

Service-Learning Project Sharing

A high quality example of a curriculum-based local or global outreach effort made possible by Learn and Serve Ohio, Partnerships Make a Difference, and a caring community of K-12 teachers and students

Learning with Purpose . . . Serving with Passion . . . Creating a Positive Legacy

Project Title: Dawson's Doggie Treats

"People just like us can be stuck in situations that are hard to get out of, so that is why we did this project."

Big Idea: The growing economic crisis has drastically increased the number of homeless families. In investigating this issue, students at Emerson Elementary found that an additional concern for these people includes how to care for their family pet after losing their home. This project focused on what can be done to assist those who are struggling to care for the needs of their families, including their pets.

Teacher: Cynthia Walsh, Emerson Magnet, Westerville City Schools, Westerville, Ohio

Students: 23 5th grade students

Curriculum Area(s): Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, 21st Century Skills.

Community Partner(s): Westerville Area Resource Ministries, Westerville Church of the Messiah, Capital Area Humane Society, Michelle and Dawson

Planning and Implementation Process

Investigation

How/why did you choose to do this project? What significant need(s) or issue(s) did your students address? What made the idea for this project compelling/inspiring? How did you get them intellectually/emotionally engaged?



In the planning stages, Mrs. Walsh hoped to incorporate a service-learning project into the standards needed to complete the economics portion of social studies. The students were asked to give input on social concerns that they felt were important and community needs that they saw. In this discussion stage two common areas emerged: homelessness and animal welfare.

Several video clips concerning each of the topics were shown to the class. One, in particular, dealt with the plight of animals belonging to people who have found themselves in situations leading to homelessness. The students were noticeably affected and touched by the subject matter, many of them relating the problem to their own families and pets.

Preparation

How did you and the students get ready? What learning was involved? What partnerships did you develop?

Students were visited by Michelle, a well-educated and caring woman who was herself faced with homelessness. Prior to the visit, students planned questions to ask pertaining to the topic. Michelle told the class her story of hardships that led to her situation and of how she found Dawson, her dog who helped her to remain strong during her struggles.

The students asked several enlightening and probing questions about how Michelle dealt with her situation, and they found that circumstances that lead to homelessness do not always stem from the stereotypical ideas that many of them held.

In this discussion, the class also asked how Michelle cared for herself and for Dawson. The project plan had developed to create a dog biscuit manufacturing company in which the treats would be made, sold, and donated by the class. Michelle agreed that this would be a helpful way of serving the community to address the need, and told the class that since she has gotten back on her feet, she now donates pet food to shelters and food banks.

The class was also visited by a representative of the Capital Area Humane Society. Students learned about the facility, what services they provide, how they help the community, and other pertinent information.

In planning the outreach portion of the project, students found recipes for homemade dog treats, did taste tests at home with pets, and participated in math activities to determine cost effectiveness and the number of treats that would have to be produced to reach their donation goals.

Action

Service-learning allows students the chance to change the world—sometimes in small ways, sometimes in much larger ways. Please explain the meaningful service activities in which you and your students were involved.



With the help of the kitchen staff at the Westerville Church of the Messiah, students made dozens of batches of dog treats. During this process each student had assigned positions within the production/assembly. Students also were responsible for creating their own labels for packaging, advertising and selling of the dog treats at the end-of-the year PTA picnic. Michelle and Dawson joined the class at this event. It was a touching and happy reunion.

Sales of the treats generated funds that were donated to Capital Area Humane Society, while remaining treats were donated to Westerville Area Resource Ministries (WARM) to be distributed to families in need. The students took a walking field trip to WARM to deliver treats to the facility.

Reflection

Written, oral, artistic, visual, dramatic and other forms of expression . . . all these are important ways of reflecting. In what ways did your students reflect on their experiences and the learning that was a part of it? What were a few of their key observations and insights?

Reflection was an important and ongoing process. Students used reflection in deciding upon what project to choose and how to approach the issue. They used the information gathered in the presentation from Michelle and Capital Area Humane Society in deciding what could be done to serve the community. After doing the at-home taste tests with their own pets, students used reflection in analyzing all of the data they collected up to that point in deciding what recipe would best fit their goals for donations.

