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Philanthropy at Parkside Elementary School: The Kindness Project

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Philanthropy at Parkside Elementary School: The Kindness Project

Cover Page Footnote

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At Parkside Elementary School Mrs. Carr worked with her fourth-grade class to do a school philanthropy unit. Philanthropy means lover of humanity. Mrs. Carr wanted the students to understand how fortunate they were and how important it was that they used their good fortune to help others. Teachers help students develop empathy through multimedia projects that focused on community problems faced by others (Buchanan, 2014). Students participated in experiences that developed their skill set in identifying problems and finding solutions. Elementary social studies instruction included inquiry started by student questions, concepts, and community action (Wade, 2002). Student both worked together to solve problems and to find problems where they demonstrated leadership in exercising their skills. Mrs. Carr discussed with them the multiple talents and treasures they possessed. She helped them to understand that it was their obligation to share rather than just absorbing the treasure and talents of others. Teachers helped their students work with multicultural groups to ask questions, identify immediate problems, and practice civics skills (Serriere, 2014). Mrs. Carr helped her diverse class members identify questions. The students identified local problems and used their civics skills to find solutions. Carr (personal correspondence, October 15, 2017) said, “Encouraging civic responsibility needs to be taught for the future of our communities.” Her students with multiple talents and resources were children of privilege in a community of mixed means. However, the students engaged the heart of the philanthropy project where they contributed time and talent. They found ways to link themselves with the community. She encouraged her students to give generously of their talents, but since they were students she did not ask them for financial gifts. However, even without gifts of treasure the students understood the need to contribute time and talent to the community.

Classroom Practices

The rapidly changing events within the nation and the world call upon students to interact increasingly frequently with a variety of people from mixed religious, ethnic, and political backgrounds. It is essential for elementary students to experience a rich social studies curriculum with multiple opportunities for civic action (NCSS 2017). Since giving financially was off the table students had to consider their other talents and abilities. They had to think of problems the community had and how they could address those problems by engaging in problem solving with groups of their peers. The students tried to consider all the needs of the members of the community before eliminating larger scale problems or unworkable solutions. Lian (personal correspondence, October 20, 2017) said,

“Service . . . helped me want to help others.” Mrs. Carr and the students generated a list of thirty-five to fifty ways they could help fix those problems before prioritizing the most likely solutions. She asked each student to identify three problems that were of interest to him or her. Mrs. Carr (personal correspondence, October 15, 2017) encouraged the students to determine real things they could do, “Driving a car was not an option.” Since they were students, they could not drive so their community interaction had to be within walking distance of the school. She helped them to determine what was realistic, and by determining which were realistic they realized how they could pragmatically take ownership of community problems. Students demonstrating effectiveness in democratic citizenship as evidenced by their ability to take ownership of community problems. Their philanthropy occurred at school or in the neighborhood without expense to the school or to their family.

Figure 1: Community Service Suggestions

Make it practical, reasonable and relevant to your/your child’s life!

In what organizations do you already participate?

- community
- church
- neighborhood
- school
- scouts

Agencies to contact or google:

- Bartholomew County Historical Society
- Bartholomew County Humane Society or C.A.R.E. (animals)
- KidsCommons
- Lincoln Central Neighborhood Family Center
- Love Chapel
- Orphan Grain Train or Sans Souci (sorting clothes, household goods)
- Parkside Court (they want musical performers, but I have had students go there to play checkers, chess, marbles, jacks, or recite poems)

Also, *The Republic* regularly runs the names, addresses and contacts of local agencies needing volunteers.

One suggestion that can be very meaningful for both parties:

- Find a neighbor, relative, church member or someone in your social circle (whom you trust) who NEEDS help (elderly, disabled or just lonely) and develop a relationship.

- Commit to once a week or twice a month to read to them, write correspondence, just visit, play a game, complete light housework or chores, or whatever they might like or need.

