Emerson's Children's Safe Drinking Water Project

Written by Beth Dalin and Mary Taylor, Emerson World Languages and Cultures Elementary Magnet School, Westerville City Schools — Westerville, Ohio

> "Kids have a magical power to make adults stop and listen. I don't know what it is, Mrs. Dalin, but it works every time."
>
> *–- Abby, 3rd grader at Emerson Magnet School*

What?
A few fast facts . . .

- **Students and teachers wanted to help children around the world have safe drinking water.**
- **250 students in grades 1-5**
- **Teachers: Beth Dalin, Mary Taylor and Christina Goldner**
- **Curriculum Area(s): Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, Science, Fine Arts, Interdisciplinary**
- **Community Partners: The Greater Cincinnati Foundation, Proctor & Gamble**

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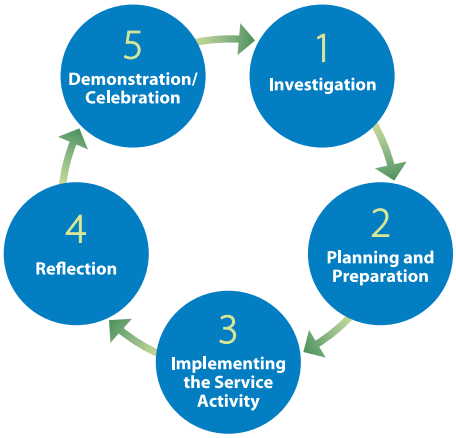
The Big Idea

The students at Emerson World Languages and Cultures Magnet School, learned about the need for safe drinking water around the world and realized that a small group of committed children can make a big difference.

Investigation

After reading an article about a partnership between *Proctor & Gamble* and *Scholastic InSchool*, two reputable companies, we decided to join their efforts. Our students addressed the need for safe drinking water in countries when they learned how many **children's deaths were caused by drinking contaminated water**.



Preparation

We began our **Children's Safe Drinking Water** project during *International Education Week* with speakers from the local water company (*DelCo Water*), as well as the *Franklin Soil and Water Conservation District* and *SWIFT (Soil and Water Information For Teachers)*. We learned that **access to clean water in the United States is rarely a problem** because we have water and sewage treatment plants. We have tax-supported municipal infrastructures that support distribution of clean water and collection and treatment of dirty water.

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Referencing the *"Water is Life" Global Water Awareness Mini-Unit*, we shared investigations with water to demonstrate how much water is on the earth and how much is available for human consumption. We posed the question, **"Why does more than 1/3 of the world's population NOT have access to clean water?"**

Our next step was to ask students to **research where in the world access to clean water was most limited**. *Water.org* gave students a list of countries that are most profoundly impacted by lack of access to clean drinking water. Because of the recent earthquake (January 2010), students decided to add Haiti to the list of the website's five countries.

Action

Children **used information from their research to create display boards of the six countries**: *Haiti, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Honduras, and India*. The students came to the conclusion that there were common problems that made it difficult or impossible to access safe drinking water. Later, the boards became valuable tools to **educate others in the community** about the lack of safe drinking water in these countries.

Next, groups of **children brainstormed ways we could help**. First graders felt that sending large truckloads of bottled water might work. Third graders wanted to send money to build water treatment plants in our six needy countries. Finally a teacher shared information about the program that *Proctor & Gamble* started with its PUR water purifier kits.

We purchased PUR water purifier kits, and children witnessed the **simple process of changing dirty water to clean water**. The excitement grew as the students watched the brown murky sediments in the polluted water settle to the bottom of the jug. The clean water was poured off the top, and all of us enjoyed a taste of the now purified water. Children discovered that a PUR packet was really **"a portable water treatment plant in a pack."** The children suggested that all we needed to do was send PUR packets everywhere in the world where clean water was needed. We agreed that **raising money to donate to Proctor & Gamble Children's Safe Drinking Water Fund was the best choice**.

Students decided that **creating awareness and educating the community** were the first steps we needed to take before we could start our fundraising efforts. Students at different grade levels took responsibility for **preparing slide shows, display boards, posters, brochures and maps** to "take the show on the road." The art teacher led students in a school-wide

RIGOR . . . *I was blown away with the amazing power point presentation about the safe drinking water project during the International Night assembly. I loved how it included statistics and was created and presented by students. I had to run out to the water table right after and purchase a bottle of water to help.*

-- Tina B., parent of Emerson student

Rigor, Relevance and Relationships

Service-learning has demonstrated the potential to provide a curriculum that is rich in rigor, relevance and relationships—three elements of learning that play a crucial role in the school improvement process, according to Bill Daggett and his associates at the *International Center for Leadership in Education*. Consistent with these elements, research clearly shows that students who participate in high quality service-learning experiences become more engaged in learning, more committed to their communities, and more empowered to make positive life and career choices.