After the completion of the project, students completed a reflection sheet in which they commented on the benefits of the project and what it meant to them. The comments made by the students reflected a real growth in empathy and understanding. Students truly grasped how universal homelessness is, how it can happen to anyone, and how important it is to make a difference on a local basis.

Demonstration/Celebration

Along the way and at the end of the project, how did you celebrate the impact of your efforts? In what ways did students demonstrate their new learning?

The baking of the treats was a celebration in itself. The whole class really enjoyed themselves on production day. Many commented on how fun it was and of how accomplished and proud the day made them feel.

The sale of the dog treats at the PTA picnic was a great time, and we were fortunate to have Michelle and Dawson join us at the event. Walking to WARM and donating the remainder of the dog treats was a fun excursion, and the ladies at the facility were welcoming, as always.



Assessment/Evaluation

To validate service-learning and spotlight key results, we need to gather information about student learning and attitude changes, as well as the impact on local/global needs and issues. What are some ways in which you were able to document your students' progress and the impact of their efforts?

We documented progress by assessing how well the students carried out key project tasks and assignments: hosting an interview with Michelle and the Capital Area Humane Society; performing specific jobs by students in the process of creating a business group; creating appropriate labels for the dog treats; completing an economics unit aligned with the state standards; and writing formal letters of thanks to those assisting in the project. One student commented on how the project improved confidence by saying, "If I had an idea I just had to take chances and put it out there without knowing if people would like it."

The real impact of the project came from the energy that was produced. There was a definite verve and excitement that showed in the work being done. This kind of impact is one that can have rippling effects for years to come and can never truly be measured.

Curriculum Connections

High quality service-learning connects service with the curriculum. A variety of state and local standards can be addressed through the investigation, preparation, action, reflection and celebration/demonstration/evaluation phases of service-learning.

So . . . how did your students use their academic knowledge and skills to "make a difference?" How did they become scientists, writers, artists, researchers, etc. to support this project? What curricular areas were addressed through this project? What were some specific standards or learning objectives that were covered? What kinds of interdisciplinary planning and learning occurred?

The project was based around completing a social studies requirement for economics. The basis of the project was creating a business in which students became producers of a good. They learned about advertising, goods and services, production, opportunity costs, and several other aspects dealing with this area of study.

In addition, students used arts skills in the creation of labels for their product and advertisement posters. Math skills were used in discovering cost effectiveness of different recipes for dog treats, and in figuring the amount of goods able to be produced with the available funds to reach the donation goals. Language arts skills were also exhibited in the process of investigating the community need, interviewing guest speakers, and creating labels and letters.



21st Century Skills

There is an increasing emphasis on helping students develop and demonstrate 21st Century Skills (Ken Kaye et. al.) Service-learning provides an excellent way to incorporate these skills in an authentic way. Please check the themes and skills that were addressed in your project.

- Global Awareness
- Pinancial, Economic, Business, and Entrepreneurial Literacy
- Civic Literacy
- Health Literacy
- Creativity and Innovation
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Information Literacy
- Media Literacy
- ☑ ICT (Information, Communications, and Technology) Literacy
- Plexibility and Adaptability
- Initiative and Self-Direction
- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
- Productivity and Accountability
- Leadership and Responsibility

Please provide at least one specific example or anecdote of how one of the skills was evident in your students' work.

Civic Literacy

There was a noticeable connection between the students and the social concern from the very beginning of the project. Many were able to relate to the issue because of their own family pets. Shortly after the investigation portion of the project, many students commented that they did not realize how homelessness can touch anyone, and several stereotypes were erased. This raised students' social awareness immeasurably.

Several comments were made about the production day, in which students assembled batter and the dog treats. They were responsible for taking great care of the facility and tools made available to them by a nearby church, which was gracious enough to allow the project to be completed in their kitchen. Everyone took great care and pride in their work.

Impact: Kids Using Their "Best Stuff" To Make a Difference

Curricular skills/knowledge and 21st Century Skills are certainly part of students' "best stuff." In addition . . . how did your students use their individual gifts, passions and strength of character in carrying out this project?



Since well over half of the class owned a family pet, they connected to the project immediately and felt very passionately about the subject. Creativity and individualism came out in the planning stages.

Many students voiced strong opinions during the process. Negotiating and compromise became a must. In the final stage of the project, several students showed great leadership at the end-of-the-year

picnic, where they were determined to sell the dog treats in their efforts to raise donations for their cause.