The First Project

The philanthropy project was a sincere manifestation of what nine and ten-year-old people could do to improve their corner of the world. All of the students participated, and they decided to create three groups; two students were in charge of each group, and all of the students helped to determine the activities. One group decided to work with Parkside Court a neighborhood senior living center, and another group determined to work with the school custodian. The third group wanted to work with younger students at the school in the kindergarten and pre-kindergarten classrooms. The students asked the kindergarten teacher for suggestions as to how they could help, and the kindergarten teacher suggested that their students would like to learn how to play board games.

Mrs. Carr was able to send the students down to kindergarten class at one time while she had the remainder of the student in the classroom. The students worked with the custodian to wash chairs and pick up trash. Similarly, she was able to send the group to work with the custodian while she worked with the rest of the class. However, she took all of the students to Parkside Court at the same time. One of the fourth-grade students, Emily (personal correspondence, October 21, 2017), observed, “Service . . . has helped me be less selfish.” This admission of spontaneous generosity was the result Mrs. Carr hoped for when she designed the project for the students.

The students asked the Parkside Court activity director for suggestions, and she helped them with suggestions. One of the students had a grandmother who lived at Parkside Court who played the piano, and a grandchild volunteered her to play while the students hosted a sing along. The students recited poetry that they had memorized and used a prop to dramatize it; moreover, the students were in charge, did the organization, and acted as emcee. At Parkside Court, one of the student’s fathers knew how to play marbles and jacks, and he engaged the students and the residents in games. The residents were very good at these games, and the seniors showed the students strategies for playing. The Parkside students really enjoyed themselves. Fourth grade students Hitashi (personal correspondence, October 16, 2017) said, “I know it takes class time to do service . . . , but it can help students grow up with a strong habit of helping, and they will continue to volunteer in the community.” The result of the project was that everyone thought this project should continue.

In Class Projects

The second year Mrs. Carr determined to be more methodical in helping her student practice philanthropy, but instead of setting aside a week for philanthropy the students did this one day every week. The one day the students did not have special classes was their service day which made this as an important part of their elementary school curriculum parallel with art, computers, music, and physical education. For the students it was an integral part of their curriculum. Philanthropy was a part of their curriculum that was part of their weekly cycle of instructional activities that were student driven. When students drive projects they work for themselves rather than for teachers or adults (Morris, 2017). The motivation for the project comes from the autodidactic expression of autonomy. By giving students ownership in their projects Mrs. Carr helped students create their own projects to monitor.

Mrs. Carr aligned her curriculum with her state standards. Mrs. Carr's projects mirrored the National Council for the Social Studies 3C Curriculum which calls for the students to meet these benchmarks prior to sixth grade.

D1.1.3-5. Explain why compelling questions are important to others (e.g., peers, adults).

D2.Civ.2.3-5. Explain how a democracy relies on people's responsible participation and draw implications for how individuals should participate.

D3.3.3-5. Identify evidence that draws information from multiple sources in response to compelling questions.

D4.7.3-5. Explain different strategies and approaches students and others could take in working alone and together to address local, regional, and global problems, and predict possible results of their actions. (NCSS 2013).

The students recognized a need and identified a project and connected the project to a social studies discipline such as civics. The students took action to identify their selected problem in the local community. Both individually and in groups Mrs. Carr had students working to identify issues and solve problems in their community.

All the projects required students to engage in personal decision making and taking action in the community; however, they did not all use specifically social studies content. Mrs. Carr's upper elementary school students built their projects with her assistance based on best practices in education, and they had an innate interest in participating and contributing. Students engaged in personal decision making as they examined evidence and took action in the community to share the results of their investigations with others (Austin & Thompson, 2014). Students helped contribute to school, developed capacity in their society, and built

a personal connection with their civic action. Some of these connections lasted beyond the duration of the Kindness project as students continued to interact with the people they worked with when they did the service. Carr (personal correspondence, October 20, 2017) said, “Students in elementary school are usually very motivated to help. If teachers capitalize on this willingness, they will develop a humanitarian spirit.” The students needed to study their community to discern how to get leverage over a problem. They might have an elderly neighbor who needed help with their trash, assistance in cleaning dog waste from their yard, or required service with reading. Some project developed personal relationships while others developed relationships with groups of people at institutions. Some parents wanted students to work with an agency such as the county historical society. Other students such as Steven (personal correspondence, October 20, 2017) worked with helping people make responsible environmental choices when he said, “When I grow up, I will want to help the environment and do other good things because of the kindness project.” That was the type of student decision making and civic action Mrs. Carr was attempting to develop.