International Center for Leadership in Education, www.leadered.com

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water bottle label contest. Each label was designed to remind people of our mission. The winning labels were placed on bottles of water that were given as thank you gifts for all who donated to our fund.

Reflection

After student water teams presented at different community and school events, we discussed the most effective ways of getting people in the community to stop and listen to a description of our mission and to make donations.

Students updated the informational brochures based on the questions and concerns the public brought up at some of our events.

In order to **create an *ANIMOTO* video**, students were required to reflect on what they had learned. The video highlighted our mission and the goals we had set for our project. This became an inspiration for others in the community to get involved.

RELEVANCE . . . *As teachers, we realized how many curriculum areas are addressed in this one project. The students' eagerness to learn about these countries, their enthusiasm and how they can make a difference was infectious.*

-- Beth Dalin

"The students were hungry for more information, excited to share the facts they had learned with other students, and driven to do something about it. The fact that only ten cents could make a big difference to a child somewhere else was something that our young students could appreciate, since a dime here in the United States is really nothing." Kirsten H. (Emerson parent)

Celebration/Demonstration

Our students celebrate what they've learned each time they share this project with others. **Their animated faces tell how excited, committed, and proud they are of their accomplishments.**

Along with other projects, *Emerson's Children's Safe Drinking Water* project was recognized in June of 2010 at *The LEAGUE*, a national non-profit organization that promotes service-learning and youth philanthropy.

Representatives from the school traveled to Cleveland to accept an award on behalf of all Emerson students.

The two students who represented *Emerson's CSDW* at *The League* spoke about the project and shared our *ANIMOTO*.

"Viewing that student-made video brought two LEAGUE officials to tears."

-- Vicki Jarrell, Principal

A typical service-learning project includes five components:

Investigation: **Teachers and students investigate the community/world problems that they might potentially address. Investigation typically involves some sort of research and mapping activity.**

Planning and Preparation: **Teachers, students, and community members plan the learning and service activities, and address the administrative issues needed for a successful project.**

Action: **The "heart" of the project . . . engaging in the meaningful service experience that will help students develop important knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and will benefit the community.**

Reflection: **Activities that help students understand the service-learning experience and think about its meaning and connection to them, their society, and what they have learned in school.**

Demonstration/Celebration: **The final experience when students, community participants and others publicly share what they have learned, celebrate the results of the service-learning project, and look ahead to the future.**

Assessment **is part of all activities to ensure that the learning and development that occur through service-learning can be measured, and to help diagnose student needs, provide feedback, and improve instruction.**

K-12 Service-Learning Project Planning Toolkit. Created by RMC Research Corporation for Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse

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Assessment/Evaluation

Students summarized information that they learned about various countries and about *CSDW* and Emerson's mission in a *PowerPoint* presentation. They designed a portable display for school and community events and presented to City Council. Students shared facts they had learned in their brochures and on water labels.

Students role-played effective ways to get passers-by to first stop and listen to their message and ultimately make a monetary contribution.

Students counted and tracked how much money was collected and how many children were impacted.

Curriculum Connections/Standards

Math: The students calculated exactly how many children got clean water a day, week, or year as a result of the money the Emerson students collected, and they graphed the results.

Language Arts/ Reading: Classes read about the countries that did not have access to clean water. Students wrote paragraphs about the challenges each country faced. These challenges include geography, poor infrastructure, corrupt government, lack of education, numbers and types of natural disasters.

Social Studies: Students mapped the location of the countries and researched the geography/ topography of the land, climate, and flooding issues.

Science: Classes talked about the water cycle and the small percentage of the earth's water that is available for drinking. Teachers created demonstrations to show locations of inaccessible water such as in salt water, ice, and ground water.

Relationships . . . *It has really given my son a sense of accomplishment that he can help change the world.*
-- Jennifer L., Emerson parent

Art: Students designed labels for water bottles that were passed out as a gift in return for a donation to our cause. The labels highlighted the problem of lack of access to clean water and also illustrated our mission—donations to PUR, an organization that distributes water purification packets and tools to clean water in areas around the world.

K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice

Meaningful Service: Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service.

Link to Curriculum: Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.

Reflection: Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society.

Diversity: Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.

Youth Voice: Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.

Partnerships: Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.

Progress Monitoring: Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.

Duration and Intensity: Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes.

