

Environmental Service Learning- Experience of a few Indian colleges

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Academic Service-Learning

(in a nut shell)

- **Experiential education with reciprocal learning-** application of classroom knowledge to community and vice versa, mutually benefiting the service providers and the recipients
- Provides a venue (or platform) for critical thinking, analysis and group interaction with **structured time** for *reflection*-talk/write (both formal & informal)

Key elements of Quality S-L

- **Integrated** into academic curriculum and apply academic skills to **solve real life problems**
- **Thoughtfully** organized to address **genuine community needs**
- A **Collaborative effort** of 'stakeholders' - students, teachers, administrators, NGOs and service recipients-in designing & implementation of service project
- Provides time for **reflection** before, during & after the service deliberately connecting curriculum, personal socio-cultural and civic aspects
- **Evaluation** by all partners to assess progress & realization of set goals

Environmental Service Learning (ES-L)

-an effective pedagogy

- Hits 3 mangoes at one stroke-
 - Effective learning
 - Meaningful service
 - Improved Environment
- Makes all the difference in learning, career options, life style & behavior, attitude & outlook of all involved
- Net result-**Better persons, Better world and Better society**

Institutions (Indian) involved in ES-L

Institutions	S-L Environmental project
St. Ann's College of Education Mangalore	Environment & health awareness through community based S-L
Stella Maris College, Chennai	Eco initiatives for environmental conservation and health management
Madras Christian college, Chennai	Systemizing recycling methods & reviving life of recyclers
Women's Christian College, Chennai	Plastic bag menace-an assessment, sensitization & mitigation program
Union Christian College, Aluva	Green campus Green minds

Profile of academic ES-L in institutions

Participants & beneficiaries S-L courses	S-L activities	Community benefits	Student learning	Remarks
St Ann's College Mangalore (Teacher training) Students, school children, parents & rural community S-L courses- Geography, Environmental Education, Biol.Sci	Environment & health awareness program-field study, rally-preparation of advocacy materials on SWM& distribution, Demonstration of waste segregation, organic manure preparation, & setting up eco-garden	Got convinced of the need for safe disposal of waste Learnt to convert waste into wealth-paper/cloth bags, organic manure preparation	Got sensitized & convinced of the need for SWM Obtained practical skills in waste segregation, recycling, manure preparation and eco gardening Took initiative in planning & execution of eco projects	Community -very welcoming and supportive Students were convinced of the need to promote healthy and clean environment in personal and public life; S-L an enriching experience

Profile of academic ES-L in institutions

Participants & beneficiaries	S-L activities	Community benefits	Student learning
<p>Union Christian College, Aluva students & faculty School children, campus & neighboring community S-L activities coordinated by CES and Dept of Psychology-nodal centre</p>	<p>-Installing vermin - compost units, rainwater harvest units -develop vegetable garden, medicinal & ornamental plants collection, maintenance & distribution of seedlings and campus greening</p>	<p>Campus greening & beautification, Enhancing campus biodiversity Become aware of good environmental practices Gain monetarily by growing vegetable garden, ornamental plants</p>	<p>-Gain hands-on experience in eco action -Opportunity to know campus & community needs and involve in fulfilling them</p>
<p>Madras Christian College Chennai- students & faculty of Chemistry, NGO, formal & informal recyclers , target village community S-L Course- Environmental Chemistry</p>	<p>Survey & pilot study on SWM & recycling plastics e waste Study of pollution levels Generating public awareness</p>	<p>Know-how of sorting & recycling waste Become aware of health issues and safety precautions</p>	<p>SWM of local community- recycling methods to convert waste to wealth, socio economic and health issues of recyclers</p>

Profile of academic S-L in institutions

Participants, courses & beneficiaries	S-L activities	Community benefits	Student learning	Remarks
Women's Christian College, Chennai Students and target community S-L course: Env't.Biol, Env't.Studies,public Health & Hygiene	Survey on environment & health hazards of plastics among college and neighborhood community	Very positive & cooperative	Exposure to community living in simple houses yet greener spaces Learnt stringent usage of water Became conscious of reducing plastic carry bags	Community-initially reluctant later became more open and cooperative Students' concerns-safety while working in the community
Stella Maris, Chennai Chemistry students, school children and local community S-L course-Pollutants & adulterants	Environmental & health awareness to school children and families in neighborhood-skits, posters, pamphlets, discussions, lectures & quiz	Interaction with students triggered positive attitude towards safeguarding env't and spreading env't'al concerns	Real-time experience in water & food analysis to benefit the community Improved communication skills Gained knowledge on env't.health issues	S-L activity in communities in which the institution has built a rapport is easier & effective

Other environmental service projects

Institutions	Service projects	Activities	Community benefits	Student learning
<p>Christ University, Bangalore Participants- students volunteers</p>	<p>Solid waste management</p>	<p>Producing documentary and screening, Campus sorting & segregation of waste, organic composting Paper recycling unit</p>	<p>Nearby slum women get livelihood in paper recycling</p>	<p>Environmental consciousness, social responsibility, Contributes to carbon reduction - green campus initiatives</p>
<p>Scottish Church College, Kolkata Participants- campus community and neighborhood school children</p>	<p>Waste disposal management towards green campus School interface program(off campus) campaigns, exhibitions</p>	<p>Establishing Vermin composting units Setting up eco clubs Active campaigning for water conservation & plastic free envt</p>	<p>College and neighboring school campus becoming greener Community eco-conscious</p>	<p>Personal life style changes in usage of resources-water, electricity, reduced use of plastics, students turned environmental campaigners</p>