Do you think your students felt empowered by this project? What "voice" and leadership roles did they have? How did they "take charge" of certain aspects of the project?

The class, as a whole, was given the opportunity to make decisions about the project during each phase. Students were encouraged to contribute their ideas about naming their company, what recipe to use for the dog treats, how to create the packaging labels for their product, and so on. Their individuality and opinions were evident in all of these aspects.

How did they experience and demonstrate a stronger sense of community (within the classroom, locally and/or globally) and/or civic engagement?

The issues surrounding homelessness and animal care -- the combination of the two -- was something that not one of us had really given much thought. It was an eye-opening experience for all. The teamwork involved for the production day showed great determination and desire to see their through all of their efforts.

What aspects of the project made your students especially proud?

So many comments came from the students about making the dog treats. They enjoyed the baking process thoroughly. It was something that not many of them realized they could do. They were so pleased with the fact that they were able to do something new, make something from scratch, and have it be beneficial to others at the same time.

From the students' perspectives, what difference did their efforts make?

The truth of the matter is that many of us view homelessness as something that happens to people because they did something wrong, that they were a bad person at some time, or that they were lazy and didn't want to work. This just is not the case for many. The project opened the eyes of the class to the reality of homelessness and the effects on families and pets.

Quotes from students: "Just because you are homeless does not mean that you are a bad person." "I got to work with the people in that situation and I understand that doing this project is right."



Are there any ways you haven't yet mentioned in which the project benefited your students? Your school? The community/world and those you were trying to help?

Aside from the main topic of homelessness relating to pets, the students learned a great deal about animal needs and the place of community action in this area. Awareness was raised about the strains of animal cruelty and neglect.

RIGOR, RELEVANCE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Willard Daggett and others have identified rigor, relevance, and relationships as key components of school reform. Include any further thoughts you have re: how your project reflected and enhanced these elements for your students.

Rigor

How has service-learning helped your students achieve at a higher level and to a greater depth?

The project created activities that allowed for hands-on learning and superior emotional connections to be made. This kind of learning cannot happen with textbook and paper-pencil work.

Relevance

How has service-learning helped make connections to the real world and developed knowledge and skills that matter in a new and deeper way?

Being able to meet and discuss homelessness and pet care with community members brought the subject to life. There is a vast difference between reading about an issue and getting a firsthand account based on experience. This gave students the motivation to act and brought their school work to life because they felt real purpose in what they were learning.

RELATIONSHIPS

How did the students develop a stronger sense of community among themselves and with the larger community?

In the classroom, there was a divide in opinions when it came to certain aspects of the project. The students learned that compromise was a part of working towards a common goal. As for the community, they showed such enthusiasm for the new relationships that formed during the project and it was exciting to see.

And Now, Some Numbers . . .

Please estimate the time spent on your project:

Number of Project-Related Hours per Student: 25

Number of Students: 24



Total Estimated Hours of Service and Learning: 600 Money Raised (if applicable): \$50 plus donations

Next Steps/Call to Action

What things might happen next as a result of this project? How might your students continue to "create positive legacies" in response to this issue and others?

The students learned that there is a need that exists, and they found a way to help. One aspect that was surprising to some was that food pantries often allow pet food donations to be made that are hand packaged. Some students said that they were interested in purchasing bulk pet food and repackaging it in smaller portions to continue donating to the local food pantry.

Other Insights/Your Own Reflections

Can you describe one or more of the "magic" or "aha" moments that happened as part of this experience?

The presentation/interview with Michelle and Dawson was so inspiring. The students were so incredibly respectful, asked deep and probing questions, and showed fantastic maturity in dealing with difficult subject matter.

What impact did the project have on you as a teacher?

I have high expectations of my students, and they rose to the occasion

Other words of wisdom/advice for other teachers . . . What did you learn? Is there anything you might do differently next time?

There are wonderful things that can happen when you strive to make a difference. At times it may seem like nothing is happening, but if you trust in the process of service-learning, the results can amaze you.

Contact Info:

Name: Cynthia Walsh

Position: 5th grade teacher

School: Emerson Magnet School

School District: Westerville City Schools

School Address: 44 N. Vine St., Westerville, OH, 43081-1530

School Phone: 614.797.7080 Email: WalshC@wcsoh.org