduates may offer a promising direction for such efforts.

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