

Service-Learning Project Sharing

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

Project Title: *Positive Plants*

Big Idea: The issues being addressed in this project were hunger and sustainability. Students at Hanby Arts Magnet School grew herb plants to donate to the local food pantry. This happened while they learned about the plant growing process, created artwork, and created great community ties.

Teachers: Kimberly Perrone and Sara Stevenson-Thiegs, Hanby Magent School, Westerville City Schools

Students : 52 4th grade students

Curriculum Area(s): Language Arts, Art, Science

Community Partner(s): Westerville Area Resource Ministries, Westerville Garden Club, Mayco Ceramics

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?

The idea for this project came about through a long series of events. It began with finding out that Westerville has a community garden in which a portion of the produce is donated back to the community food pantry managed by *Westerville Area Resource Ministries (WARM)*. Discussions between Mrs. Perrone and the AmeriCorps Service Learning Fellow (provided by the “Growing Together Service-Learning Network” and ServeOhio) started at that time. The hope was to somehow get the students involved in the garden, but the question was, how?

One day a discussion began with Mrs. Thiels about her yearly science project in which students learn about the entire life cycle of plants in a hands-on project. This sparked the idea of having students grow some kind of vegetable plant that could be used for donation to WARM. The Service-Learning Coordinator at Otterbein University had been contacted about the project idea and suggested that growing herbs would be a way of growing a sustainable food source. To merge the science aspect with art, Mrs. Perrone worked on modifying a ceramics lesson so that students would create glazed pots in which the herbs would be donated.

Once the ideas were introduced to the students, we discussed gardening and what they already knew about it: what we would need to complete the project (knowledge, skills, supplies, support); how we would obtain the necessary supplies; and how the project would benefit others. Mrs. Perrone specifically held several class discussions with students reflecting upon on what feelings are evoked when using your knowledge, time, and skills to create something and then giving it away for the benefit of others.

Preparation

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

The students prepared for this project in phases. In the regular education classroom they were introduced to the project idea through discussion and brainstorming. We discussed what they already knew about plant growing, gardening, what plants need to survive and thrive, what benefits they bring, and how to obtain the supplies we would need to see the project through.

In art, the students discussed the purpose of the project, the goals, and how creating something and giving it away made them feel. Much reflection was done during this portion of the project. Students were emotionally invested in the process of creating pottery for the plants that they would be growing.

In science, the class did investigative work in learning the entire life cycle of plants. They grew their own mustard plants from seeds and completed journals and charts while learning all of the terminology and technical aspects involved.

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.

The process of growing herbs to donate to WARM was assisted largely in part by the Westerville Garden Club. The women from the Garden Club came into the art class and taught the students the intricacies of planting and growing herbs. A good deal of problem solving was involved in the herb growing, and the students learned a great deal about how different plants have different needs. The herb growing process took teamwork, and students took turns caring for the plants. They investigated

the use of the herbs they were growing, wrote out care instructions for the recipients, and created a cookbook to go along with the donated herbs so that the recipients could use the herbs in cooking.

During the time that the herbs were being grown, there was a cold snap and some of the plants did not survive. The members of the Garden Club were kind enough to purchase additional herbs to reach the donation goal. During the final week of school the students took the surviving plants and the newly purchased herbs to WARM and presented them, along with the care instructions and cookbooks. The herbs were then made available to the clients of WARM to take home and enjoy.

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 done during several steps of the project. These reflections were completed in conversations during each phase. Students were able to transfer learning from art to science and vice versa. In this process the students made connections between the two classes and discussed the meaningful work they were doing, how they were helping others, and the ways in which their learning and their work was being integrated into meaningful service.

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?

Students had a celebration and reflection after walking the donations to WARM. They completed reflection pieces, discussed the project and the work that they did, and expressed how much the relationships created with the Garden Club and their new learning impacted the project. Learning was demonstrated in the process of growing and caring for the plants, and in creating the care instructions.

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?

Students were assessed academically in the science aspect in that they were required to keep journals during the process of growing their plants. They were responsible for learning the technical aspects of the plants and were assessed in the curriculum areas as specified in the curriculum standards. Additionally, students were evaluated in art for the process of glazing pottery as this was a regular part of the art curriculum requirements.

As for the impact of the service, the value was stated in the presentation of the plants to WARM. The ladies at the facility were enthusiastic about the donations and stated that it was a wonderful project that the clients would truly enjoy. They said that they try to make fresh food available as often as

possible and that they would like to be able to do so much more often, but that at times it is simply not possible. The need for proper nutrition is of high importance, and WARM is there to provide as much in this area as possible to supplement the diets of those who find themselves in need of assistance. Providing fresh fruit, vegetables, and herbs is really important in providing good nutrition, and the students helped to make this possible.

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 plant growing in science fulfilled the state standards and requirements that are currently in place for the fourth grade. Students used investigative skills and observation in the process of growing the mustard plants in science class, and in growing the herbs in art class. They used language arts skills in creating the care instructions, creating the cookbooks, and in other aspects of the project including reflection. They used creativity and artistic abilities in the process of creating the glazed pots used in the donation of the fully grown herbs.

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
- ☑ 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

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

Civic Literacy; Leadership and Responsibility

Students learned about the services provided by WARM and the societal need for assisting others in fulfilling nutritional needs. Students were highly motivated in the care of the herbs and were given specific jobs in the process of growing. They were responsible for watering and had to learn the specific needs of herbs.

Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

There was a very difficult aspect of the project that came about that was unexpected. The pottery used by the class was generously given to us by Mayco Ceramics. However, we did not realize that the pots were not able to properly drain in the manner that is needed for the growing of herbs. With the help of the members of the Westerville Garden Club, the students were able to come up with a solution to this problem and created a way in which the herbs could properly drain while still being able to use the glazed pots.

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?

Some of the students were familiar with gardening prior to the project. Some shared stories of family gardens, planting, and flowers. They were also able to create the designs for the pottery glazing as they wished to express their own creativity.

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 students worked on creating the labels, care instructions, and the recipes books. Students were involved in the concept of the project very early on and were able to give input all along the way.

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

It was really a great learning experience working with the Community Garden Club. Although students learned a great deal in science about plants and their growth, they were able to learn even more about the process through their new relationship with the members of the club.

What aspects of the project made your students especially proud?

The students were really pleased with the plants that they were able to grow and the fact that they were able to give them to WARM. They did have disappointment when some of the plants did not make it, but this had been touched on early on in the project and we had discussed the fact that we were growing extras in case we could not get all of the plants to grow properly. The students were really excited about the plants that the Garden Club donated, and even though these plants were purchased, it made the class happy to be able to give a larger donation.

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

The idea behind the project was to be able to do something other than a typical food drive. In donating herbs, the students gave an item that could be reused and cared for to create a sustainable food source. They really understood that their efforts were different than just collecting canned goods, and it made the concept of donating to a food pantry have a more profound impact.

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?

For the first time ever, WARM has acquired a plot of land at the community garden. They will be growing their own vegetables and herbs for the food pantry. They needed volunteers for this project. When the class donated the herbs, they were all invited to help with the garden over the summer. Some of the students sounded interested, so hopefully they took that information and were inspired to help over the summer. The invitation to volunteer was also given to the Garden Club members. This effort will hopefully provide a greater variety and more nutritious options to those who need the help of the food pantry.

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 regarding 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?

By expanding upon the basic learning and creating a service opportunity, the students used the knowledge that they had gained and put it into action that had profound meaning to them and to others in the community. They learned not only from their textbook materials, but also from community members who shared with them years of experience and know-how.

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?

This project gave the students a new way to look at using the skills that they learn in school to create a better world. Many of them were not aware that donating fresh fruits, vegetables, and herbs was a need that existed. They learned that one way they could serve the community was to take the skills that they acquired in science and apply them to growing items which could be donated to fulfill this need.

Relationships:

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

The class as a whole was devoted to caring for and growing their herb plants. They felt strongly about putting forth a great amount of effort into the plant project. They all had jobs and a schedule to maintain in the process. It was a little disappointing to them when some of the plants did not survive, but they were very proud of the work that they put into the plants that made it. It truly was a group effort. The relationship formed with the Garden Club was especially beneficial to the class, and the students learned so much from the members of the club. The project really could not have gone off as well had it not been for the Westerville Garden Club members who put in such a great amount of effort and time into helping.

And Now, Some Numbers . . .

Please estimate the time spent on your project:

Number of Project-Related Hours per Student: 32

Number of Students: 50

Total Estimated Service and Learning Hours: 1,280

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 are now aware that they can volunteer their time during the summer to assist in the growth of other fresh food items at the community garden plot being cared for by WARM volunteers. Many of them shared this information with their families. In addition, there was discussion of the Westerville Garden Club creating a children’s gardening club in conjunction with the school in the future.

Other Insights/Your Own Reflections

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

It was extremely touching just how helpful the Garden Club was in donating so much to our efforts. The students really appreciated everything that they did, especially purchasing fully grown herb plants to help replace the ones that did not survive due to frost. The kids were so happy to have these to donate to WARM and were really excited on the day that we walked to the center.

In all, the project was a huge culmination of lots of great ideas coming together in just the right way. All of the pieces fit just right in the end, and it will be exciting to see if this leads to bigger and better projects in the future.

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