

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: *Westerville Special Olympics Advocacy*

“Something about the project I will never forget is when we interviewed people with developmental disabilities only to find out that they like the same things as we do and are just regular people like us. It was very fun and we got to know them better.”

-- Emerson Magnet School 5th Grader

Big Idea: Special Olympics is a national program that benefits people with special needs and affords them the ability to participate in competitive sports. Emerson Magnet School students found that there is a Westerville Special Olympics (WSO) branch and that there is a need to make the community more aware of the local program. One 5th grade class decided to advocate for WSO by creating brochures/placards to distribute in the community.

Teacher: Bethany Morris, Emerson Magnet School, Westerville City Schools, Westerville, Ohio

Students : 23 5th grade students

Curriculum Area(s): Language Arts, Social Studies, Addressed standards for International Baccalaureate Curriculum, 21st Century Skills

Community Partner(s): Westerville Special Olympics, Local Professional Graphics Designer (who wishes to remain anonymous)

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 began with very purposeful planning to complete a service-learning project. The process began by having discussions about what areas and concerns were meaningful and interesting to students. In brainstorming sessions, the class came up with several issues based on personal experience and community knowledge. After the class chose the most compelling areas of interest, planned presentations were scheduled for representatives of community agencies to talk with the students.

Westerville Special Olympics Local Coordinator, Alice Wilson, talked to the class about the program and why it is so important to the community. Students were shown pictures of athletes, told about the special events that are held, and watched videos about the challenges faced by those with special needs. The class really benefited from the fact that they were able to meet Alice's daughter, Kim, who is a Special Athlete. Kim's enthusiasm and love of life inspired everyone and sparked a real desire to spread the word about the program.

Preparation

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

The class researched background information about Special Olympics. They found out how it came about, the purpose, and what inspired the program. They discovered the need for everyone to be allowed the opportunity to be involved in athletics, not just for the health benefits but for camaraderie and socialization as well.

In coordination with the WSO Coordinator, Special Olympics athletes and parents visited Emerson. The fifth grade class conducted interview sessions with them. They discussed the program and asked questions about what personal meaning the program has, how it has changed participants' lives, and what needs existed to improve it. Students discovered that one of the program's primary concerns is enhancing outreach to make those people who could benefit from Special Olympics more aware of its existence in Westerville.

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.

It was decided that to advocate for WSO, students would create brochures/placards to place in the community. The goal was to create informational sheets to increase awareness, and to make these available to parents of children with special needs.

The project was approached from a business perspective, with WSO being our client. Teams were formed. Small groups of students were given jobs, such as writer, group leader, artist, and technology expert.

Using the information learned in the investigation and interview process, students decided on what key ideas needed to be included in their brochures. The class learned about brochures and related design concepts with the help of a local graphics designer. The brochures were created using technology and 21st century skills. In another session, the brochures were critiqued and improvements were made.

After the student groups completed their designs, all files were turned over to the WSO board. The board is deciding which designs and design elements best fulfill their needs. Printing and placement of the final design is still to be determined. The conclusion was that the most beneficial location for placement of the placards would be in pediatricians' offices. Students will possibly write persuasive letters to doctor's offices to request assistance in getting the information to those who could most benefit from it.

To supply WSO with funds to cover the costs of printing, we created another business. Students used art work created by a local artist to have greeting cards printed. The students advertised the greeting cards, created posters and signs, made announcements, and sent out newsletters to let the school population know about their efforts. The students were responsible for receiving orders, counting money, ensuring quality control, monitoring distribution, and managing other business procedures. We made this a part of our economics unit, which included learning about assembly line procedures and the different functions of business.

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?

We used reflection every step of the way. During each session, we discussed what we had previously learned and discovered. We connected new information and ideas and used these to improve our efforts. Communication skills and productivity were increased, and students showed a great amount of empathy.

Some students completed surveys to reflect upon the project. The general response was very positive, and the students really enjoyed working in teams and with others from the community, especially the WSO Athletes.

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?

Once the placard designs were complete, they were presented in class to the WSO coordinator and board. These are being used in the decision making process for advocacy and publicity.

This project also inspired students to participate in "Spread the word to end the word": (retarded). Students made up skits and props to perform for the entire school. During lunch periods, they put on

the skits to explain how they had gotten to know a Special Athlete, and how using the “r” word is hurtful and mean. Stickers were given to all students in the school to remind them to pledge online to “end the word.”

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?

After hosting a client interview to establish our goals, we documented student progress by creating guideline checklists for each group, creating placard drafts based on these checklists, having the drafts critiqued by a professional graphic designer, editing them, presenting them, and then raising funds to print final placards for distribution in the community.

