

Empty Bowls Fundraising for "A Child's Portion" A West Sonoma County Service-Learning Lesson Plan

Contact Information

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Introduction and Description of the Lesson

"Empty Bowls" is an annual Service-Learning project at WSCUHSD's two high schools. A high school art teacher in Michigan as a fundraiser for a local food drive created the model for this program. The project has been adapted and followed by thousands of schools, churches, and all manner of community based organizations. Those wishing additional information can access the official website at..... The project is designed to heighten community awareness around issues related to hunger – worldwide, nationally and locally. Regardless of the curricular tie-in, the basic premise remains the same: produce ceramic bowls, make or solicit donations of soup and bread and sell tickets to a soup dinner.

The bowls project has been widely adapted to different curricular areas. The focus of this paper is on the connection to the Health curriculum that is part of a core Social Studies Survey course in the 9th grade. The specific curricular tin-in was nutrition, however, as the project unfolded, rich connections were made to topics such as: political and environmental aspects of worldwide hunger; the history of national public policy initiatives, economic systems and notions of charity versus social justice.

The focus of this paper is the project at Analy High School and the Health component specifically. Sally Briggs, art teacher and project lead, and Eric Wycoff, social studies instructor, were exposed to the "Empty Bowls" project during a visit to the state of Maryland when their district was first piloting Service-Learning.

The community served by our high school is small and rural in nature. The district is geographically the state's largest, with many students commuting to the school site. "Empty Bowls" is timed to coincide with Open House and has enjoyed steadily increasing support from the school and parent community. Analy's project benefits a program titled "A Child's Portion". This adjunct to a local food bank works to provide balanced nutrition to young people struggling with the effects of poverty and hunger.

A number of connections are worthy of mention

- High school students traveled to the elementary school to teach ceramics and discuss hunger issues. Over 200 primary grade students produced bowls.
- The Culinary program produced and served all food for the event.
- Social studies classes examined world and local hunger and explored possible solutions.

Instructional Process

Preparation

For most students in the social studies class, this was their first Service-Learning (SL) activity. Initially, most students were convinced that the project was compulsory service and equated it with punitive measures. In order to alleviate their misconceptions, the teacher facilitated an examination of SL including: history and definitions; concepts of community; benefits to students; ideological underpinnings of the instructional strategy and connections to civic responsibility.

The social studies/nutrition strand of the project utilized the "kNOw Hunger" curricular resources provided by the Gerda and Kurt Klein Foundation. This foundation creates the opportunity for young people to understand the world and translate that understanding into positive action. This non-profit, public foundation promotes education that teaches tolerance and respect for others, and encourages community service focused on ending hunger. The lesson plans and other materials are available at <http://www.kNOwhunger.org/> The quick link directly to the lesson plans is..... The unit lasted approximately three (3) weeks, but spanned two (2) months as we would shift from health curriculum back to activities directly tied to the SL project.

While the Klein Foundation materials are excellent, the bulk of the reading is a problem for some students and particularly for second language learners and students with a Special Ed designation. My site does not ability group in social studies. *Teachers who implement this lesson may wish to seek out other supplementary readings beyond those provided by the Klein Foundation.*

The lessons addressed a wide variety of standards in the core academic areas of English/Language Arts and History Social Studies. The study began with a brainstorming activity designed to reveal prior knowledge of the subject. Not surprisingly, many students began with the impression that hunger was caused by either over-population, poor crop yields or some combination of the two. The unit examines: the historical context of hunger; the effects of hunger; global, domestic and local issues; political and public policy aspects; and possible solutions to the problem.

Action

A student commented to me recently that, "we actually do stuff in this class" and how true it is. For this project, students completed two levels of service. First, as a result of their research, they better understand the causes of hunger and are able to advocate effectively on behalf of affected populations. Students also wrote poetry on the themes of hunger using a variety of forms. This writing was presented on slips of paper included with the bowls on the evening of the event.

The second strand of action was in the form of actually producing bowls for the banquet. Students traveled to the art wing and learned how to cast a bowl. The following week, we returned and glazed their creations. One unexpected but welcome effect of this was increased attendance at the event as parents turned out to buy their student's bowl and witness the fruition of their efforts.

