

Two Examples of Service-learning Units

Here are two brief summaries of academic units which are written by teacher candidates for their two-week solo teaching assignment as part of their final student teaching experience in general education.

1. Name of Unit: Take a Peek at Who's Unique, Grade 2

A Unit on Understanding Self-Esteem

Theme: The theme of this unit is self-esteem. The teacher and students explore the self-esteem theme through many wonderful pieces of Children's Literature. The students discover more about self-esteem through the many resulting class discussions that take place. Also, numerous self-esteem related activities and lessons are demonstrated and taught to the students.

The essential questions are:

1. What is self-esteem?
2. Why is it important to have a sense of self-esteem?
3. How can we find out about our own special attributes, qualities, talents, and uniqueness?

Service-Learning Component: There are many opportunities for service-learning to take place in this unit. Besides the suggestions for service-learning, that are included in each of the lessons, there is one in particular that will actually be utilized at the end of the two-week unit. In the 6th and 7th lessons, the second-grade students will listen to a book about names (*chrysanthemum*), and also share information about their own particular names (which was provided by their parents). After discussing the book and their own names, a *Name Acrostic Poem* lesson is taught to the students. They complete an individualized poem on their own name. The poem reflects positive words that describe them and possibly words of special qualities about them. The result is a whole-class sense of self-esteem as they each present their beautiful poems and then display them on the bulletin board.

The students then become masters at the *Name Acrostic Poem* activity, and take on the part of leadership and role-model as they provide a self-esteem boosting service learning activity to their younger buddies from a kindergarten class. Prior to the service learning activity, the second-grade students are paired up with the name of their younger buddy, and they do research on *positive* words that might describe their buddy. With the advanced information, they are ready to provide their special service to/with their younger partner. When the second grade students finally meet their younger buddy, they will introduce themselves and welcome their buddy into the classroom. As they go to

work creating the poem for their partner, much interaction, collaboration and cooperation takes place. After completion of the poem, the second grade student brings the buddy up to the stage and introduces the youngster as he/she shares the poem with the entire group. The kindergarten is the focus of positive attention and applause. The kindergartner is left with the feeling of being special. The roots of self-esteem begin to take hold.

The Elements of High Quality Service-Learning are present in this unit. *Integrated Learning* takes place as the activity enhances the students' new found knowledge about self-esteem and the value they find in helping others find self-esteem. *High Service* is met by the second grade students as the *Name Acrostic Poem* activity is age appropriate and well-organized, and the needs of their younger peers are being met. As the second grade students play a major part in planning the activity, they are engaged and *Student Voice* is represented. Reflection is accomplished before the activity (to be prepared), during (to find what works with their younger partner), and after (as a class to discuss how the activity went) the service-learning activity. And finally, *Collaboration* is exercised as the second grade students are involved throughout the entire process, as they work with their teacher, fellow students, and younger peers, to see the project to its successful completion.

2. Name of Unit: Children of the Earth, Grade 3

A Unit on Making Wise Choices for the Environment on Planet Earth

Theme: This two-week unit correlates with a year-long theme of space. The first goal of the unit is to nurture in the students an appreciation for the planet Earth. The students will achieve this by looking at scenes in nature, listening to a story about nature (Dear Children of the Earth) and writing a response about their own experiences. The second goal is to foster an awareness that everything ends up somewhere. The students will achieve this by examining the amount of trash they create in one day and discussing where this trash will end up. They will then sort and categorize the trash into piles of items that are reusable and recyclable. The third goal is for students to begin to examine their own choices and to realize that they can make a difference. The students will write a play promoting recycling, create a poster and be challenged to a no-waste lunch. They will also hear daily stories of students who make a difference as presented in the TIME Kids magazine's "Heroes for the Planet" issue.

The essential questions of this unit are:

1. Why is it important to care for our planet?
2. What are some problems facing our planet?
3. How can I make a difference?

In 1989, state legislation known as the “California Integrated Waste Management Act” mandated that cities reduce their waste by 50 percent by the year 2000. In order to reach this goal, it is important to educate our future adults about the issues of waste management. This unit is directly aligned with the Science Framework for California Public Schools, which states, “Resources must be used with care, conserved, and recycled” (p.97) as an important scientific concept for third grade.

Service Learning Component: The students will be involved in two service-learning activities. First, they will actively participate in the Recycle Challenge. This challenge will encourage students to save recyclable materials for the class. The class will take these items to the recycle center and vote on a creative way to spend the money. The class will be divided into three teams determined by the three causes they would like to consider supporting with their earned recycling money. Choices will include adopting an endangered animal or a rain forest, purchasing materials to set up a worm composting bin, or donating it to an environmental organization in the community such as a coalition to help abandoned cats.