

Cesar Chavez Memorial Garden Project

Contact Information

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Introduction and Description of the Lesson

The Pathway New Horizons School is for 7-12 grade students living at the Northern California Regional Facility in Eureka, Humboldt County. The eighteen students of the school are incarcerated youth with a Mental Health and Alcohol or Other Drug diagnoses. The origin of this project came about in a partnership with an Americorps*VISTA worker who was placed with CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate). CASA had been notified by the Redwood Coast Action Agency (RCAA) of grant funds available through the Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism. Funds were available for community projects that incorporated the education about Cesar Chavez with emphasis on his core values and meeting community needs through partnerships with other organizations. What began as a way for the students to get outside (their motivation) and work in a garden, turned into a service-learning project that met standards in nearly every subject required to graduate from high school. The students designed, planned, created, maintained and harvested all produce and flowers from the garden that were donated to a number of community agencies that feed the needy and care for elders in assisted living care homes. Throughout the project, classroom lessons were driven by the experience of working in the garden. Math, life and physical science, language arts, world and U.S. history, government, economics, fine arts and foreign language (so that's what Latin is for!), vocational, physical education, health, and use of technology were incorporated in the classroom and the garden. Most importantly, my students developed their relationships with each other and discovered their ability to affect positive results in their community that they had previously felt so detached from.

Instructional

Preparation

Preparation for this service-learning project provided many opportunities to assess prior knowledge and meet many standards across subjects. We began by having a class discussion about gardening, farming, produce, labor and Cesar Chavez. Students had a wide range of experience and knowledge about the various topics and the sharing of this information prompted a number of questions that were recorded for further inquiry. We watched a short film about Cesar Chavez and the formation of the United Farm Workers and discussed this in light of the easy availability of produce in our supermarkets. We decided that our garden should be used as a way to have fun, help others and earn credits all at the same time. The students identified what they believed to be important needs in the community. We then researched how those needs are met in our community and how we might join in assisting people that already help I challenged the students to take responsibility for their lofty goals by putting in the effort to communicate to

each other and me the ideas they have for meeting the goals. Challenging students turned out to be a great way to inspire consistency of effort, social skills practice and develop critical thinking as well. Course standards were made available to students who insisted that there was a way to earn credits in any subject- and they found ways! Training in the use of tools, care for plants and using time effectively were taught and emphasizes throughout the beginning part of the project.

A list of tools, plant seeds and starts, soil quantity and other necessary equipment was made in brainstorm sessions. Through this process, we examined the appropriate plants for our climate, symbiotic plant relationships, organic growing guidelines, area and volume, growth patterns and potential, photosynthesis and the relationship of soil, sunlight air and water, efficient use of space, aesthetics and so on. Students prepared the site using tools and measuring out the bed spaces using stakes, string and tape measures. Topsoil was broken up and amended with compost amenable to better drainage potential and then topped with 10-12 inches of an organic soil mix. The students made many wonderful mistakes that became evident as the garden grew and labor was required to fix problems. The opportunity to make mistakes, fix them and remember that resources provided to plan more effectively could have been utilized better was an invaluable experience for students and myself as well.

California State Academic Content Standards

7th Grade Mathematics

Number Sense 1.0, 2.0

Algebra and Functions 3.0

Measurement and Geometry 1.0, 2.0, 3.0

Mathematical Reasoning 1.0, 2.0, 3.0

8th – 12th Grade Mathematics

Algebra 24.0

Geometry 8.0, 9.0, 10.0, 11.0

Probability and Statistics 8.0

7th Grade Language Arts

Reading 1.0, 2.0

Writing 1.0, 2.0

Listening and Speaking 1.0, 2.0

8th Grade Language Arts

Reading 1.0, 2.0

Writing 1.0, 2.0

Listening and Speaking 1.0

9th – 10th Grade Language Arts

Reading 1.0

Writing 1.0, 2.0

Listening and Speaking 1.0

11th – 12th Grade Language Arts

Reading 1.0
Writing 1.0, 2.0
Listening and Speaking 1.0

8th Grade History/Social Science
8.12

10th Grade History/Social Science
10.3, 10.4, 10.10, 10.11

11th Grade History/Social Science
11.6, 11.8, 11.9, 11.10, 11.11

12th Grade History/Social Science
Principles of American Democracy 12.1, 12.2, 12.3, 12.7, 12.9, 12.10
Principles of Economics 12.1, 12.2, 12.4, 12.6

7th Grade Science
Life Science
Cell Biology
Genetics
Earth and Life History (Earth Science)
Structure and Function in Living Systems
Physical Principles in Living Systems (Physical Science)
Investigation and Experimentation

8th Grade Science
Physical Science
Forces
Structure of Matter
Earth in the Solar System (Earth Science)
Reactions
Chemistry of Living Systems (Life Science)
Investigation and Experimentation

9th – 12th Grade Science
Biology/Life Sciences
Cell Biology
Genetics
Ecology
Physiology
Grades Nine Through Twelve
Chemistry
Atomic and Molecular Structure
Chemical Bonds
Acids and Bases

