

Helping Hands in Our Community

An Ojai Unified School District Service-Learning Project

Contact Information

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Introduction and Description of the Lesson

Helping Hands in Our Community was a Service Learning project done by a kindergarten class of 18 students. After making Stone Soup at Thanksgiving the students decided to cook a bi-monthly meal for the local elderly food program. This project was based on the student's study of their community, lessons from the district adopted science textbook, study and observation of local gardens and their yields, input from local restaurateurs, and the investigation of the cultures of different continents. Many social studies, science and language arts content standards are addressed through this project. Students worked on the project during individual, small group and large group times.

Instructional Process

Preparation

As part of a Thanksgiving feast and celebration for all kindergarten classes, my students made a Stone Soup. The Stone Soup was the impetus for doing service in our community. After we had read the story a discussion ensued in which the students identified a need to help the elderly and homeless people of our community. They felt that if people in the story could be without food, then there might be others without food in our community.

After identifying the need, we made a list of people in our community and local organizations that might service these people. We invited the organizations to our class and had them discuss with us the different ways that we could help them. We contacted Little House, which is a senior center, Help of Ojai, Meals on Wheels and the local organizers for the homeless shelters in Ojai. We also invited parents in and discussed our plans to help the needy in our community. The discussions with the parents and community organizations were instrumental in narrowing down our focus to help make meals for the elderly. We discovered that the homeless shelters were only open during the winter months in the evenings, and many parents were uncomfortable with their children visiting these shelters, anyway. They did, however love the idea of cooking for our elderly community members.

To determine the prior cooking experience of my students, a survey was sent to the parents. This survey included questions to determine how much cooking they do with their children, what types of jobs they give their children while cooking, if parents were willing to come in and help

twice a month to help cook, if they were willing to bake some items in their ovens if needed, and what days were the best for them to come on field trips to Little House, our senior center. After the surveys came back, I realized that many of the students had never cooked before, so it was decided that having a least one parent per group of four students was going to be essential. We also found that pumpkin carving knives were the best kind of knives for children of this age to use alone, and that if they were going to cut vegetables with other knives they would need a parent or teacher to supervise, one on one, until they understood how to hold their hands and the knife.

We contacted a local health food store and restaurant which is connected to a community-supported agriculture program, to see if we could get some help in cooking, as well as make a connection to a local farmer for produce. They were delighted to help and field trips were set up to visit their store and kitchen as well as a local farmer's field.

It was also felt that several field trips to Little House prior to making the food was essential to connect the children with the people they were helping.

By designing and participating in this service project students learned the value and joy of helping others. They also learned about the diversity of our community, and how helping others in need creates an understanding, and make connections between people and community.

The Academic Content Standards addressed in these lesson plans

Reading

- 1.0 Identify the front cover, back cover, and title page of a book
- 2.0 Understand that printed materials provide information

Reading Comprehension

- 2.1 Locate the title, table of contents, name of author, and name of illustrator
- 2.3 Connect to life experiences the information and events in texts
- 2.5 Ask and answer questions about essential elements of text

Writing Strategies

Students write words and brief sentences that are legible

Math

- 2.0 Students understand the relationships between numbers and quantities

Algebra and Functions

- 2.0 Students sort and classify objects

Mathematical Reasoning

- 1.0 Students make decisions about how to set up a problem
- 2.0 Students solve problems in reasonable way and justify their reasoning

Social Studies

- K.1 Students understand that being a good citizen involves acting in certain ways

Life Science

2. Different types of plants and animals inhabit the earth
 - a. Students know how to observe and describe similarities and differences in the appearance and behavior of plants and animals
 - c. Students know how to identify major structures of common plants and animals

Earth Science

3. Earth is composed of land, air, and water
 - a. Students know characteristics of mountains, rivers, oceans, valleys, deserts, and local landforms

Action

Because the students thought of the project themselves, motivation for making the food and taking it to Little House was not a problem. The children were absolutely excited about helping others in their community and were delighted to be cooking.

Students identified the social and personal responsibility areas that were addressed in our project by doing the project and also through our group discussions. It was their idea in the first place to make food for others in the community. They already had a sense of responsibility to others and to their community.

Because I wanted this service-learning project to be integrated with as many curricular areas and standards as possible, I decided to link it to our study of the continents. Each month I read to the students about a continent, and we went through the aspects of its culture: food, clothing, housing, transportation, and art. We also identified the different kinds of plants and animals that lived on a particular continent. We narrowed our study on each continent to a particular region so that it was doable within the school year. We then took the information we had learned about a culture from a continent and made a food for the Little House senior center based on what we had learned.

As an introduction to each continent, we would make a map and identify where in the world it was. We then would make a large group map of all the landforms on that continent. Next we would categorize animals from that continent into the six animal types: mammal, reptile, amphibian, bird, fish, and insect. An example of an activity we did with the students was that the students would color in pictures of these animals and place them on a black-line master of the continent.

