

Running Head: IMPROVING COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Improving Community Involvement and Citizenship Among Elementary School Students
Through Service Learning Experiences

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Abstract

This Action Research Project was designed to increase student awareness and involvement of socio-economic differences and how the children can make a difference in their community. Service learning projects were non-existent at the Academy causing the young children to miss out on learning experiences that would teach them how to make a difference in their community while also making real-world connections to the curriculum. Donation collections for people in need were previously implemented as community service projects in the elementary school but these activities did not teach children about actively conducting services and understanding socio-economic differences apparent in society that can be tied in with the classroom curriculum.

The writer implemented a service learning program for the kindergarten students that involved the children reading books to earn money they were to save to purchase books for children in need at a neighboring public school. The children communicated with the children in need through pen pal letters. Both groups of children learned how they are similar in many ways regardless of their living situations. They discussed different books they liked which helped the students at the Academy select the books they would purchase for the children in need. Once the children collected their money and purchased the books, a kindergarten book wrapping day was created. The students all took part in decorating white paper to use as homemade wrapping paper for the books. A pre-project and post-project interview were administered to the kindergartners using the same questions for both interviews to track the changes in perspective and maturity the students underwent after completing the service learning project.

Analysis of the data indicated that service learning projects result in more meaningful learning experiences for young children as opposed to donation collections or an absence of any form of humanitarian education. The children gained an understanding of socio-economic differences and learned how they can make an impact on their communities by helping people in need. Student responses to interview questions before and after the service learning project was implemented reveal increasing maturity and understanding of how the students can help people in need and be upstanding citizens in their communities.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Problem Statement

The problem was that opportunities for community involvement at the Academy were inadequate for student learning, and the development of empathy and responsibility for the community.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to increase service learning projects at the Academy in order to influence young children who come from upper-class families to empathize with and help those in need, and as a result work towards improving their communities. Service learning projects have currently taken the place of the previous elementary school donation collections as a form of reaching out to the community and people in need. Both parties involved in the volunteering and receiving end benefited from this experience since it taught them all how they could make an impact on their communities, and it illustrated to the children that there can be positive aspects of society.

Description of the Community

The Academy is an international private school that spans across several public school districts in the region. The Academy prides itself as being a highly academic school that prepares students for college and a lifetime of learning. The curriculum is accelerated at all grade levels starting at kindergarten and continuing throughout high school. Parents must pay tuition to send their children to this school. Scholarships are not available to students who attend the Academy; so all families must be capable of paying full tuition before their children can attend. The majority of students who attend the Academy come from upper-class, wealthy communities. Tuition to attend the school increased this year to cover the increasing cost of text books and

supplies. Parents may also send their children to the school's before and aftercare program which offers safe and productive activities for children of working parents. Childcare services are available for an additional cost.

The Academy is chartered by its state location but it is not a charter school. The kindergarten through twelfth grade campus is fully accredited by the Independent Schools Association of the Central States, or ISACS. The communities that surround the Academy are mainly small, high-income, suburban neighborhoods. Parent involvement is high at the Academy for all grade levels. Most of the parents that send their children to the Academy value education and want their children to achieve their maximum potential. Many parents at the Academy are also active volunteers for the school, and they often supply the classroom with needed materials that may arise at any given moment.

The elementary students at the Academy all come from wealthy families, and they were unaware of the daily experiences families in need must cope with. The children also were unaware of how they could make a difference in their communities by helping people who are less fortunate than themselves. The five kindergarten classes at the Academy were surveyed in a pre-project interview, and the majority of the students felt that all children in the world have everything they need, but not everything they want since there is not enough time to shop for all of the things you want. The responses they gave proved that there was a need for the students to take part in service-learning projects that would expose them to people who are less fortunate, and teach them how to make an impact on their communities by helping people in need. Service learning opportunities were scarce at the Academy in the elementary school setting. In the past the elementary school students took part in donation collections as a community service activity which did not teach the children or engage them in active experiences to help others.

Description of the Work Setting

The research project took place at the Academy's main campus. Each of the five kindergarten classes including the young kindergarten class located at the Academy preschool were all involved in the project. The school population consists of about 72 total kindergarten students, and about 1,500 students in the entire school. The Academy is an international private school with a diverse student body. The cultural make up is approximately 45% Anglo-Saxon, 25% natives of India, 15% Asian, 10% African American, and 5% Hispanic. The Academy celebrates diversity and teaches children at an early age to value all cultures and ethnicities. Many of the students at the Academy are bilingual or trilingual since they typically learn their native language growing up at home and then begin to learn English in preschool. The Spanish language is also taught to students at the Academy starting in preschool and continuing until the students graduate.

The intention of this project was to aid kindergarten students at a neighboring inner-city public school. As a component of service-learning, neighboring schools in the community were contacted to offer services for any need they may have had. The teachers at the Elementary mentioned the need for personal reading books in the homes of the young children. This brought about an opportunity that was beneficial for both parties in the project. Approximately 70% of the students at the Elementary were on free or reduced lunches. Many of the families relied on food stamps to feed their families. The kindergarten students at the Elementary attended a half-day kindergarten program whereas those at the Academy attended a full-day program. Many of the students at the Elementary were also English as second language learners (ESL).

All kindergarten parents, teachers, and children at the Academy along with the Young Kindergarten program at the pre-school were participants in the research project. The inner-city kindergartners and their teacher at the Elementary were also involved on the receiving end of the project. All 70 Academy kindergarten students took part in the project. Approximately 62 students from the Elementary participated in the project also. Some of the children at the Academy were required to work in pairs to support one student at the Elementary since there were more students at the Academy than the Elementary. Both schools consisted of a diverse student body comprised of various ethnic backgrounds.

Writer's Role

The writer's role at the Academy is that of an elementary school classroom teacher at the main Academy campus. The writer is also responsible for implementing and creating an advanced, standards-based, kindergarten curriculum, and the curriculum timeline. Another responsibility of the author is to ensure that the curriculum is being advanced to fit in with modern times, and is up-to-date on any new discoveries or changes in education. The author of the project also works on integrating the school's mission of "creating caring, creative, and responsible citizens," within the curriculum. The author is also responsible for ensuring that the state standards are being implemented in the curriculum. Collaboration among co-workers is important to the author in order to ensure that the timeline of learning and concepts is suitable for all classes and is aligned with the curriculum of the student's future grade level at the school.

Chapter II: Study of the Problem

Problem Description

The problem was that opportunities for community involvement at the Academy were inadequate for student learning, and the development of empathy and responsibility for the community. Active community service or service learning projects were reserved in the past for students in the middle and upper schools at the Academy. Many of the teachers and administrators feared including young children in service learning projects because they thought it could be scary for the children to interact with people less fortunate than them. Simple donation collections were the means of helping people in need prior to this service-learning project. Donation collections are helpful for people in need, but they do not teach the children how they can make a difference in their communities. In the past the elementary students would bring in their donations from their parents and did not think of what it was for. Interacting with a kindergarten class in need has helped keep the element of fear out of the project as opposed to working in a soup kitchen or working with high school students in an inner-city school.

