

An empirical assessment of self-esteem enhancement in a high school challenge service-learning program

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Empirical data collected from a total of 187 elementary and secondary school students were analyzed in this article to assess enhancement of student self-esteem in a service-learning program. The elementary school students were split into treatment and control groups based on their involvement in a greenhouse construction project. At the high school level, two experimental groups were each characterized by Zoophonics tutoring and student service to the Delano Historical Society. Control groups were identified equivalent to these treatment groups. Coopersmith self-esteem inventory and its school-academic subscales were adopted to assess the effect of each service-learning project. While no significant gender differences were found among the three experiments, the Zoophonics tutoring was more effective than the greenhouse construction and Delano history projects in improving student self-esteem and academic performance. Empirical guidelines were developed based on these findings to further enhance the existing service-learning projects.

Service learning has been an innovative approach to improve school practice across the nation (e.g., Conrad & Hedin, 1989; Crossman, 1989; Krug, 1991; Patterson, 1987). Following the former President George Bush who signed the National Community Service Act in 1990, President Clinton endorsed the National Community Service Trust Act in 1994 (Zoophonics News, 1996). In response to the federal initiative, the California Department of Education supported the Children and Adults Living, Learning, Nurturing and Growing through Experience (CHALLENGE), a K-12 service-learning program at Delano, California.