Students examined current events and were socially aware of poverty and community needs. Starting with the Martin Luther King birthday and later year-round the local newspaper made a list of volunteering opportunities available to the community. Mrs. Carr helped the students determine which were most appropriate for students. The students had an opportunity to collect and recycle paper, bottles, and cans, work in the school library or on the school courtyard (Chessin, Moore, & Theobald, 2011).

In another project the students volunteered to conduct a recycling of bottles and cans – truly a dirty and thankless task. The students earned six dollars for the aluminum they recycled all year, so they did not do it for the money. They recycled plastic for the community which did not pay anything at all. It also took space to store and time to get it to the recycling center. It was not a glamorous project, but it did demonstrate their commitment to the environment.

One group of students used their time to help in the library as their project after the school decided to staff the library with an aide. They checked books in and out, helped younger students find books to read, and read stories to individuals. In this project they took on a role as peer mentors. They worked with the rest of the library staff and volunteers in making bulletin boards or decorating the library for the seasons. The students saw how hard they had to work to maintain the library and the collection of books and saw it as their space to care for.

A few years ago, their school courtyard received the national schoolyard designation. The courtyard was open to the sky but surrounded by four walls. They did the major work in the fall and the spring planting and watering. A group of a dozen students went to the courtyard with a parent, and during the winter

student feed and watered the birds. The fourth and fifth grade teachers received Project Based Learning in-service a few years ago, and it remained a permanent part of the class. The students planted, weeded, cleaned birdbaths and feeders seasonally and dedicated one hour per week to philanthropy at school. There was also an extra credit option for service learning done outside of school.

Autonomous Projects

With the school year divided into four quarters, and students also did extra credit for each quarter outside of the school. The students did it for the challenge. The students practiced philanthropy around specific days such as Martin Luther King Day or holidays when there were family, religious, or community celebrations. Mrs. Carr encouraged the students to record their work because as seventh and eighth grade students they will be required to do community service hours and log it to meet National Honor Society requirements. She also understood the importance of giving her students power over making decisions about how they would improve their little corner of society.

Mrs. Carr asked that someone aside from a parent sign the student's service hours log, which also required the student to reflect on the service they performed. It required an outside voice from the community to review their work and accomplishments a sort of community peer review. This had the added benefit of getting students to interact with members of the community not affiliated with their school. Once again students had to relate to the community to create and sustain a partnership and philanthropic relationship. Business partnerships in collaboration with the community were important as were working together to demonstrate research, economic, and geographic knowledge for display in the community (Guerrero, 2007). Their relationships with people outside of their school might have future impact as they built networks of people interested in their future success.

Figure 2: Service Hours Log

Student: _____ Date of service: _____
Beginning time: _____ Ending time: _____
of hours/minutes total: _____
Location: _____
Agency/Group benefitting: _____
Agency/Group supervisor signature (to verify participation):

(signature) (please print name above)
Paragraph describing ACTIONS performed during service:

Personal reflections on service performed:

Parent signature: _____

Assessment

Near the end of the year, the students engaged in writing reflections about why they did in their philanthropy projects. They considered the benefit to others, organizations, their family, their community, and themselves. Arsh (personal correspondence, October 21, 2017) said, “If children take part in service . . . they will benefit the community and make the world a better place.” Arsh clearly had a significant experience with the philanthropy project that he believed was beneficial to students. The explained how they met adversity, overcame it, and what they learned about themselves and the community in the process. The act of reflection meant that students had to examine how they thought about their experience. Evaluation measured the manifestation of student results in the community.