The population affected by the lack of service-learning opportunities was the elementary students at the Academy. The kindergarten students are the focus of this project because they are at an influential age, which can make an impact on them to take similar action in the future. Reasons for why the problem had not been solved include; the administration and teachers worried that service-learning may scare the children, donation collections were less work on the teachers, and because some teachers were unsure of how to tie service learning in with the curriculum. Creating a service-learning program at the Academy was important because the children enrolled there come from wealthy families, they were unaware of socio-economic differences, and they lacked an understanding for how they could make an impact on their

communities. Students who were introduced to service-learning projects and people in need at an early age will be more likely to continue to be volunteering citizens as adults.

Problem Documentation

The main source of evidence that proved a problem due to a lack of service learning experiences existed at the Academy was summed up through the lack of experience and knowledge the kindergarten students had coming from wealthy neighborhoods and going to a private school. Students were asked a number of questions in a pre-project interview. See Appendix A for the interview questions. The same questions were then given to the kindergarten students after the project as a post-project interview to track the changes in perspective that resulted among the students after the service-learning experience had taken place. Cooper and Pace (2004) discovered that children's perspectives of want versus need changed significantly from the beginning of their service learning project to the end of it (p. 57). It was discovered that many children changed their minds after conducting the service learning project believing before that all children in the world have everything they need and later discovering that this is not always the case (Jennings, 2001, p. 475).

Student responses to a student survey (see Table 1, page 40) also proved that the students at the Academy were unaware of the fact that there are people who live in less fortunate situations. The students were accustomed to having their parents take action whenever there was a want or need of any type. Tempel and Plater (2006) supported such findings when they discovered that students from high income families do not "realize that not everyone in the world has everything they need" (p. 31). The majority of the students did not know what they could do to help others. Not one of the children mentioned doing chores to earn money to help others, or taking part in a community service project. Many of the students' answers were

materialistic and required money from their mothers and fathers. Creps., et al. (2006) also supported the findings that children in upper-class families are unaware of the scope of the problem there is in the world for people in need, and for the living conditions many people face on a daily basis (p. 2).

A chart that showed the percentage calculations for the number of students who answered a survey question a certain way was determined based on each kindergarten teacher counting how many of his or her students responded or agreed to one of the majority responses. See Table 1, page 40 for a sample chart. Each of the students that responded or agreed to a majority response were added together from each of the five kindergarten classes, and then the percentages were calculated based on the number of students who responded with or agreed to a majority answer out of the 70 total kindergarten students. The chart showed that the majority of kindergarten students at the Academy were unaware of socio-economic differences and how they could make an impact on their communities to help lessen the gap between the upper and lower class status. Based on the findings from Wade (2001) approximately 50% of all young children aged seven and under that came from wealthy families were unaware of socio-economic differences and people in need (p. 27). The data charted for students at the Academy showed that 50% of all students were lacking knowledge of people in need and how they could help people in such circumstances.

The parent survey (see appendix B) indicated that the majority of the parents of kindergartners agreed that service learning is an area that the school was lacking in and would benefit from if it were put into action. The parents also agreed that beginning service-learning projects at the kindergarten level would influence the students to be volunteering citizens in the future. Another well-received idea was that tying in community service projects with the current

classroom content would help the children have a concrete means of learning important concepts. The pre-project and post-project surveys revealed that service learning activities do teach the children about being caring, and active citizens in the community.

Literature Review

A research study by Cooper and Pace (2004) stated that donation collections do not teach children “how they can help others and make an impact on the lives of others” (p.54). Cooper and Pace (2004) both agreed that there are better means of community service that can actively engage the students and result in a learning experience (p.54) Service learning combines both community service and content learning tied together as one. Service learning goes beyond community service by not only teaching children how to help others but also teaching them the importance of helping others. The definition of service learning according to Russo (2004) is “a broad term that can be applied to many activities students do in their daily lives, anything related to learning while helping others” (p. 11).

Donation collections tend to lack educational quality. Many students who participated in donation collections received their money from their parents and they would hand it to their teacher without realizing its meaning. The money was often indistinguishable to the students from any other payments their parents made, such as field trip money or book orders. A research study conducted by Muscott and O’Brien (1999) reported that donation collections “do not teach the core values of service, empathy, understanding, and active participation in helping others (p.374). Drake and Morreale (2001) elaborated in a similar fashion by saying that “donation collections may help the community, but they do not improve the community by producing caring citizens (p.13). A goal of service learning is to teach children to be good citizens who are cognizant of the needs in their community, and who are eager to take action to improve society.

Good citizenship did not ensue when the young children were exposed to donation collection projects. Good citizenship results when “students are actively engaged in a community project that has a known outcome or goal (Santos, 2004, p.3; New York City Board of Education, 1993, p. 4). Various research sources proved that donation collections do not promote student learning.

Students who are not taught how they can impact their communities and make a positive difference in society may grow up not knowing how or why they should take action to improve their community. Everyone regardless of their age should be held accountable for their actions in regards to the community and caring for the community. According to Muscott and O’Brien (1999) “parents, teachers, and students themselves need to be held accountable for their own actions and impact on the community” (p.380). Children should be taught at an early age to care about their surroundings and to take action to make the most of their communities so that they do not grow up unaware of their responsibilities to the community and society as a whole.

Castillo and Winchester (2001) revealed “gangs and troubled youth often have not had opportunities to take part in service learning experiences” (p.68). Many gang members and troubled youth negatively view community service as a prisoner’s punishment (Castillo & Winchester, 2001, p.68; Bonnette, 2006, p. 8). Young children who are surrounded by gangs and crime often do not have opportunities to see citizens reaching out to their communities. Many young children who grow up in high crime areas may only come into contact with prisoners completing community service as a punishment, and they therefore do not make any positive connections to community service as a volunteering choice. Research revealed that “after-school programs that involve service learning projects have helped lessen gang related violence in some areas” (Hollingsworth, et al., 2003, p.141). Service learning projects introduced early in a student’s career, and practiced throughout the student’s schooling serve as a means of

community involvement and as a means of channeling students' interest and energy in productive matters rather than gang activity. Service learning also teaches "tolerance and acceptance of others" which was important at the Academy since it is an international school with a diverse student body (Bickmore, 2001, p.153).

Research indicated "children in upper-class families lack exposure to children and families in less fortunate situations" (Hollingsworth, et al, 2003, p.140). The majority of students at the Academy came from upper-class and upper-middle-class families who were unaware of the fact that there are people around the world who do not have everything they need for health and well-being. A group of researchers at a White Paper Conference including an Academy staff member concluded, "children who are not exposed to underprivileged families do not learn to develop empathy for others and make the switch from thinking only about themselves to thinking about others in the community" (Creps, et al., 2006, p.2).

All children can learn how to take part in protecting and caring for their community. Students need teachers who can guide them to be active citizens in the community. Hollingsworth and her associates (2003) discovered that children who are not educated on the actions they can take to help others may not develop past the stage of egocentrism"(p.145). Teachers need to model and guide children on how they should act to be good citizens. Educating students about compassion and empathy as they progress through maturity can help them transition from thinking only about themselves to thinking about others. The home and school environments both provide the best means of teaching children how to be caring citizens.

One of the most significant flaws of carrying out donation collections as a means of community involvement among students was that it cannot be tied in with the curriculum. According to Lee (1997) and Mainzer and associates (1990) "making charitable donations to an

organization or to people in need is honorable but taking actions towards a specific need is even more honorable because it touches the lives of the students and urges them to be life-long contributors to people in need” (p. 20; p. 95). Education today is based on state and national standards that all educators must teach; therefore it is important that every activity completed during the academic day be related to the standards and concepts the students need to learn. Cooper and Pace (2004) note how service learning can be integrated into the curriculum in a manner that will relate to all different learners and learning styles (p. 55). Donation collections did not offer opportunities to learn and elaborate on the curriculum since there were no student actions involved in the task. Young students often received money from their parents and then turned it in to their teachers without knowing the money’s significance.