Source: National Youth Leadership Council (www.nylc.org)

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21st Century Skills

The *Partnership for 21st Century Skills* has identified the elements described in the sidebar on the right as the critical systems necessary to ensure 21st century readiness for every student. Though *Emerson's Children's Safe Drinking Water* service-learning project clearly demonstrates connections to many of the skills, the following outlines one skill in detail.

ICT (Information, Communications, and Technology) Literacy: Students used the information they gathered from various sources about six different countries, water use in the United States, and Proctor & Gamble's PUR technology to create a Power-Point presentation. They also de-veloped a script to accompany the PowerPoint. This became an effective educational tool that we used at many of the venues where we presented, including a City Council meeting.

Impact: Kids Using Their "Best Stuff" to Make A Difference

Different classrooms contributed to the project in different ways. Some **created world and country maps**, others **made brochures**. Some **created displays**, others worked on **PowerPoint and ANIMOTO video**, and all contributed to the **water bottle labels**. Many students traveled to various community events and other schools to **lead presentations** about the need for safe drinking water.

"I was so surprised and pleased to see my child take the risk of talking to complete strangers about the Water Project. I have known my child to be reserved and a low risk-taker when it comes to speaking up in public. To see her engage perfect strangers and eagerly share her knowledge was exquisite. I can now not only hope for her to be a confident public speaker as an adult, but actually envision those moments. What a great attribute, which takes not only confidence, but practice. I did not expect her to have this chance in third grade!"

-- Elysabeth, Emerson parent

The students were very much **empowered by the knowledge they obtained** and the **impact they felt they made** on these needy countries. Each water team took pride in how many people stopped at their booth and how much money they collected at an event.

After we researched the six countries, we learned just how lucky we are here in the U.S. and how some people are victims of corrupt governments, poverty, and lack of education.

Our Emerson students believe they are able to share the responsibility for getting safe drinking water to others who need it.

The students were especially proud when they got people to take time to listen to their message and make donations.

21st Century Skills addressed and demonstrated by *Emerson's Children's Safe Drinking Water* service-learning project:

- ☑ Global Awareness
- ☐ Financial, 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
- ☑ Flexibility and Adaptability
- ☑ Initiative and Self-Direction
- ☑ Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
- ☑ Productivity and Accountability
- ☑ Leadership and Responsibility

Source: The Partnership for 21st Century Skills (www.p21.org)

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Next Steps/Call to Action

We will continue to **educate the community** at information booths throughout the summer and will expand the learning community by visiting different venues during the school year. We plan to invite *Otterbein University* students to help us find other ways to spread our mission and develop further learning opportunities for our Emerson students.

As a result of our efforts, *Proctor & Gamble* has agreed to send a representative to our school to share his/her experience with the *CSDW project*.

There are many programs that support access to clean drinking water. Find one that works for you!

Other Insights . . . Reflections of the Teacher

The students realized that they have a "magical" power to attract the attention of adults. They realized their persuasive powers were critical to the fundraising campaign.

We learned that everyone takes part in a school-wide project in his/her own way. Some students, teacher and parents will take on bigger roles than others, and that's ok.

The parent of one of our 3rd graders, Robin, had a major role in helping in the classroom. She facilitated the research of the countries that were most needy and she shared how it impacted her—"*After reading about how the children in those six countries suffered due to the lack of clean water, I couldn't sleep at night. I still see their sad faces.*"

> "As teachers, we realized how many curriculum areas are addressed in this one project. The students' eagerness to learn about these countries, their enthusiasm and how they can make a difference was infectious."
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> *— Beth Dalin, Emerson World Languages and Cultures Magnet School*

So What?
Results and impact . . .

- 450 service and learning hours contributed
- Sent PUR packets to a number of places around the world where clean water was needed
- $2,000 raised to benefit those who need safe drinking water

Now What?
A Call to Action:

Now that you have read about Beth's students and their efforts to help children around the world have safe drinking water, what could you and your classmates do to make a difference? Just like Beth, Mary and their kids, there are people everywhere making a difference. Let us know what you and others in your community are doing by posting your information on . . . www.legacyevillage.ning.com

To learn more about how to help children affected by the lack of safe drinking water, log on to . . .

Emerson websites:
www.purwater.weebly.com

www.teachertube.com/viewProfilephp?user=Bdalin

In addition, you may find these sites helpful:

P&G Children's Safe Drinking Water:
www.csdw.org/csdw/pur_packet_at_work.shtml
Reliance:
www.relianceproducts.com/pur_water.html

What Ideas Can You Add?

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