Changes planned for next year include cross grade teaching about hunger (to elementary level students who produce bowls) and I will also encourage students to write letters to the editor or others as appropriate to communicate what they learned. Adding a letter writing component to the unit would be a powerful curricular connection.

A final development that evidences the outreach of the project was the fact that a number of local pottery artists donated their work for auction at the event.

Reflection

Students reflected on the project in a variety of ways. Students created portfolios of their work that included: brainstorming, questions, notes from readings, reflective writing and responses to study/discussion questions. Additionally, students created poetry on themes of hunger and participated in a number of lively class discussions.

Reflection that is a regular part of the end of year final exam revealed that a notable number of students (12/60) identified this project as the single academic lesson that had made the "biggest impression" on them that year.

Student Assessment

As noted above, students created portfolios of their study. These portfolios combined with teacher observations, homework questions/quizzes related to the reading and discussion points were the tools used for assessing student progress.

Project Evaluation

The "Empty Bowls" has been a success. Each year has seen increasing interest and support from the school community, individual staff members who give of their time and the larger community.

This year's event raised over two thousand dollars for "A Child's Portion" and was the best attended banquet so far. The core goal of raising student awareness of hunger was certainly achieved.

Celebration/Public Recognition

We celebrated the "Empty Bowls" in a variety of ways, both in the larger community and also at our school site. These included

- Students who participate in SL receive a special designation at graduation
- The classes viewed a compilation of pictures spanning the study.
- Students promoted the event to local media outlets. The local paper sent a photographer to the event and printed a story about the project.

- Students and staff traveled to the office of our Community Partner to present the check. It was received with many thanks and not a few tears.
- The banquet itself was a celebration filled with students who had produced bowls, made food or supported the project in other ways. A student potter set up her equipment and threw bowls that were then auctioned.

Materials and Staff Development Needs

Teachers who wish to successfully complete the Social Studies/Health component of this project should allocate time in advance of the activity to review the Klein Foundation materials. The bulk of the materials is so great that you can pick-and-choose from the variety of resources available. Again, the curriculum is available in PDF format at <http://www.kNOwhunder.org>

Funding and Resource Support/Sustainability

Please note that the Social Studies/Health SL project discussed here is just one facet of a larger project orchestrated by an energetic and vital staff member. The project is certainly an on-going event. It will certainly continue to grow and expand.

Lesson Plan Profile

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Abstract

This project has been adapted and followed by schools, churches, and all manner of community based organizations. The focus of this service-learning project is a connection to the Health curriculum that is part of a core Social Studies Survey course in 9th grade. Although the specific curricular tie-in was nutrition, rich connections were also made to political and environmental aspects of worldwide hunger, the history of national public policy initiatives, economic systems and debate over charity versus social justice.

Degree of Complexity

Medium

Educational Setting and Participant Information

Educational Institution

Public

Comprehensive Schools

9-12

Participant Configuration

Individual project

Group Project

Whole Class Project

School Schedule

Traditional nine month

Service Provided

Overview of Service

Level of Service

Direct Service
Advocacy

Service Issue Areas

Civic Action
Health
Human Services and Social Needs
Environment

Duration of Service Activity

Short Term (2-6 Sessions)

Specific Service Activity Areas

Public Works and Safety

Economic Development

Civic Action

Legislative Education
Fund Raising

Health

Social Services
Hunger
Nutrition Education

Human and Social Needs

Environment

Lesson Content

Subject Area(s)

Consumer and Home Economics
English/ Language Arts
Health Education

History / Social Science

California State Academic Content Standards

Historical and social sciences analysis skills
Health education

Civic/Social / Personal Responsibility Goals or Standards

Civic Responsibility

Collaborating Partners

Community Based Organizations (CBO)

Associations and Agencies

Human Services Associations (Shelters)
Local/State/Federal Governmental Agencies
Social Services

Educational Institutions

High School

Corporation for National Service

Learn and Serve Community Based

Individual Partners

For-Profit Partners

Health Services

Public and Private Education Services (see Education above)

Reflection

Journals

Video / Pictorial presentation

Artistic presentation (poetry)

Oral presentation

Portfolios

End of the Year Most Significant Academic Lesson