The benefits of carrying out service learning activities as opposed to a donation collection were significant as was evident in the literature. According to Cooper and Pace (2004) “service learning allows students to contribute their time and efforts in a personally meaningful way rather than simply carrying a donation from their parents (p. 57). Muscott, and O’Brien (1999) supported the statements made by Cooper and Pace (2004) by stating that service learning teaches specific character traits including: responsibility and self-control, cooperation and teamwork, and respect and appreciation for diversity” (p. 375). Teachers who decide to carry out donation collections in the classroom should think about the invaluable learning that their students are missing out on by denying them the real life experiences and abundance of learning that service-learning initiates. As teaching demands continue to increase, service learning allows teachers to integrate academic content with character building and citizenship.

Freeman and King (2001) stated “service learning is an increasingly popular pedagogy which explicitly connects community service with appropriate learning objectives (p. 211). The rise in popularity of service learning programs in schools raises the question of what the negative aspects of omitting service learning projects places on a school. According to O’Keefe (1997) “community service and service learning programs for children provide character education in action, inculcating within them the values of public community” (p. 54). Most every teacher agreed that good character is an important pursuit to instill within students of all ages. Most every teacher also wanted to make sure that the curriculum they taught could be applied to real-life experiences. Service learning projects provided students with an interactive learning experience in a true to life environment. Schools that avoid initiating service-learning projects within the elementary grade levels are preventing an academic atmosphere of good citizenship, respect, meaningful learning experiences, and character building (O’Keefe, 1997, p. 56). Omitting service learning from the curriculum can “rob students” of valuable life experiences that will help them prepare for their adult futures as American citizens (O’Keefe, 1997, p. 57).

Americans have dealt with acts of terrorism and violence in the world. The 2007 Virginia Tech shooting, the Columbine school shooting in 2002 and the Pennsylvania shooting in 2006 at an Amish one room schoolhouse proved that character education is a beneficial component to all academic programs. Beale (2000) pointed out how important service learning is in schools today because religion is not allowed to be practiced openly in a public school setting. Service learning could take the place of religion as a method of character building that is permitted by the schools (Stott, & Jackson, 2005, p. 157). Most importantly service learning projects allowed teachers to teach about morals and ethical conduct in a manner that was not offensive to anyone or any particular group.

Learning about citizenship and community service in a classroom setting does not provide students with concrete examples that can help them conceptualize these concepts (Lafon, 2006, p. 46). Young students benefited from real-world experiences that they could see and experience physically. Kindergarten students were not at the stage of Formal Operations according to Piaget's age stage theories, which means that their brain development was not at a point where they could think abstractly. Service learning projects in which the children were actively engaged in their learning and experiences taught them at a level in which they could internalize the new information. According to Tempel and Plater (2006) volunteerism does not become "internalized until concrete examples are provided" as was the case in service learning projects. (p. 31). Service learning has become increasingly popular in education today because it "explicitly connects community service with appropriate learning objectives" (Freeman and King, 2001, p. 211). Any school could benefit from service learning projects that integrate the service experience with the content standards for the appropriate grade level.

Incorporating service learning activities in schools also helps the students gain self-worth. Tempel and Plater (2006) stated that the absence of service learning in schools "prevents students from taking part in activities that promote self-confidence and self-efficacy" (p. 30). Students who were taught how they could impact the lives of others felt good about themselves because they felt important and that their services could benefit society. Service learning also provided the students with "an opportunity to belong to a group where they do not have to be the strongest, fastest, or smartest" (Lafon, 2006, p. 45). Competition among students could cause undue stress and pressure. Service learning promoted team work and allowed everyone to be successful by working together. According to Rasicot (2006) "students feel good about their service learning projects and gain satisfaction knowing that they have done

something good for their communities” (p. T6). Community involvement gave all of the children a chance to feel successful and made them feel that their services were important.

Another reason why service learning should not be omitted from the curriculum was because “service learning teaches students about responsibility and dedication to others more than any other classroom lesson can” (Werner, et al, 2002, p. 559). The students took pride in their work when they were helping others, which motivated them to work hard and complete the tasks they had started. Service learning projects also required a lot of effort and planning among students,” which also prepares students to be responsible citizens. (Worley, 2006, p. 305) Young students who were exposed to service learning projects at an early age learned how to be responsible and to move towards thinking about the goodwill of others rather than just themselves. Muscott and O’Brien (1999) noted that “service learning projects provide students with experiences that are experiential in nature, designed to build responsibility through action, and include the teaching of caring through service to others” (p. 374). Many life skills were learned through service learning activities.

Some teachers who had a hard time managing cooperative group work among students found that their lack of success was due to their lack of service learning activities in the classroom. Service learning activities did not promote competition; rather such projects required efficient teamwork to get the job done. Lafon (2006) stated that “service learning provides students with the opportunity to belong to a group where they do not have to be the smartest, fastest, or strongest” to feel good about themselves and their accomplishments (p. 45). Students that competed to be the best in their cooperative groups were not able to adequately participate as “cooperating” group members. Emphasis has been placed in today’s society on all individuals being the best in everything they take part in. Students needed to learn how to focus on working

in teams to create the most effective learning environment (O'Keefe, 1997, p. 54). The business world requires their employees to be able to work well with others and communicate. Service learning provided a good first step for students that taught them how to work with others and be supportive of one another in order to create high quality work in less time. Nebgen, and McPherson (1999) professed that communication is a key element in service learning which teaches the children to be responsible citizens that are advocates for the needs of their community (p. 91). Service learning projects helped the students learn at an early age the importance of helping others, working well in cooperative groups, and developing communication skills.

Another issue that some teachers may have had difficulty with in the classroom was tolerance of various ethnic groups in the classroom setting. Service learning activities were once again effective means of diminishing this problem. Fertman and his associates (1994) noted that "service learning has brought together students who do not typically interact with one another including older and younger, physically challenged, Caucasians, African Americans, and Hispanics". (Fertman, et al, 1994, p. 5). America is a diverse country that celebrates diversity and the cultures of various ethnic groups. Students who learned about diversity through community service learned how to be responsible citizens who work hard to make their community the best it can be. Service learning also develops "specific character traits including responsibility and self-control, cooperation and teamwork, and respect and appreciation for diversity." (Muscott, & O'Brien, 1999, p. 375). Service learning activities not only taught the children about how they could make a difference in their communities, but it also provided important lessons to the students that will benefit them in the classroom each school year.

Causative Analysis

There are a number of causes that lead to the problem of a lack of service learning opportunities and an awareness of people who are less fortunate among the students at the Academy. One of the major problems at the Academy was that parents and teachers there are not working together to create meaningful learning opportunities in which the students will be able to reach out to their communities. In the past teachers and parents did not have a problem with the initiation of donation collections to save money for people in need. Service learning has become increasingly popular due to the fact that the children not only do something good for their communities but they also learn new concepts that can be tied in with the curriculum they are learning in class with a real-life learning experience.