Civic Action

Philanthropy was displayed in many places teachers recognized student needs and responded with philanthropy. Marshall (2013) described how a group of teachers created a sustainable philanthropy to help their hungry students. While they started with a fund raiser they quickly realized that the need for long term student support was important. They created a group that provided resources for community hunger, shelter, clothing, medical care, and supplies to help students remain in school and remain successful. The group provided a safety net of triage to students in need. Other philanthropy experiences involved college students using philanthropy as a method for learning.

Students in higher education experienced philanthropy as part of courses to fulfill specific objectives such as grant making or grant writing. Within their curriculum they may undertake activities and ideas that lead to experiences that have lifelong impact. Olberding (2012) found in a longitudinal study of alumni that over fifty percent of the students indicated that their awareness, beliefs, intentions, and learning changed because of their experience, while fifteen percent served on nonprofit boards, seventy-one percent volunteered, and eighty-six percent made recent gifts to nonprofits. In college students learn about the needs of the community and how nonprofits work to fill those needs. College students engaged in this work as part of a defined curriculum pattern. Philanthropy played an important role in developing significant experiences for curriculum and instruction. Similarly Hatcher and Studer (2015) found that college students engaged in service learning developed philanthropy values and skills after

graduation in family life, social activities, and career choices. Students learned both about how they could volunteer how volunteerism occurred in their community; moreover, they formed connections to the community through their activities. Students transferred their knowledge about civic life into experiences and actions they can take in society.

In educational literature philanthropy was mentioned as a value or disposition associated with civic action. A comparative study between elementary students in the United States and Turkey suggested that the social studies curriculum of both countries promoted individual and social values (Merey, Kus, & Karatekin, 2012). In Turkey, students placed more value on philanthropy, which was not surprising due to the religious and cultural tenants that reinforced that value. Never the less students participated in civic action or service learning in some United States classrooms. Students thought of that action as philanthropic. Civic efficacy was the ability of students to understand that they had both the knowledge and values to take action then exhibit the disposition to improve the community.

Civic efficacy was an important part in the elementary social studies projects. Teachers and their students created model projects that were shared through social media in order to document civic efficacy and social justice. Moving beyond testing Sonu (2011) documented through video three elementary social studies teachers who explored social justice issues such as child labor, discrimination, and immigration. Those three issues provided examples as to how three teachers in three distinct locations demonstrated and their students' civic efficacy as they explored social justice topics. Students started with a background in controversial issues and conducted research with primary sources prior to taking action. Some civic action in elementary social studies was specifically history-based rising from either biography or documentary film (Buchanan, 2014; Christie, Montgomery, & Staudt, 2012). Armed with background knowledge the students transferred values of contributing in the community into dispositions to engage in the community. It prepared students for a role in civic life and gave them opportunities to develop a presence within the community. The role of the teacher was important in creating a space for student to experience civic efficacy (Serriere, 2014; NCSS, 2008). Students worked in a diverse group, raised questions, found places in their life when they participated, and took action in their community. Students engaged in the community to provide new knowledge to a real audience. Students helped with historic preservation efforts by gathering data for community documentation of physical resources or engaged in the dissemination of historical knowledge in the community (Morris, 2016A; 2016B; 2008). Civic-minded and well-informed students continued the struggle for equity as they understood the importance of place. Students connected their understanding of the world to policies and practices that they implemented in

seeking civic efficacy. They used social spaces to mobilize the processes of historical thinking, empathy, and empathy to master their responsibilities as citizens.

