

Spotlight on Service-Learning

Service-Learning + Philanthropy Education in the Special Education Curriculum = A Formula for Success!

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Students with disabilities often need alternative methods of demonstrating mastery and alternate, yet authentic, assessments to demonstrate acquisition of particular skills. Service-learning and philanthropy education address the social/emotional skills, functional skills, and transition skills while teaching and strengthening academic skills. By integrating service-learning into the classroom, students have opportunities for community service and community-based instruction. Service-learning and philanthropy education inclusion can include Individual Education Plan goals, and also cover all the core curriculum standards. Service-Learning has many benefits for students with disabilities including: enriching the learning experience and using higher level thinking skills through reflection; demonstrating civic responsibility and developing leadership and citizenship skills; and strengthening student involvement in communities through community service.

Through service-learning projects and philanthropy education, students use what they learn in the classroom to solve real life problems and use practical applications to become contributing citizens and community members. It also allows students to generalize acquired skills in a real-world setting – increasing the likelihood that the skill can be performed in a variety of settings. It allows students to use voice and choice in their project ideation and connects social skills to curriculum. It also incorporates universal design for learning – flexible goals, methods, materials, and assessments to meet the varied needs of all students. When students can learn in an environment that nurtures their abilities and strengths, they are more engaged and experience a higher level of achievement. Educators can incorporate service-learning in self-contained and inclusionary classrooms.

Students in Jen Smith's self-contained classroom at Wabash High School partnered with their local animal shelter for their service-learning project. Using the lesson, "I am a Hero for Animals" www.learningtogive.org/units/humane-heroes-those-who-care-enough/i-am-hero-animals the students identified the needs of their local shelter and volunteered for service. They completed the application for employment and utilized standard job skills while volunteering. They also completed an assessment of the shelter's needs to organize a collection to meet those needs. Communication, math, transition, job, and independent living skills were practiced as a part of the service.

Natalie Bassett, teacher at Summit Middle School incorporated a functional and life skills project into her functional classroom. Students Bake a Difference by baking sweets for faculty members in the school. Adapting content from "One Small Act" www.learningtogive.org/units/character-education-caring-grade-6/one-small-act the students planned the baking menu, shopped for the ingredients while staying within their budget, created the baked good – utilizing social/emotional, collaboration, and communication skills - and distributed the sweets to the staff. Students also wrote personal notes of appreciation for the staff members, developing and encouraging writing skills. Inherent in the process, students gained authentic practice of vital life skills: budgeting; food preparation; grocery shopping; hygiene; and job-related skills.

Teacher Peggy Schrougham from Spencer Elementary School used the Teach One lesson, Doodle Stones to teach and enrich collaboration, communication skills, social/emotional skills, and empathy and understanding. Students read the book, Rain, Reign and participated in a discussion on students' differences and similarities. As a mainstreamed classroom, the emphasis was on embracing differences and fostering a "family" atmosphere. Students created Doodle Stones – painted stones with positive messages of respect and acceptance- and placed them in the school's courtyard, playground, school entrances, and throughout the school building. <http://www.learningtogive.org/units/doodle-stones/doodle-stones>



Service-learning and philanthropy education is a natural fit for special education and inclusion classrooms. It is a natural vehicle for providing the authentic assessment and alternative delivery of content that many special education students need. It is truly a formula for success!

How can a school be a part of this winning equation? The first step is to be sure that you are registered at www.generationOn.org. Registering is free and simple. It will connect you with generationOn Indiana and generate information for the mini grant application for teachers and schools. Philanthropy lessons are FREE to schools at www.learningtogive.org. For more information, contact Joan Belschwender, Director generationOn Indiana at generationOn@iasp.org. For free professional development for your region, corporation, or school, contact me at bethsmithgenonin@iasp.org.

See our generationOn Indiana page on the IASP website: www.iasp.org/affiliates/genon/ or the IMLEA website: www.imlea.org