In the past, students at the Academy have taken part in donation collections to help people in need. Young students often do not understand the difference between the money that is sent with them to school for field trips and book orders. Students who solely took part in donation collections did not learn the significance and message that helping others brings. Service learning prepares students for active citizenship in their communities (Beale, 2000, p. 66). The goal of service learning is to prepare students for a lifetime of good will and consideration for others. Donation collections do not teach students any new concepts. Incorporating service learning into the curriculum teaches students how they can make an impact on other's lives in a concrete manner (Rasicot, 2006, p. T6).

Another possible cause of the students' lack of understanding of people less fortunate than themselves was due to the lack of exposure the students had with people less fortunate than themselves. The socio-economic status of the students at the Academy is upper-middle class to upper-class due to the tuition expenses that the private school requires. The students also live in

neighborhoods that are composed of wealthy residents. Students needed exposure to families less fortunate than theirs so that they could begin to understand the needs of such families and the services they could provide to help people living under such circumstances. Donation collections done in the past did not involve students going out into neighboring communities to impact the community directly. Castillo and Winchester (2001) note that when students are “actively engaged in service learning activities” their understanding and compassion for others becomes innate (p. 70).

Teachers and administrators at the Academy were fearful of initiating service learning projects in the elementary school setting because they felt such experiences would make the children overly worrisome and frightened. Bickmore (2001) states that young children can take part in service learning activities and be successful if the activities are developmentally appropriate (p. 155). Service learning activities in the past at the Academy were reserved for high school students who volunteered at soup kitchens. This type of volunteering was not appropriate for young students. Kindergarten students needed to be involved in service learning activities that included other children or less intimidating experiences (Cooper & Pace, 2004, p. 5). Kindergarten students who were actively engaged in earning money for books for other kindergarten students who were less fortunate learned about the concepts in an open and friendly environment. The students also learned more about children who are less fortunate than themselves through writing pen pal letters back and forth between the children that were living in less fortunate circumstances.

Difficulties could have occurred when teachers had a hard time finding service learning opportunities or cooperating groups. Tempel and Plater (2006) agree that starting a service-learning project was the most difficult step in the process of creating a service-learning program

(p. 31). Teachers could start by calling community members or representatives to inquire about possible opportunities for involvement. “True service learning projects involve students in the community by requiring them to seek out the needs of the community” (Creps, et al., 2006, p. 2). Teachers could also contact local libraries, nursing homes, and government offices to determine where the greatest community needs are located (Creps, et al., 2006, p. 2).

Chapter III: Outcomes and Evaluation

Goals and Expectations

The goal of this study was that young students at the Academy would be exposed to service learning projects that would educate them on how they could make a positive impact on their communities. The students no longer take part in donation collections as their primary source of community service and involvement. Service learning projects no longer are excluded from the curriculum in fear of the content being too mature for young students. Students of all grade levels were actively involved in service learning projects throughout the school year.

Expected Outcomes

Several specific outcomes were achieved by engaging kindergarten students in meaningful service learning projects. The following outcomes were achieved: The kindergarten students developed an understanding of different socio-economic living situations, and developed a sense of citizenship and service to their communities. The students were also actively involved in service learning projects. Another outcome of the project was that students took pride in helping others in their communities, they developed a life-long love of learning and helping others, and they also gained exposure and knowledge of people who live in less fortunate situations than themselves.

The children became eager participants of community service after being exposed to people in need. The children also gained confidence knowing that their help was appreciated and needed. All students in kindergarten and above at the Academy are now actively engaged in service learning projects throughout the school year. The process of helping others in the community taught the children to live humble lives and to be thankful for all they have. Each

service learning project serves also as a curricular lesson since the children will be learning new academic content while they are actively participating in doing something good for their communities.

Measurement of outcomes

Several instruments were used to measure the effectiveness of each outcome. Many of the measurements for this project were qualitative due to the nature of the project, and the youthful age and developmental levels of the children involved. Quantitative analysis was also conducted to determine the significance of the survey administered to the parents, as well as to track the percent change in regards to how the children's perspectives changed after implementation of the project. The expected outcome that kindergarten students would develop an understanding of different socio-economic living situations, and would develop a sense of citizenship and service to their communities, was measured through the use of pre-project and post-project interviews conducted with the teachers and students of each classroom individually. The teacher asked the same list of questions before and after the project to track the changes in perspectives that the children underwent. See Appendix A for a complete list of interview questions. The interview data was also compared quantitatively based on the majority responses to each question and the percentage of children that chose that particular response as a percentage in each of the five kindergarten classes. See Table 1, page 40 for an example of a graphic organizer that was used in this project for quantitative comparisons.

A parent survey (see Appendix B) was also conducted to determine background information about the community involvement the children's families were active in at the time, and to what extent the parents and teachers felt there was a need for a service learning program at the Academy. The survey was also helpful in tracking the amount of involvement the student's

families were willing to participate in. The survey covered such information as the parent and teacher perspectives on the current service learning/community service program at the school, and the need for improvement and curriculum integration into the program. The same survey was also administered in conclusion of the project to track the changes in perspective that the parents gained in regards to service learning at the Academy after the project was complete. The effectiveness of the survey was based on the amount of participation through the number of surveys returned. See appendix B for a complete list of survey questions that are based on five levels of agreement or disagreement. The data tables and tools that were used to calculate the significance of the parent survey can be found in Table two, page 46.

The parent survey was used to track the parent's levels of agreement or disagreement for the effectiveness of the Academy's service learning program that was in place after the project was conducted. The survey responses were scored using a rubric that was composed of five different degrees of agreement. The Likert Scale was as follows: "5" indicated strongly disagree; "4" indicated disagree; "3" indicated neutral; "2" indicated agree; and "1" indicated strongly agree with the given statement. See Appendix D for the data tables that were used to track the number of responses given in the pre- and post-project surveys. The difference was also be calculated to prove the impact the project had made on the Academy's service learning program from the parent's perspective.

Tracking the amount of involvement that each child was actively engaged in was measured through anecdotal records and participation charts the teacher or students themselves completed as they took part in community service/service learning activities. See appendix D for a participation chart example. Obtaining a signature from the coordinator of the service project gave verification for each student to prove that they completed the services on their own. The

students with the help of their teachers kept track of the minutes they completed in service learning activities to ensure and validate their dedication and commitment to service learning.

Measuring the outcomes of the degree to which the students took pride in helping others in their community and of students developing a life-long love of learning and helping others was a difficult task. The most significant measurement tool for these outcomes was through the use of daily anecdotal notes and observations. The interview questions in appendix A also helped determine the amount of pride and dedication the students had towards carrying out service learning activities. The enthusiasm and changes in responses for the interview questions from the pre-project to post-project interview/survey were the predicting measures that demonstrated the amount of pride and commitment the students had towards community service/service learning.

The final expected outcome of students gaining exposure and knowledge of people who live in less fortunate circumstances than themselves was measured by all of the measurement tools in the appendices A-E. The pre-project and post-project interviews served as a tool for determining background knowledge students possessed as well as information that was new to the students. The student survey/interview response charts helped organize the data configured from the pre-project and post-project interviews. The parent and teacher interviews helped to determine the amount of exposure and background knowledge the students and their families had prior to the project, as well as what needed to be done to educate the children on economic differences and the services they could give to help people in need. Finally the community service participation charts served as indicators to determine the degree of influence this project had made on the students in encouraging them to participate beyond the realm of the project.

