



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## SERVICE LEARNING BENEFITS ALL

Service learning is a strategy for integrating community service with academic instruction. That is, student learning should be enhanced while community needs are met, and links between research and educational practice should be established.

The Adult Education Department of Shelton State Community College (SSCC) joined the College of Education at the University of Alabama in a service learning partnership that benefits students at both institutions. Several education courses at the University have a service learning component that students can complete by working with adult learners in a credit-bearing educational experience. These university students participate in an organized service activity, becoming tutors for students in the community college's adult education classes (thus meeting a community need).

The SSCC Adult Education program offers GED preparation, graduation exam help, and skills remediation courses and services. The program focuses on assisting adults in obtaining knowledge and skills for employment and self-sufficiency. Classes are free to the learners, but all learners must participate in an intake/orientation session prior to enrolling in the class.

The mechanics of the partnership include:

- University students learn about service learning, the duration of the service experience, and the skills required. The university professor outlines the course requirements.
- University students receive structured training that addresses their role at the program site; responsibilities and limitations; knowledge of the issues, dynamics and culture they will find at the site; appropriate attitude, behavior, and attire; and appreciation of the dignity of each person being served. Training is provided by a representative from the community college's adult education department who visits the education classes at the university to explain the program's intake process and other issues, such as code of conduct, attendance agreement, learning styles, goal-setting activities,

assessments, and the like. Confidentiality and respect for the adult learner are stressed.

- University students sign up for a placement, select an adult education class to attend, and agree to visit the class on a regular basis. They meet with the adult education instructors and are paired with an adult education learner. The pair works together in an assigned subject area.

- University students sign in and out each week, and their hours are tracked for their professor. They keep a record of their attendance, with personal reflections from each visit.

As we are just entering our second year of the partnership, substantial amounts of hard data are not available. However, anecdotal reports are plentiful. University students receive practicum experience in an educational setting while the adult education students benefit from individual instruction. The partnership benefits the learners in both programs. It is an extremely cost-effective way to enhance the educational experience for all learners, as neither institution has a financial obligation to the other or to the partnership. Students from both institutions have developed critical thinking skills; many have become interested in additional volunteer activities.

This collaboration allows our institutions to work together to share human, educational, and technical resources. A comprehensive action plan continues to be fine-tuned each semester, but the partnership clearly provides a unique way to allow students from both institutions to participate in connected learning.

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## PLAYING CHESS ON THE INTERNET AND LEARNING

If students can have fun as they learn, they have even more motivation to make the effort. I have found that playing chess on the Internet is fun and can be a very useful instructional method. It can help students learn, develop logical reasoning skills, experience some opportunities for positive character development, and improve writing skills.

Playing chess develops logical reasoning. Logic is the art and science of inference; to play chess well, one must be able to draw valid inferences continuously throughout a game. For example, before making a move, a thoughtful chess player must consider carefully what could happen next, whether the current move is in his or her best interests, and plan future moves.

Character development is part of the “hidden curriculum.” One’s character is the disposition to act in morally important ways, such as having respect for oneself and others, and taking responsibility for one’s actions. In playing chess, a player’s true character is often exposed. The Internet is notorious for trash-talk, as handles provide anonymity. Chess players win and lose, and learning to win and lose graciously is a live issue in every game. For example, when a piece is moved, it cannot be taken back—and is especially difficult to accept when it becomes obvious that the move was not in the player’s best interest. These situations can help identify areas and developmental opportunities for practicing personal responsibility.

Writing skills can be improved if, as students play chess, they keep a chess diary. Students improve their games by analyzing moves and identifying critical turning points. If students are required to keep a diary of their games, they will develop both chess-playing and compositional skills. In a number of my writing assignments, students are required to write about lessons for life—e.g., to discuss the principles of logic and ethics involved in playing chess; to describe how chess imitates life, developing descriptive abilities and organizational skills.

Playing chess on the Internet has proved to be a successful instructional strategy. Students discover that learning can be fun, and they have the evidence to prove it.

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