After we had finished with the animals we would learn about the plants and establish what kinds of trees, fruits, and vegetables grow in the area we were studying. Both the study of the plants and animals would give us a basis for the foods that might be eaten, as well as topics for discussion. Students were asked questions such as, "On this continent it is common to eat insects. Do you think that this source of protein would be something the people at Little House would want to eat?" By doing these activities we were addressing many science and some social studies standards.

Each week as we read the literature and expository books about a continent or culture, to give us information and background knowledge needed to accomplish our service-learning project, we were meeting content standards for reading, such as: concepts about print, reading

comprehension, literary response, and analysis. We also did art projects for each culture we studied.

Once we had a deep understanding of the culture we were exploring, we got our cookbooks out and decided on a type of food to make through class discussions. Some examples of soups that we made were a Brazilian Black Bean soup for South America and Minestone Soup for Europe. When a food had been decided upon, the students made a grocery list, with teacher guidance, as a whole group activity. As a teacher, I decided to do the shopping on my own, as 18 to 20 kindergarteners in a grocery store would not work very well.

Dates for cooking were established by the teacher and parent volunteers to insure that there would be enough help each time we cooked. Groups of four students cooked with each parent helper. All ingredients and necessary utensils were set up for each group before the cooking began.

Parents were instructed at a meeting prior to the cooking, about how to run their groups. We went over how to insure student safety with the knives, how to make sure that all students were included, and ways to make sure that the students were doing the work and not the parents. If the food was made on a stove or hot plate, we would go over the safety issues around that cooking source. If food was going to be cooked at a parent's home then we would help to get the food into the cars and have it brought back when it was done. Students needed to see that the food turned out and what it looked like so that they had a sense of accomplishment. The cooked food was then put into large plastic containers and refrigerated at school.

The next day we traveled by local trolley to take what we had cooked to Little House, and joined the senior citizens for lunch.

To culminate our service-learning project, we put together a cookbook with all the recipes of the foods we had made. This cookbook served as a portfolio for the students' work, and was given to the children's parents and one copy was given to Little House when our project was completed. It included recipes, information learned about the continent each food came from, digital photographs, and dialogue from the students about the project. The cookbook idea was explained at the beginning of the project so that students knew what their end product was going to be.

A tremendous amount of learning went on during all phases of this project. The students learned how plants grow by planting some of the ingredients used in our recipes in the school garden some of the plants we planted were squash, tomatoes and peppers. They learned the different parts of a plant and which plants grow during which season. They learned basic fractions such as halves and quarters. They learned how to use a digital camera, took pictures of the foods they made, and learned how to drag their pictures onto a word document. They also learned practical life skills such as cutting, measuring, spooning and pouring. Students were expected to use writing strategies that they had learned during our project, such as writing a simple sentence, using simple capitalization and punctuation, and spacing between words.

Reflection

Students had a chance to reflect before and during the project and after we completed the cookbook. Some of their reflective comments were included in the cookbook.

An oral survey was completed at the end of the year to help the students express their feelings about the service project; what they liked and didn't like, what they thought would have made it better, and how to do it differently next year.

Student Assessment

Student achievement of content standards was assessed by the teacher on an ongoing basis, and District performance measurement tools were used to insure mastery of Content Standards in the areas of social studies, science and language arts.

Students were also assessed through informal observations during cooking time, class discussions, and during our time at Little House. Students were also assessed on the work in their portfolios which was collected throughout the project, and in many cases, became part of the final cookbook.

Project Evaluation and Expansion

The teacher made a list of questions about service learning in general, and specifically about the project. The students were then interviewed while being videotaped. This videotape will be used as a tool to possibly develop and expand the project for next year.

This project could be expanded by including more classes in the project, and by cooking once a week instead of twice a month.

Celebration and Public Recognition

Parents were kept informed of the project through weekly newsletters home and through an ongoing bulletin board in the classroom.

The service was celebrated through a lunch put on by the students, parents and our community partners for our "buddies" at Little House. The students made invitations and asked their new friends to come to our school to eat. We also provided trolley tokens so that coming to our school would be possible and also free. We showed them our cookbooks and presented Little House with a cookbook for them to keep at the senior center.

We also took part in Ojai Unified School District's annual Cesar Chavez Day celebration and created a display board so that other people in our community could see what we had done.

Materials and Staff Development Needs

Materials Needed

- Regional children's books about different continents
- Cookbooks
- Large Rubbermaid containers to transport food
- Kitchen towels for clean up
- Measuring spoons and cups
- Bowls

- Pumpkin carving knives
- Child friendly knives
- Cutting boards
- Hot plate
- Wooden spoons
- Digital camera
- Disks
- Computers
- Photographic computer paper
- Trolley tokens

Ingredients for food prepared

Funding, Resource Support, and Sustainability

The funding for this project came through our district's CalServe Grant and the Cesar Chavez GoServe grant. Process costs such as paper, pencils, printer cartridges, and crayons were provided through our regular school budget and were minimal. Resource materials such as cookbooks came from the Ojai Library, the Farmer and the Cook, and parents. This project could be sustained through donations of food from local farmers and food organizations.