Analysis of Results

The results of the project were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively based on the responses to the interviews and survey questions, as well as anecdotal notes and daily observations (see appendices A-E). Daily anecdotal notes were considered in the results to determine the daily influences the project had made on the students, and to track the maturation the students underwent as they carried out the remainder of the project. The findings were presented in a chart format as seen in appendix E. Anecdotal notes provided qualitative analysis as a means of analyzing and describing the maturation process the students went through as they take part in the service learning project. The Anecdotal notes were analyzed on a daily basis to observe the types of changes in perspective that occurred and when these changes became apparent.

The steps or methods suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for analyzing qualitative data was initiated by using the Constant Comparative Method (CCM) to determine similarities and commonalities found through daily observations of student behaviors as a result of the three month service learning project. The anecdotal notes were compared throughout the project with an emphasis on the reoccurring themes that take place in the beginning, middle, and end of the project. Focusing on the beginning, middle, and end of the project reactions pinpointed the critical moments in which changes had occur. Reoccurring behaviors were highlighted in the anecdotal record charts to determine which themes were common amongst the kindergarten students. The common themes for the beginning, middle, and end of the project were then compared to one another to determine where and when major changes took place. Finally, the common themes for each of the critical moments in the project were compared with the determined themes of the other kindergarten classes participating in the service learning project

at the Academy. Common patterns were then determined as a means of conducting extensive qualitative research that tracked the changes in perspective the students underwent after taking part in the service learning program.

Participation sheets provided quantitative analysis for associating the amount of time the students took part in service learning activities and the degree of change their perspectives underwent. Statistical data was also presented quantitatively in tables 1 and 2 on pages 40 and 46 respectively. The tables show the percentage of students who responded with specific responses. A parent survey was also quantitatively analyzed by keeping statistical data tables and graphs to track the number of responses given to each question on the survey and the difference in the pre-project and post-project survey results.

The survey scores based on the Likert Scale were averaged for the pre-project and post-project survey. Appendix D includes a data table that revealed the average scores for each of the survey questions asked. The calculated difference from the pre-project and post-project surveys was also presented in the data table. A graph was created and displayed in Table 2, page 46 using the data table information to serve as a visual of the degree of change that occurred after the service learning program was put in place. Table 2, page 46 also reveals the calculations completed for the *t*-test in order to show that the survey results were significant. The quantitative data collected through this process was examined to prove the effectiveness, and reliability of the survey tool in relation to the topic being studied.

The effectiveness of the plan was determined based on the quantitative and qualitative data derived from the charts, the *t*-test, anecdotal notes and from the daily encounters with the students as they engaged in service learning activities. Based on literature from the references cited throughout the study, the plan was predicted to be successful and proved to be so. Each of

the sources reflected the positive nature of service learning projects. Tempel and Plater (2006) reinforce the positive nature of helping others by stating that “involvement in service learning and volunteerism in general enhances the students’ commitment to addressing civic and social concerns even after they finish the project”

(p. 30).

Sources of error in the project could have included a lack of participation amongst parents in purchasing the books and wrapping them in student decorated wrapping paper. Other errors could have occurred if the cooperating inner-city school decided not to participate. Once the plan was implemented the effectiveness of the plan in impacting the problem was quantitatively analyzed based on the student’s responses to the same set of questions they were asked in the beginning of the project, and the percent of change that resulted from the students’ changed perspectives (see Table 1, page 40). The parent survey could also have proved to be insignificant after that data was collected and the *t*-test was administered. The results were presented in data tables and charts in order to make the results more accessible to readers. (See appendices A-E). Fortunately, the parent’s and the cooperating school’s cooperation and efforts were significant making the project a success.

Chapter IV: Solution Strategy

Statement of Problem

The problem was that opportunities for community involvement at the Academy were inadequate for student learning, and the development of empathy and responsibility for the community.

Discussion

A number of solutions for the problem were gleaned from the literature. The need for service learning in the classroom was apparent in a study by Santos (2004) who stated that service learning projects introduce students to the concept of applying what they learn in school towards making a difference in their communities (p. 1). Students learn best when they are being engaged in real-world activities that have meaning in their everyday lives. Service learning projects give students an opportunity to make this real-world connection at a young age. Another benefit to having a service learning curriculum in the elementary school is that such projects often address the needs of both parties involved (Jennings, 2001, p. 474). The students at the Academy benefited from the lessons they learned about people in need and how they could help them, while the other party received a needed resource and reassurance that society can be kind.

Young children have been learning about their world and how people around the world have different lifestyles. Service learning projects “introduce young children to economic and living situations that differ from their own” (Stott, & Jackson, 2005, p. 157). The children at the Academy were accustomed to a comfortable life in the suburbs coming from families that are a part of the upper-middle-class or upper-class. Service learning activities helped such children understand and appreciate their privileges and caused them to experience empathy for those who

are less fortunate. According to O'Keefe (1997) "service learning projects provide character education in action, including the values of public communities" (p. 43). Younger students who were exposed to such social differences learned to look outside of their own worlds and consider the conditions other people face everyday.

An important component of service learning projects is that they teach students how to be good citizens and attain a sense of civic responsibility (Fertman, 1994, p. 5; Galley, 2003, p. 25). Citizenship needs to be taught at an early age so that children learn what is appropriate and inappropriate as a United States citizen. A similar project could help young children look beyond themselves and begin to overcome their developmental stage characteristics of egocentrism. The children at the Academy come from wealthy families that do not receive any aid from their communities but with service learning projects the children got to be the ones who provided the services to others. Showing one's compassion and concern for others instills a sense of well-being and resourcefulness among the children (Fertman, 1994, p. 6; Beale, 2000, p. 66).

Service learning projects not only are beneficial for the students carrying out the projects, and the recipients of the services, but also for the community. Smith and Wohlstetter (2006) suggested that "service learning projects create positive changes in the community" (p. 464). The work carried out by the students enhances the appearance of the community, and improves the "image of today's youth" (Cooper, & Pace, 2004, p. 55). The news and other forms of media often report on negative aspects or actions committed by today's youth. Service learning projects give today's youth a chance to portray their assets and prove that not every child or adolescent is mal-intentioned. O'Keefe (1997) goes on to say that "student work and service in the community teaches others that the next generation is capable of initiating good deeds"

(p. 48). Students that engage in service learning activities at an early age are more likely to continue volunteering and completing community service into adulthood

(Fertman, 1994, p. 6). Students should be introduced to service learning at an early age so they can be exposed to the joy that volunteering brings to other people and to themselves so that they will become responsible, volunteering citizens in the future.

The initiation of service learning projects at the Academy began in the 2006-2007 school year in September for the kindergarten classes. Service learning projects will then be initiated in all grade levels through high school starting the 2007-2008 school year. Service learning can be tied in with the curriculum to meet several state and national standards for all grade levels. The kindergarten students at the Academy learned about the social studies standards for citizenship and helping others. They also learned about their role in the community and how they could make a difference in their communities. The students also learned important lessons by being exposed to and educated on differences in economic status. The children also learned about how they could help those who are less fortunate than themselves. The students made a positive impact on society while they moved from ego-centric thinking to empathy and consideration of others and their needs.

The students at the Academy also strengthened their reading and writing skills as they read books about helping others and caring for their communities. The children also worked on their writing skills as they interacted with the children in need through the exchange of pen pal letters. Both the students at the Academy and those at the Elementary benefited from using inventive spelling to write to their pen pals and were motivated to write because they wanted to create a letter in which they could communicate with their pen pals. Most every subject area can be integrated with service learning in a positive and meaningful manner. Young children are

eager to learn new things and help others, which made kindergarten a suitable starting point for an annual service learning project.