Other Environmental Service projects

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<p>Bishop Heber College, Trichy Students from various depts & faculty</p>	<p>Community health awareness program Campus air quality and SWM studies</p>	<p>Measurement air quality and noise levels on campus, fluoride mapping, carbon foot printing, Vermin composting, environmental action Among self help women groups</p>	<p>Became aware of dental flourosis, Plastic waste mgt, vermin composting and flourosis</p>	<p>Hands on training to acquire skills in environmental methodologies irrespective of disciplines Concern for envt and societal health</p>
<p>Karunya University, Coimbatore Faculty students, neighboring community, visitors</p>	<p>Solid waste management-developing a model</p>	<p>Data collection, Analyzing type & quantity of waste and suggest strategies for reduction, recycling and conversion</p>	<p>Awareness on solid waste mgt Campus follow up action-waste segregation, and processing facility being set Shop keepers sensitized on the issue</p>	<p>Problem of pollution and waste mgt relevant to the immediate context-change of attitude and sensitivity</p>

Other Environmental Service projects

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Christian College, Katakada PG students, Faculty & health care agency	Water quality assessment	Analysis of water samples	Became aware of health issues related to water contamination	Developed water testing skills Concern for water quality
Salesian College, Darjeeling College and neighborhood community	Solid waste management	Awareness program- community & individual families Water testing	Awareness of safe drinking water and Waste mgt	Students became environmentally conscious and action oriented

Tender moments..touched hearts..making a difference...Impact of S-L on students

- Became **environmentally conscious** to minimize water usage, live a simpler life style, reduce use of plastic carry bags and not to litter the campus
- Got **impressed** by families living in small houses yet having green spaces
- Took back the **local wisdom** of community to class room
- **Improved ability** to apply theoretical knowledge to life situations
- Started promoting **healthy environment** in their own household and neighborhood
- Became **concerned** of the waste strewn on the streets with swarming flies

Tender moments..touched hearts..making a difference...Impact of S-L on *Students*

- Improved **leadership** skills-planning, organization, time management, sense of responsibility and accountability
- Got motivated for **hard work**
- Felt the **joy of helping others** and a sense of satisfaction
- Developed **positive values** –sharing, cooperation, tolerance
- **Developed human skill** to interact with people and greater self awareness
- **Developed specific skills** related to eco-action-water/food analysis, vermin composting, recycling methods etc

Tender moments..touched hearts..making a difference...Impact of S-L on students

- **Change** of negative stereotypes and accepting others who are different
- Better understanding of the **complexity of social issues** ie: poverty, illiteracy and unemployment
- Increased sense of connection to the target community
- Some developed concern for the elderly in the community & volunteered their time.
- Better understanding of the intricacies of Community service

Tender moments..touched hearts..making a difference...Impact of S-L on students

Eventually

- Academic learning became more **meaningful and practical**
- **Deepened understanding** of the topics related to environmental service projects
- Widened their **career options**
- Became more **civic responsible**

Challenges in adopting S-L Approach

- In some institutions, the system does not lend for incorporating S-L into curriculum with credits
- Both faculty & students find it hard to spare extra time outside class hours for service
- Lack of administrative support in few cases
- Safety of women students while immersed in community service (in slums/ remote areas)
- Sometimes new teachers are not aware of S-L methodology (lack of orientation)

Factors favoring S-L adoption

- All institutions are already engaged in Community service- what is missing is direct link to academic study and reflection on service experience
- Partnership with NGOs working in a given community
- Administrative support in terms of finance & personnel
- Cooperative effort of more departments-not single department or single teacher
- Leadership- encourages and recognizes the extra effort put in service- Institutionalizing S-L
- Committed & experienced faculty-periodic training of teachers and proper orientation of student leaders a must

Factors retarding S-L practice

- Time constraints
- Resource crunches
- Lack of incentives / recognition and administrative support
- Accessibility & response of target community
- Networking with NGO's & Communities
- Political intervention

A few practical tips to faculty for effective S-L

- Plan S-L as **optional** activity incorporated into a course or a project (for interested or motivated students) with extra credits / certificate of recognition (Better not to make it compulsory)
- Take care to **link** S-L goal, outcome, reflection and assessment
- Take active part in planning, initiating and monitoring S-L activities,
- Be responsible to conduct **reflection sessions**, evaluation and remember to take back the community experience to the class room.
- Encourage students to lead, organize and work with flexibility, involvement and commitment

Some glimpses of student reflection

- S-L experience was interesting since it was activity based
- Triggered my interest to involve in more such awareness programs
- Improved my communication skill and removed the fear of interacting with people
- S-L gave me a chance to disseminate my Chemistry knowledge
- I feel lucky to do this course
- Wonderful opportunity to get educated as well as to educate others
- Excellent experiential learning opportunity

Finally to conclude.....

“Environmental S-L is a proven pedagogy for purposeful learning and meaningful service. It has the power to transform self & society and the physical world we live in”

Let us as educators and environmental activists commit to universalize S-L as an integral part of Asian Higher Education.

Thank you