Teaching for social justice included a wide variety of basic needs and human rights including: access to medical treatment, child labor, clean air and water, deforestation, destabilized climate, education, human trafficking, hunger, immigration and refugees, racism, violence, and war. Some teachers used children's literature to teach social justice to young students. Felleman-Fettal (2017) called for using an interdisciplinary approach including social studies, language arts, science, dance, drama, and music to teach social justice. Using multiple modes of learning help them to understand social justice through a variety of disciplines. In another article about merging literacy and social studies teachers worked to help citizens see enduring issues in context. By providing global perspectives and helping students read and understand social studies sources critically, see how issues were examined by every generation, and how the issue was resolved it for their time. Creating a solution for their time may not be perfect, but they have resolved it until the next generation engages with the problem. Soares and Wood (2010) saw social justice through authentic voices, breaching social barriers, identity, multiple perspectives, and serving. These concepts helped students to see the universality of social justice on multiple continents.

People in multicultural classrooms found social justice to be particularly imperative. Racism remained the controversial issue in elementary classrooms due to the unacknowledged role that race plays in American society. Sleeter (2013) believed that students learned when they connected to their culture, experienced content examples from multiple cultures, took action on social issues, and reflected about the differences between themselves and social justice issues. Each of these concepts tended to make their curriculum culturally relative. While not often addressed by schools or teacher race and racism affected all students particularly African American students. Brown and Brown (2011) suggested curriculum explore ideas about race and perspectives on the legacy and impact of racism. It was easy to find examples of the legacy of racism found in land distribution, locations of poverty, convictions, poor relief, arrests, housing policy, incarceration, and violence. Elementary school was a place where exploring race was difficulty due to the complicated, contentious, and highly charged atmosphere around the issue. Textbooks depict of violence directed at Black people and their resistance to that violence, but the accounts lack context, do not show the beneficiaries of the violence, and do not hold the institutions that upheld the violence accountable (Brown & Brown, 2010). Deep understandings of how institutions reconstituted slavery through the chain gang and penitentiary system illustrate why people did not make progress following the Civil War. Students

needed to talk about race in the curriculum that explored social justice. Social justice in the United States was dependent on the successful exploration of the challenges and possibilities of these discussions.

Conclusions

Students from higher education to elementary school harnessed their abilities and talents into commodities and gifts they used to enrich the community. The elementary students practiced identifying problems, identifying talents, and turning their abilities into something that people needed. By linking their talents with community problems they provided solutions to local needs.

When elementary social studies students took their good fortune and turned it to the improvement of others the resulting beneficence was called philanthropy. The philanthropy provided for an opportunity for the students to provide for methodical practice of philanthropy. It gave students a structured time to plan and execute their philanthropy and encouraged them to create independent opportunities to engage in community philanthropy. It provided students the structure for documentation of their work and for reflection upon what they accomplished.

Working with kindergarten students provided older students with mentoring and leadership experiences as they demonstrated civic efficacy in their elementary school. They took action to provide services and activities for the younger students. Older elementary students realized that they had the power and the abilities to make decisions that helped improve their community for younger students.

Students took their inquiry studies and looked at individuals who made a difference with the important connections to community and context of social justice (Montgomery, Christie, & Staudt, 2014). Students made the connection of the study of civics with community need. Their application of civics provided demonstrable examples of how they applied social justice to their community. Students designed project that reflected social justice issues as they worked with seniors and other community members who did not have the resources to do needed work. Students worked to improve the lives of individuals in their neighborhood. Through volunteerism they made a statement in their belief of enacting social justice in their community.

Multicultural students both participated and made contributions in their community. The members of the class represented the multicultural community where they lived. Students opened the doors for seeking change in the community that provided opportunities both for group and individual civic projects. The class interacted with a variety of their neighbors and community members to improve their neighborhood for all the residents. While students project only lasted for the

fourth-grade year the opportunity to continue them in other grades was available. Busey and Walker (2017) called for a critical patriotism that moved past an emphasis on individual acts and toward collective action.

Elementary students engaged in civic action to create student led groups that contributed to the common good by developing common property in the school courtyard. They engaged in community recycling programs to take action in reprocessing the earth's elements and to be good stewards of the environment. They also participated in projects that provided services for their school community by helping to operate the library. Each of the projects was successful because a student led group provided a solution to a community problem. Students articulated that philanthropy was about giving of themselves in talents, time, or treasure. Students acted to give of themselves in the community.

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