Solutions

Chemical Thermodynamics

Organic Chemistry and Biochemistry

Earth Sciences

Dynamic Earth Processes

Energy in the Earth System

Biogeochemical Cycles

Structure and Composition of the Atmosphere

California Geology

Physics

Heat and Thermodynamics

Action

Students were engaged with the garden project daily. Since my students range from 7-12th grade, I provided individualized and group curriculum that was connected to the garden theme. The study of Cesar Chavez opened up an avenue of inquiry in the social studies that was amenable to group lessons as well as individualized assignments in research and from text. Daily maintenance of the garden required investigations into science and math. Students and myself came up with ideas to pursue “on the fly”. This resulted in keeping the energy and motivation to learn at a peak. When the standards were made available, the students were able to develop the skills necessary to make a reasonable argument for pursuing their questions. When the answers to inquire didn’t satisfy the students, we looked outside the classroom to learn more. Many community members with expertise in the use of medicinal herbs, organic farming, social organizing and fine arts contributed to the project by sharing information with the students and engaging with them in the work of the garden. When produce was ready for harvest, students chose agencies to donate to based on their ability to provide the most immediate help to the most needy. The students genuinely followed through on making decisions to create and disseminate the garden’s bounty. Some vegetables were left to rot when the class didn’t decide where they should go in a timely way. The experience of wasting good food resulted in the emergence of leadership and shared responsibility. Supervision was constant and many students developed their own sense of supervision by reminding their peers to stay on task or find out information before making a decision that could have negative effects on the garden.

Reflection

From the beginning, I let the students know that the garden could be as much a part of their school day as they wanted it to be. They only needed to make the effort to behave appropriately and learn in all of their assigned courses. Some students sought to go the extra mile in using the garden as a platform for all of their subjects while some students would just use the garden rarely as a means to earn credits. My program is an integrated mental health and educational venture. Developing social skills and positive and healthy relationships is a primary goal. Student motivation to take responsibility for their participation with a group working toward a shared goal was the greatest change to observe. The integrated and thematic approach to teaching and learning around Cesar Chavez was a process, not a prescriptive approach. I was lucky enough to have the ability to change daily lessons if the passion was there to work with.

Students reflected regularly in discussion and in writing about how the project opened doors for them that they didn't know were there before. Many students commented often on how this project gave them a sense of self that they never had realized before. In sharing with the most needy, the students were visibly proud of their ability to help others. Thank you letters from outside agencies bolstered their sense of accomplishment.

Student Assessment

Regular use of journals, class discussions, sharing of individual and small group inquiries and traditional assessment tools were utilized to measure growth and success. Different learning modalities and means of expression were allowed so long as the students were able to demonstrate learning. Since students generated questions from working in the garden, I was able to provide resources and textbooks that had the information they would need to answer their inquiry. In this way, textbook assignments and support materials provided to complement the texts were used throughout.

Project Evaluation and Expansion

The personal impact on the students participating in the project is immeasurable. Maturity and growth is observed in relationship with others and consistency of character. This project provided an opportunity for the students to develop these attributes. A community need was met in that every donated food item and flower was distributed to someone in need. This project is being maintained as the spring season starts again and is also expanding in its scope. Lessons learned from last year are being heeded in the development of the garden space this year. The theme of producing the most food in the least amount of space is being emphasized to promote sustainable and organic farming practices. We have also secured another grant to expand the garden to include a large greenhouse for year round growing and the production of starter plants for other community schools and community gardens that share the goal of feeding those in need.

Celebration and Public Recognition

We celebrated by eating some of the produce and making salsa for a classroom party at the peak of the harvest. As we were part of a regional network of organizations operating through the Cesar Chavez Healthy Communities Project, our recognition came in the form of educating the community about the life and core values of Cesar Chavez and meeting the needs of the most desperate in our community.

Materials and Staff Development Needs

Any tools, plants and soil necessary to grow a garden are what are initially required. How big the project is depends on the teacher's willingness to include students in taking on the responsibility of caring for a garden. You do not need to be an expert, I can attest to that. Making mistakes and developing resourcefulness to meet a challenge provided my students and I with all the staff development that we needed to ultimately meet a community need and have a personal growth experience together.

Funding, Resource Support, and Sustainability

Starting small with donations from local farmers or garden supply stores is not difficult. Many school districts and County Offices of Education have staff people whose job it is to help find

funding for projects like this. The community you live in is potentially your greatest resource. Individuals and organizations with a passion for encouraging gardening and organic practices can usually help out with guidance and donations to the project. My project was funded through the Governor's Office on Service and Volunteerism as part of the Cesar Chavez Day of Service and Learning. Sustaining this type of project is simply a matter of making the commitment to maintain the garden and meet it's needs for replenished nutrients and care. Connecting with community organizations provides opportunities to create relationships that have unlimited potential for the garden and your students.

To find out more about the grant funding, contact:

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