WSO was extremely pleased with the students’ efforts. They will help us continue to measure community impact over time.

Meanwhile, the students were certainly able to articulate the project impact on them. 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.” Others felt it helped them with in leadership and teamwork.

The large and very noticeable theme was that students gained a great deal of respect for these Special Athletes, whom they otherwise may never have encountered. That is a social lesson that they will never forget and will shape them for years to come.

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?

From the beginning, we used skills involving language arts and communication. In choosing a project, we brainstormed ideas and organized our thoughts through a variety of verbal skills. We used decision-making strategies in deciding how best to serve the WSO community.

The main curriculum areas covered involved the research of Special Olympics and the interviewing process that students went through. We used literacy skills in creating our interview questions and taking notes during the process. Students also used editing skills in the making of brochures.

In our efforts to raise funds, we created a business based on social studies/economics requirements. The students were responsible for production, advertising, quality control and other areas.

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.

Social and Cross-Cultural Skills

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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?

There were several aspects of the project that allowed students to develop their individual strengths. We worked as teams, and everyone had a part in contributing to the main project. Some students were very adept at the research aspect, while others were more easily able to handle the interview process. Those with an eye for design were given that role in the brochure-making, while others used leadership skills to keep teams on track.

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 really fell in love with the athletes. This was inspiring to them; to find out how alike they are. When it was decided to participate in “Spread the word to end the word”, the students really took charge. They put everything together, and so quickly. With a great motivation like that behind them, the day went so well. It was a great thing to see.

In what ways did they develop a deeper appreciation/understanding of other viewpoints, perspectives, circumstances and/or backgrounds?

The amount of compassion and empathy developed by some of these students is overwhelming. They truly got a grasp of the importance of equality for those with special needs and realized that these individuals should have the same opportunities afforded to others.

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

The students were very proud of the fact that what they were doing was going to help in reaching out to the community and getting the word out to other kids who may be able to benefit from the Special Olympics program.

What aspects of the project made your students especially proud?

They were especially proud of their abilities to be change agents by using their skills and learning new things.

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

Several themes came from the interview sessions that took place with the athletes. The students really understood the need to have a sense of belonging and the importance of friendships that are formed through the organization. There was a true feeling of being able to help in this project so that other children could find out about WSO and get involved.

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?

The efforts put forth so far are evident in the relationships that were formed in the process of the project. The larger impact will come after the school year has ended. We hope that the greatest fruit of our efforts will come after the placards have been disbursed within the community. Hopefully then, the students’ work will be able to reach those who can truly benefit from the Westerville Special Olympics.

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 learning was significant on many levels. Using this activity gave students the opportunity to meet real people they could help and have a great impact on. The interaction that they experienced was evident in the motivation that they showed in completing the project, especially the research/interview process and the creation of the advocacy placards.

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?

The students were able to create something that will go out into the community and will reach people. Not everything we do has the potential to have an impact on others. The knowledge that their work would be in the hands of others sparked more creativity and drove them to work harder.

Relationships

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

There were opportunities to work in groups throughout the project. This can be a difficult task even for grown-ups. The students showed great maturity in working as teams. But, the greatest thing to see was how much they enjoyed being able to form friendships and get to know the Special Olympic Athletes.

And Now, Some Numbers . . .

Please estimate the time spent on your project by completing this formula:

Number of Project-Related Hours per Student : 21

Number of Students: 23

Total Estimated Hours: 483

Money Raised (if applicable): \$600

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?

We already have another project underway. The students will be excited to see the completed brochure that is chosen by the WSO board. Once that has been decided upon, the next step is to get the placards out into the community. Some students have shown interest in attending WSO events. Simply by telling others about the work that we have done will be of benefit.

Are there any ways in which other young people or adults can take action to help address the need/issue you targeted?

The Special Olympics is a well-established program, but because of the situations that people with children of special needs face, they may not have the resources or knowledge of local programs. The Special Olympics always needs advocates, volunteers, and above all else fans. BE A FAN!

Other Insights/Your Own Reflections

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

I got goose bumps when I saw the difference in the student brochures before and after they met with our graphic designer. It was amazing that they were fifth-graders producing such a professional-looking product!

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

It made me proud to see the students work to advocate for this project (we started with many project ideas that needed to be narrowed down) and then to work so hard to bring it to fruition.

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

Trust in your students. Never doubt the willingness of community members to help. Talk about your project with everyone, and you will be surprised by who joins your efforts!

*“Age has nothing to do with greatness.”
-- Emerson Magnet School 5th Grader*

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