



Educators Consortium for Service Learning

Service Learning Lesson Plan

Students address early childhood education for low-income children

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The Story

Our sixth grade students read a chapter from *I Believe in ZERO* by Caryl M. Stern that focused on child labor in Bangladesh. The reading groups discussed and reflected upon the factors that force children into working instead of attending school. Next, the students analyzed a world map illustrating average income levels within countries across the globe. The groups then compared the average income level in Santa Monica to San Bernardino, and watched a video documenting Save The Children's efforts in that area. They also held discussion sessions on what items, materials, and services low-income children may need. Finally, as the culmination activity, representatives from each group presented their ideas to the rest of the class.

Although the unit officially ended at that point, the real journey is still ongoing. A group of sixth graders formed a council to develop their ideas and potential outcomes and stay organized. Another student built a website dedicated to raising awareness about poverty in San Bernardino and organizing donations. The students eventually decided to make homemade education books (using an ABC and 1,2,3 formats) for low-income children and personally deliver them to a local Head Start program.

After reviewing a summary of the proposed ideas, officials from Save the Children admired the students' enthusiasm and the multiple ways they embraced the identified need. As a result, the organization offered two scholarships to our sixth graders to attend their annual Advocacy Summit in Washington, D.C. last April. The students service learning experience then included educating future service leaders: our fifth grade students. They created a presentation that outlined their process and outcome. The mantle has now been passed on to this year's class, who are working hard to complete their own early childhood education project.

Grade Level of Students Involved

4-6 (Upper Elementary)

Duration –This service learning experience lasted four months last school year. And seven months this school year. Program begins with a one-week case study and students continue to meet over the course of the school year by forming councils and meet during their lunch and recess periods.

Service Learning Themes

Literacy & Mentoring

Hunger, Homelessness, and Poverty

Safe and Strong Communities

Community Need

Children who participate in Early Childhood Education programs, such as Head Start and Pre-K, when compared with children who don't, are more likely to have a better future. With increased educational opportunities within these programs as a foundation, these children are more likely to stay in school, plan their families, become productive adults, and educate their own children. They also are less likely to repeat a grade, drop out of school, or engage in criminal activities.

Community Partners: Save the Children

Academic Connections

This service learning experience was introduced through our reading curriculum; however, it could also be integrated into social studies/history classes.

Key Content Areas

Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening,

Skills being introduced or developed

Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Meeting Management, Community Outreach, Problem Solving, Perseverance

Standards being met

Gate Standards – Novelty (Student Choice, Student Interest, Student Aptitude, Independent Study, Critical Thinking Skills, Creative Thinking Skills). Characteristics of Gifted Learners (Making Connections, Tolerates Ambiguity, Engages in Abstract Thinking, Strong Sense of Fairness, High Levels of Task Commitment)

Books, Media, Websites, and other Resources Used

I Believe in Zero by Caryl M. Stern

Save the Children Early Childhood Development video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reJOdksQkxY&safe=active>

Global Connections Made

We used the text and maps to gain better understanding about issues and locations. This could be further developed especially to learn, for example, about the different programs and approaches Save the Children offers to locales in the United States compared to locales in different parts of the world.

Five Stages of Service-Learning (Procedure)

Investigation: Students learn about child labor in Bangladesh and connect to education challenges for local low-income children. They read a chapter in *I Believe in Zero* and watched a Save the Children video that highlights the educational challenges for children living in poverty.

Through group discussion, students considered the different factors that may lead a child to work instead of attending school. Groups also held discussion sessions about the different items young students may need (books, school supplies) and also potential ways to volunteer and help by giving of our time and talents. Groups then presented their ideas to the entire 6th grade class

Preparation and Planning: Students formed a council dedicated to early childhood education and created a website to stay organized. The council continued to meet for the remainder of the school year, often before school or during the lunch or recess periods. Students used these meetings as a time to remain organized, meet with local experts, and create a game plan to help a local pre-K program.

Action: Students created homemade coloring books related to the ABCs and 1,2,3 count books. The students then traveled to a Head Start program in San Bernardino County, presented their books to young school children and taught them using these materials.

Reflection: Students met with a Save the Children representative and discussed their thoughts and feelings after working with the pre-K students.

Demonstration: The entire process, from introducing the concept of child labor to San Bernardino visit, was documented by photographs. Students used pictures to create a PowerPoint presentation to showcase their experience to our 5th grade class. They discussed the *process* they went through. Ultimately, they challenged the fifth graders to continue the work they had initiated next year and become service leaders.

Any Assessment and Evaluation

This service learning experience embraced more with the *process* rather than the outcome. Therefore, “mistakes” were embraced as learning opportunities not errors to be avoided.

Technology Integration

Various use of technology through the process including word-processing, Internet searching, coding for website.

Examples of Youth Voice & Choice

Students formed their own council and elected their leaders. All ideas were student generated and the process was executed completely by them. Teachers only provided support when directly asked by the students, and even then it was only in an advisory capacity.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

The real beauty of service learning resides in how students empower themselves. They drive the process, often to unexpected heights and unforeseen outcomes, while gaining a variety of life skills: perseverance, problem solving, meeting management, community outreach, and critical thinking. Service learning in one word *is process*. From gaining awareness and perspective of societal challenges to reflecting and educating future service leaders, the process can be completely (or primarily) student-driven when the educators continually notice what skills or knowledge may be missing and continually support them by filling in the gaps with personal development. They learn while leading.

It feels a little funny presenting today as *OUR* program. The truth is that this program does not belong to us; it belongs to the students. They form their service groups and elect their leaders. They organize and run their meetings. They reach out to community members who can assist their efforts. In essence, we the teachers have transferred complete control of the program to the students. Neither Kelly nor I know where these ideas are going. However, by having an open mind and taking a few risks, special opportunities will naturally present themselves. Let's be completely honest with ourselves.

At best, this transfer of power can feel uncomfortable. At worst, it can feel terrifying. I mean, what if they make the wrong decision? Or, what if something goes wrong? Well, I will go ahead with the spoiler alert. Go ahead and take the words “what if” out of those two sentences. They **WILL** make a wrong decision and something **WILL** go wrong. That is when the true learning occurs. Think of the life skills these students are gaining by going through this process: perseverance, critical thinking, meeting management, community outreach, problem-solving. As we all know, some of our greatest life lessons came from the times we skinned our knees and had to pick ourselves back up.