Selected Solutions/Calendar Plan

Several approaches to improving service learning opportunities were realistically implemented at the Academy. The service learning projects were implemented at the kindergarten level including reading books to earn money to get new books for the children in need. The kindergarten students at the Academy interacted with other kindergarten students in a public inner-city school system. The interactions allowed the students at the Academy to learn about the differences and similarities they had with one another. The students were asked a set of questions before and after the service learning project to track their progress in understanding socio-economic differences and how they could make an impact on the lives of others. Through this experience the students learned about the standards of being a good citizen such as being polite and considerate to others, and they began to think beyond themselves and go from ego-centric thinking to caring about the needs of others first.

A step by step process occurred for carrying out this service learning project. The first step involved all kindergarten students at the Academy being asked a set of questions that would be the same for everyone and, remain the same at the end of the project. The goal for keeping the questions the same at the beginning and ending of the project was to track the progress the students had made in their understanding of social differences, and how they could make a difference in their communities. The students then had a two month period to read books and collect nickels for each book read. The money collected went towards reading books that the students at the Academy wrapped with paper they had decorated for the children in the inner-city Elementary whom live below the poverty line. Each child participant then selected books from

those they had read to purchase for the children in need. They wrote about why a child who does not own any books of their own would enjoy the particular books they selected. The book recommendation activity served as a supplemental activity to the learning process the students had engaged in. The same set of questions were asked to each of the kindergarten classes once again at the finale of the project to track the student's maturation after the project, and the perspective changes in conclusion to the experience.

After all of the books had been purchased the students took part in a gift wrapping day. All of the kindergarten students at the Academy came together to take part in a gift wrapping day. A local community grocery store donated butcher paper for the students to decorate as gift-wrap. The students decorated the butcher paper with stamps stickers and drawings that they believed the other kindergarten children would enjoy. Once the wrapping was completed the books were transported to the Elementary for distribution amongst the kindergarten students there.

Throughout the project the kindergarten students were given a pen pal from the inner-city school to correspond with. The pen pal experience taught the children from both schools that even though they live different lives, they still like to play, laugh, be with friends, and do things that children enjoy doing. The pen pal experience also helped the children work on their reading and writing skills in an exciting, real-world manner. A conclusion project summarized everything the students had learned about service learning. The students went to the cooperating inner-city school and helped the students at the Elementary plant flowers around the exterior of their school to help improve the appearance of their school and community. Both parties were involved in the service learning process and both learned that people of all socio-economic groups are capable of participating in service learning activities that will benefit society.

Week-by-Week Calendar Plan of Action for Service Learning Project

September Week One	Contact possible inner-city or at-risk schools and find a cooperating school and classroom to complete the project.
Week Two	Ask the cooperating classroom teacher what they would like or need to receive from a service learning project. Obtain a signed document for permission purposes from the school.
Week Three	Discuss and come up with a plan of action for the services the school would like to receive. (In this particular example the classroom teacher requested books for each student to have as personal books to take home because they do not own many books of their own and she felt the children would enjoy having their own books.)
Week Four	Information about the project should be created and prepared to send out to the parents including a participation slip to determine which students will be taking part in the project.
October Week One	Parent information about the project should be sent out to parents.
Week Two	The kindergarten teachers conduct the pre-project interview and record the student's responses.
Week Three	Participation slips are due this week and should be collected. Send out a reminder just in case the parents forgot to do so.
Week Four	The children begin reading and collecting nickels
November Week One	Pen Pal letter writing begins among the kindergarten students at the Academy and the kindergarten students at the Elementary.

Week Two	Teachers have classroom discussions on the books the children are reading and collecting nickels at home for.
Week Three	Classroom discussions on the books the children are reading and collecting nickels at home for continue.
Week Four	Academy kindergartners and their families begin purchasing books with the nickels earned.
December Week One	Books are due into school.
Week Two	Gift wrapping day will occur in this week. All kindergarten classes will decorate butcher paper to wrap up the purchased books for the children in need.
Week Three	The books are delivered and the post-observation interview and discussion is conducted

Chapter V: Results

Results

The problem that was being researched was that opportunities for community involvement at the Academy were inadequate for student learning, and the development of empathy and responsibility for the community.

The goal of this research was to engage the elementary students in a service learning program that would benefit the education and well-being of the kindergarten students while also improving the community.

The first expected outcome that the kindergarten students would develop an understanding of different socio-economic living situations, and would develop a sense of citizenship and service to their communities was met after carrying out the final project. The Constant Comparative Method (CCM) for qualitative analysis was put into practice to compare the responses the children made over time and in each of the kindergarten classrooms at the Academy (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Common themes were disclosed proving that the children were impacted by the project. Some reoccurring themes include the following: the children had regular meaningful discussions and proved a better understanding of how they could help others in need through their responses to the same interview given before the project began. An example of the changes in understanding that took place include when in the beginning of the project the majority of the students felt that everyone in the world has everything they need for survival and comfortable living. After the project the majority of the students replied that everyone in the world does not have everything they need for survival. All four kindergarten classes revealed similar results. The children were even making comments about how they never thought there could be children in the world without many books to choose from for a bedtime

story. Some of the kindergarten students even had tears in their eyes when they thought of what it would be like to not have any books to read with their parents for a bedtime story. The percentage of change was also quantitatively analyzed to track the degree in which the students' perspectives had changed. See Table One, page 40 for the percentage calculations.

The need for initiating a service learning program at the Academy is apparent in Table One. The student survey questions can be found in appendix A. Over half of the students at the Academy responded to questions about wants versus needs with answers that related to material things. The children at the Academy took needs such as food, shelter, clothing, and heat for granted. They mainly expressed their concerns for getting things they want like a pony, or toys. The children could not imagine that there are children who do not have all of their basic needs being met. The students at the Academy believed that everyone was like them and had everything they needed and wanted without any struggles. The students were able to consider losses of needs due to natural disasters like tornados but they could not imagine that there are people who have never had their basic needs met.

Table 1: Majority Responses in Percentages for Student Pre-Project Survey

Questions

Student Survey Question number and Response	Percentage of Students that Answered with this Response to Represent the Majority
1. <i>House, pets, water, friends, socks, spaghetti, energy, books, school supplies, nothing.</i>	65% answered with one or more of these responses
2. <i>Horse, cool clothes, Santa and his reindeer, everything, all of the money in the world.</i>	55% answered with one or more of these responses
3. <i>I do not know, you buy things you need and get toys you want, one is more important than the other.</i>	52% answered with one or more of these responses
4. <i>Yes of course they do, some may have lost the things they need in a tornado or storm.</i>	75% answered with one or more of these responses
5. <i>No because nobody has time to shop for everything they want, no because most people want everything there is in the world and that is too much stuff to fit in a house.</i>	70% answered with one or more of these responses
6. <i>Yes because mom and dad buy them for you, sometimes Santa brings them to you, everybody has and needs books.</i>	51% answered with one or more of these responses
7. <i>But they do have books at home, you could have mom and dad buy them some, some people still need to buy them for their kids.</i>	63% answered with one or more of these responses
8. <i>Yes mom and dad drive you there, no because some don't live near a library like a Native American Indian.</i>	55% answered with one or more of these responses

The second expected outcome stated that the students would be actively involved in service learning projects. This outcome was met since all four kindergarten classes at the Academy took an active role in raising money, decorating the wrapping paper, and writing pen pal letters to the students at the Elementary. The children put in their best effort to help these children in need. The time sheets (see appendix D) completed by the children in each of the kindergarten classes at the Academy indicated that each of the classes spent equal amounts of time committed to the service learning project. Further research is necessary to determine the long term effects of beginning service learning projects at a young age, and how engaging in service learning projects at an early age impacts continued involvement in service learning opportunities later in life.

The expected outcome, which stated that students would take pride in helping others in their community, was also met. The impact that this project made on the students at the Elementary and at the Academy was apparent through the excited and positive responses the children in both parties gave and sent through their pen pal letters to one another. One child from the Academy wrote: (the following quotes are typed using the actual spellings the kindergartners wrote for their inventive spellings)

Deer pin pal, I am so hapee that we r frens now. I hop u lick the buks. U wil luv the won I got fr u. Evry won needs buks. Mi favrite buk is cliford.

Dear pen pal, I am so happy that we are friends now. I hope you like the books. You will love the one I got for you. Everyone needs books. My favorite book is Clifford.

Another child from the Academy wrote:

Dear pen pal, I like you. We wil bee frens for evr. I had fun at yer skool. Do you like the flowers we plated? I am glade we wer togeter.

Dear pen pal, I like you. We will be friend forever. I had fun at your school. Do you like the flowers we planted? I am glad we were together.

A child from the inner-city elementary school wrote back to their pen pal saying:

I luv u mi bk slps wth me at nite I rd it evr nite u r so nis cum vst me ugn.

I love you. My book sleeps with me at night. I read it every night. You are so nice. Come visit me again.

The quote the child from the Elementary wrote is representative of the enthusiastic responses, pictures, and teacher notes the students sent proving their joy for the generous gifts, which in turn gave the kindergartners at the Academy confidence and pride in a job well done. The aforementioned observations were also determined by using the Constant Comparative Method (CCM). Multiple observation sheets were completed by each of the kindergarten teachers involved in the project, and positive feedback was the common theme for each class.

The expected outcome of students developing a life-long love of learning and helping others could not be proved until the children get old enough to track their service learning involvement and regard for helping others in the future. Beginning activities and service learning projects in life can help children develop a love for learning and helping others but determining the factual information for this particular outcome cannot be determined until the passing of time reveals the facts. A follow-up study for this project is being planned for research on the long-term effects of service learning on the same student group within the next six to ten years.

The final expected outcome stated that the students would gain exposure and knowledge of people who live in less fortunate situations than their own. This expected outcome was met since the children of both the Elementary and the Academy met face-to-face and communicated with one another three times during the time span of the project. The children learned not only how they are different due to socio-economic differences, but they also found out how similar they are since they both like to play, run, and make new friends. The time the children spent together proved their awareness of their individual differences and similarities in how they communicated and worked to find out every detail about the other.

Discussion

Based on analysis of student responses to a survey conducted before and after the service learning project was implemented it became apparent that the kindergarten students at the Academy developed a new understanding of socio-economic differences and how they as students can make a difference to help people in need. The Constant Comparative Method (CCM) proved reoccurring themes that each of the four kindergarten classes demonstrated before, during, and after the project. At the beginning of the project many of the kindergartners felt that everyone around the world has everything they need, and many felt that most people

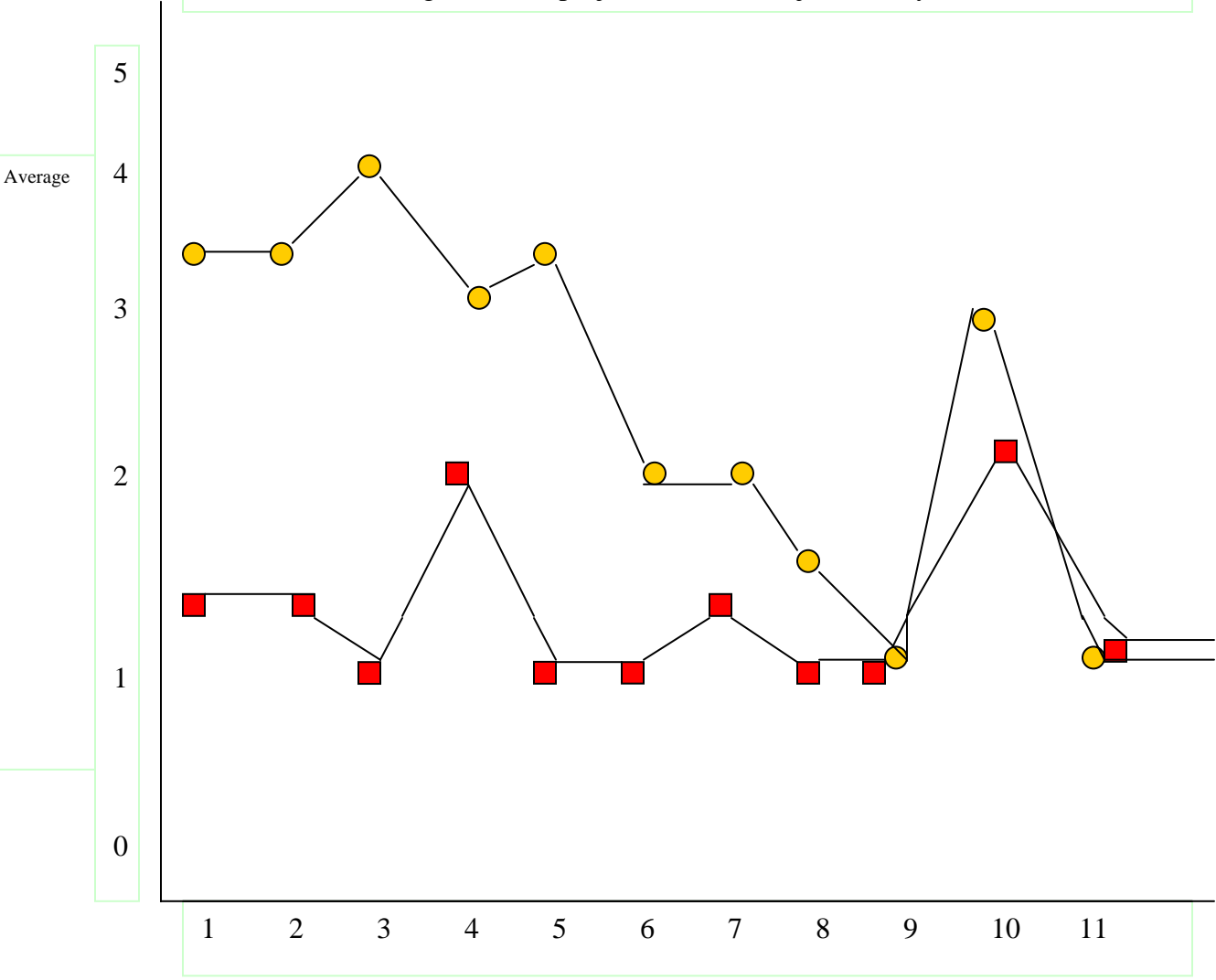
around the world have everything they want if they have time to shop for it all. After the service learning project a large majority of the kindergartners stated that they believed many people do not have everything they need, or especially everything they want. The children have had several discussions about how good it feels to help others. The kindergartners have also been playing games at recess where they pretend like they are donating items to various charities. This service learning experience will most likely help the children become life-long volunteers. Implementing service learning into all grade levels in the elementary school in the future will help all students develop a life long love of learning and helping others.

The significance of pre-project and post-project parent surveys conducted to determine the need and effectiveness of the service learning project from the perspective of the parents of the students involved was determined based on a *t*-test carried out to determine the effectiveness of the aforementioned survey. See appendix B to view the parent survey and the Likert Scale used in the survey. Table 2, page 46 includes the data collected for the responses the parents made to the parent survey. The data collected was used to determine the mean, the standard deviation, the degree of freedom, the confidence interval for the mean, and the p-value. The *t*-test was then conducted and determined that the p-value was 0.50, which indicated that the survey was 95% significant, proving that the pre-project and post-project survey data was significant to the topic being discussed. The following graph in Table Two provides a visual for the changes in perspective the parents underwent from the pre-project survey, to the post-project survey. The significance of the surveys proves the relevance of the results and the questions in regards to the topic of service learning projects in the elementary school.

The parents of the students at the Academy were satisfied with the initiation of a service learning program at the Academy. Table Two is composed of a graph that demonstrates the

changes in perspective the parents underwent from the beginning to the end of the project. In the beginning the parents felt that their children were learning little about helping others as a part of the curriculum. The trend improved for the post project interview because the parents felt that the service learning program gave the children a new understanding of helping others, and conducting services for people in need. The desired results were achieved after the project since the children and their families were satisfied with the service learning program and the amount of learning the students were gaining. A graph with a similar graphical trend for the pre-project and post-project interview would have indicated little change. The opposite of the trend in Table Two would have indicated that the children were not learning and gaining new insights.

Table 2
Averages for Pre-project and Post-Project Survey Results



- = Pre-Project Averages
- = Post-Project Averages

The kindergarten students were not only successful in learning about helping people in need, raising money by reading books to help people in need, and in learning about their communities and how they can make an impact on society, but they also learned how to be appreciative of what they have while considering other's needs. The outcome of the service learning project at the Academy supports Werner and associates (2002) in their statement that "service learning teaches children more about responsibility and consideration of others than any other classroom lesson can" (p. 559). The growth and maturity that the kindergartners at the Academy achieved from being actively engaged in the process of reading books and saving nickels in a jar, to wrapping the books and decorating the gifts, as well as writing pen pal letters has made a big impact on the students. Simply discussing what the students think would happen if the class were to conduct such a project would not have helped the children develop the reading skills, and the sense of citizenship as they did with the service learning project. The students' awareness of socio-economic differences and needs in the community, also would not have been as acute as it was after the students conducted the actual project.

The results of conducting a service learning project over a donation collection were overwhelming. Donation collections in the past were completed without any student awareness of what they were supporting or why they were collecting money. The donation collection resembled turning in money for a field trip in which the children handed over money from their parents without understanding how the money will benefit others in the community. Donation collections also prevented the students from learning about different socio-economic factors, and how to move from egocentric thought to thinking also about others. The learning component of a service learning project over a donation collection proved to be a significantly better choice over

a donation collection that requires minimal effort and understanding of socio-economic differences in the world.

The kindergarten students are equipped with the information and enthusiasm to be volunteering citizens for life, as well as life long learners. The impact of this project on the kindergartners as they move up in grades could not be determined in conclusion to this project due to the scope of the project. Further studies would need to be conducted to determine the long-term effects of this service learning project on the same group of students in future grade levels. Further studies would also need to be conducted to determine the effects of a school-wide service learning program to determine whether such a program would increase student awareness and participation in volunteering activities.

Overall, the outcome of the service learning project proved to be a success. The children learned about socio-economic differences, improving the community, being grateful for what they have, and helping those in need to better society. The collective service learning project where both parties planted flowers around the cooperating class's school taught the students from both parties that regardless of living situations they can make a difference in the community. The kindergartners also learned how regardless of the differences in lifestyles and socio-economic status that they have with their pen pals, they are all still the same in many ways. The children learned that their pen pals liked to eat pizza, play, spend time with friends, and play games, just like the majority of children in the world do. Service learning projects proved to be more effective than donation collections for teaching children lessons about their community and helping others. The project was also successful because it sent the message to the community that the next generation is capable of doing good deeds for the community. Further research and experimentation would need to be conducted to determine the long-term effects of service

learning being prolonged after the kindergartners go on to first grade, second grade, etc. Further research would also be necessary to determine the effects of a school-wide service learning project.

Recommendations

Service learning is an invaluable resource that allows teachers to make the most of their instructional time by integrating good citizenship and community service with other curricular areas. Service learning is beneficial not only because it can be integrated across the curriculum, but it also can be adapted to fit the needs of most any grade starting in pre-school all the way up to high school and even college in some instances. Any classroom can benefit from taking part in service learning activities.

The following recommendations are important to consider if a researcher were to replicate this service learning project: Researchers should remember that service learning is not community service. Service learning involves more than just providing a service to help people in need. Researchers also need to remember that service learning requires students to not only do a service for their community, but to also learn from the experience, a topic, or topics that are being studied in the classroom. Another point to consider is that all service learning activities should be tied in with the National and/or state standards.

Other recommendations researchers would need to consider if duplicating this study is that it would be beneficial to conduct a long-term study to determine how many students continue to take part in service learning activities after their initial experience in kindergarten. A long-term study would reveal whether or not students continue to take interest in service learning and are eager to take part in more projects. Tracking student responses to an interview before and after the project are concrete examples of the growth and changes in perspective the students

develop as they undergo the service learning project. Student responses to interview questions before and after the project will reveal how the students have changed their ideas of socio-economic differences in the world.

An additional recommendation to researchers working to duplicate this study is that the activity to help others in the community, or to benefit and better the community should be tied in with the curriculum for a subject such as math, science, social studies, or reading. True service learning involves carrying out an action or service to help others in some way, while learning or reviewing curricular topics. When working with young children one should make sure to remind the students of why they are taking part in such a learning experience. Young children often need constant reminders to help them comprehend and retain new information. Children need repetition to help them remember new facts.

Plans for Dissemination

This project will be shared and presented to members of the faculty at the Academy. The teachers and staff are unaware of what service learning entails and how to go about beginning a service learning project. This presentation will inform the faculty of how to carry out a service learning project, and will discuss why service learning is so important. The faculty members will also be informed of the benefits of using service learning in the classroom and the community as opposed to conducting simple donation collections that do not teach children the importance of helping others. The benefits of incorporating service learning within the curriculum will also be explored.

Information on service learning could also be shared with the parents of students to inform them of the importance and benefits of service learning in the school. Parents would receive fliers with information detailing how service learning works and why it is beneficial for

children to take part in such activities. Parents could be encouraged to volunteer to help in the classroom or out in the field when the children are engaged in service learning projects. Many projects require extra help when young children are involved, therefore parent help and volunteers could make the experience run smoothly and be more enjoyable.

The public and educators across the globe would also benefit from learning more about service learning and implementing a service learning program. This document will be sent to several scholarly journals in an effort to reach publication. Service learning is a valuable concept for all educators, parents, and childcare providers to be aware of. This document as a published article could assist others in learning about this valuable cause.

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Appendix A

Student Interview/Survey

Student Survey/Interview Questions for Service Learning Project at the Academy

1. What are some things you need?
2. What are some things you want?
3. What is the difference between want and need?
4. