

## 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: *Reading Buddies*

*"I got to be a part of little kids liking to read." -- Imani T., 8<sup>th</sup> Grader, Buckeye Middle School*

**Big Idea:** Illiteracy is a huge issue within our country. Illiteracy rates in this country are estimated at 14 percent of our population, ranking us approximately 27<sup>th</sup> out of 205 countries. Pam Reed's 8<sup>th</sup> Grade RICA (Reading in the Content Area) class at Buckeye Middle School decided to speak up and fight against this issue.

**Teachers:** Pam Reed, Buckeye Middle School, and Susan Turner, Cedarwood Elementary School, Columbus City Schools, Columbus, Ohio

**Students :** 23 8th grade students

**Curriculum Area(s):** Reading Fluency; Self-Selection in Reading; Prediction/Connecting to Text; Picturing Text

**Community Partner(s):** Columbus Metropolitan Libraries, Ohio State University, and Cedarwood Elementary School

### 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?*

All of the students in Pam Reed's 8th period RICA (Reading in the Content Area) class at Buckeye Middle School were specifically chosen by teachers as being extraordinarily low in reading. Due to poor

performance on tests (Ohio Achievement Assessment and teacher evaluation) and lack of reading material in the home, these students entered 8th grade as non-readers. They simply hated reading. Through survey and discussion, Pam learned that their hatred of reading spanned back to childhood--these students do not have happy memories of reading.

When these students realized how their non-reading affected them and their futures, they wanted to give back to the next generation. Many of them have younger siblings who would also be headed down the same path: difficulty in school, low grades, poor test performance, and lack of self-esteem. The students recognized the illiteracy issue that exists within the United States. They studied and learned about consequences of not being able to read. The students stood up and spoke out against illiteracy and decided to help fight the problem.

### **Preparation**

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

Pam's class of 20 8th graders practiced reading storybooks. They took their role as reading buddies to younger students very seriously and anxiously anticipated reading to kindergartners at Cedarwood Elementary (a feeder school for our middle school on the south side of Columbus). The 8th graders gathered different picture books and videotaped themselves reading the stories. They then watched the videos and analyzed their strengths as well as areas in which they needed improvement. The students repeated this process several times, perfecting their ability to read picture books aloud.

A librarian from the Columbus Metropolitan Libraries came in to work with the students. The librarian helped the 8<sup>th</sup> graders with reading tactics as well as selecting age-appropriate books. Once the students were able to comfortably read the books aloud without flaws and with intonation, the students took a field trip to Cedarwood Elementary School. We worked with Susan Turner, an exemplary kindergarten teacher at Cedarwood, to plan a unit around her class needs. The unit was on friendship, and the 8th graders created questions about friends they could ask the 5-year-olds to help build bonds. The students had to arrange for parents to act as drivers, enlist a grandmother to bake cookies for our new buddies, and make many arrangements in the classroom to be able to go to Cedarwood.

### **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.*

As a part of the "Reading Buddies" service-learning project, the 8th graders got to practice and improve their reading, while the kindergartners gained from being read aloud to by the older students. Both parties benefited greatly from the experience. The 8th graders return to the elementary school every month to continue the program. The 8th graders goal is to become positive role models for these little people -- even attending their kindergarten graduation. But the secret twist is that the 8th graders are really helping themselves.

These 8th grade students are not only helping themselves, but they are also helping the community by positively impacting the future. By reading to kindergarteners and helping them improve their literacy, the 8<sup>th</sup> graders hope that the younger children will enjoy reading and continue reading throughout their lives. The students in Pam's RICA class have learned the importance and need of reading to children aloud.

Society is often ready to give up on these students known as "non-readers." Yet the students themselves have not given up. Through this service-learning project, they see the need to learn how to read, and they have given their time to helping these younger children understand this as well.

However, the students have done more than just read to these children. They have started to form relationships with these younger children. The 8th graders made holiday cards for the kindergarteners. Each student included a picture of themselves reading to their "reading buddy." The kindergarteners in return wrote thank you notes to the 8th graders. This generous deed not only made the kindergarteners feel loved and cared for, but also helped them practice their everyday writing skills.

### **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?*

Students reflected in journals on their experiences and insights throughout the service-learning experience. They were provided with a list of self-guided reflection questions and were able to respond to those questions that stood out the most in their experience. The following are excerpts from the students' journals:

*"When you help others in your community/world, it makes the world a better place. It can also be fun sometimes." -- D'aundra A.*

*"I actually wanted to come to school today. It was better than I thought it was going to be." -- Pernell P.*

### **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 8th grade students celebrated and demonstrated their learning throughout their experiences with their reading buddies. When the students traveled to Cedarwood Elementary school, they got to demonstrate their knowledge and all of the work they had previously done in the classroom. In addition, they got to share the picture books they chose with the kindergarteners, and they got to use their new reading skills to make an impact on the younger students.

The 8th graders also celebrated their learning by connecting with the kindergarteners socially as well. The 8th graders shared cookies with the elementary students during their reading experience and formed relationships with the younger students. The 8th graders became role models for the kindergartners, and they realized that these younger children looked up to them. These 8th grade students wanted to be the best role models that they could for the younger generation.

### **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?*

These 8th grade students developed a love of reading that transcended what happens in a typical remedial reading classroom. Every day, when they had “story time”, Pam’s 8th graders, many of whom were revisiting 8th grade or had failed a previous grade, were genuinely excited. The Buckeye Middle School principal, Marianne Minshall, and Pam took turns providing homemade snacks and treats for the students to provide a warm and happy memory. From this experience, many students started checking out picture books from the classroom library to read to younger siblings. They also began reading short novels in homeroom for their own enjoyment. A post-project survey revealed that their feeling about reading improved 86 percent! Many of the former reading “haters” became lovers of books and reading!

### **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?*

Because students were practicing reading strategies, their own reading fluency, strategy and comprehension improved dramatically. Some of the Common Core Standards they addressed during this service-learning project are:

- Understand dialogue through the use of “voices” in the books
- Analyze point of view through questions
- Make predictions and inferences from text
- Recognize shifts in mood
- Integrate visual information from pictures

## 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

*There is an increasing emphasis on helping students develop and demonstrate 21<sup>st</sup> 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.*

### **Leadership and Responsibility**

Because the students Pam teaches in her RICA class were hand-picked due to their low test scores and identifying themselves as non-readers, the project itself surprised her. When the 8th graders said they wanted to “save” younger students from the tough lives they felt they had because of their non-reader status, it touched Pam’s heart. Most of the students in this class have discipline and attendance issues and, not surprisingly, low grades. Almost half of these students have been retained. Watching these young men and women come alive with reading when matched up with their reading buddy was amazing.

Brad had always been a non-reader who told Pam the first day school that she would never get him to like reading. When they worked with the kindergartners, he had not one but TWO buddies. He was also one of the “feature” readers – reading a picture book to all of the kindergartners with excited voices and enthusiasm. Darrin’s attendance issues were not a problem during the service-learning project -- he never missed a “Reading Buddy” day. Olivia, who is painfully shy, came out of her shell and smiled non-stop with her buddy.

## **Impact: Kids Using Their “Best Stuff” To Make a Difference**

*Curricular skills/knowledge and 21<sup>st</sup> 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?*

Pam’s students have big hearts -- they just don’t always have the outlet for their compassion. When they designed the “Reading Buddies” program, their main concern was to keep kids from going down the same path they did . . . acknowledging that without reading their lives have been really hard. All too often we, as adults, call these “soft skills” -- compassion, empathy, kindness, the ability to take action, collaboration. The truth is that these are skills for life -- the true skills that take time to mold and create.

*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?*

According to Eric Jensen, based on his brain research in low-socioeconomic children, we are only hardwired for six emotions: sadness, joy, disgust, anger, surprise and fear. Students have to be explicitly taught the “true” skills: humility, empathy, compassion, cooperation and gratitude. By seeing their efforts really make actual changes in the kindergartners lives, I feel the students were not merely taught these skills, they experienced and intuited them for themselves.

*What aspects of the project made your students especially proud?*

There was one moment in particular when Pam’s students saw that their work and compassion transferred into real, viable learning experiences for their buddies. The 8th graders made “readable” picture books for the kindergartners using the Word Wall words their teacher provided us. They also had some of the kindergarten readers as examples. When the 8th graders saw the kindergartners walk in to the library with their caddies of reading, writing and art supplies -- and chief among them was the book their buddy created. They were speechless (which is tough for an 8th grader). They thought it was so “cool” that the little people actually read and used the books! So the kindergartners read the book to their buddy -- while the 8th graders were grinning from ear to ear!

### **And Now, Some Numbers . . .**

*Please estimate the time spent on your project:*

Number of Project-Related Hours per Student: 30

Number of Students: 23

Total Estimated Hours of Service and Learning: 690

### **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 8<sup>th</sup> graders are going to read with their little buddies one more time this year and will also be attending their kindergarten graduation. The students have created bonds that have provided these little ones with positive role models. The impact of the experience will carry on with both the 8th graders and the kindergartners.

### **Other Insights/Your Own Reflections**

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

When Ke’Ron, a 6’2” young man who boxes and plays football, was reading a book about kittens to Ray, a self-proclaimed reading hater, and they were intensely practicing strategies, voices, and questioning techniques -- Pam was brought to tears. These students are selfless. They were determined and dedicated to making an impact in their community. The students are helping to make a difference in the education of our future youth. They are helping to fight against the educational gap that exists. The 690 hours that these teenagers put into this project demonstrate how the students have truly given back to their community.

#### **Contact Info:**

**Name:** Pam Reed

**Position:** 8th Grade RICA Teacher

**School:** Buckeye Middle School

**School District:** Columbus City School District

**School Address:** 2950 South Parsons Avenue Columbus, Ohio 43207

**School Phone:** 614.365.5417

**Email:** [tinytapir3@aol.com](mailto:tinytapir3@aol.com)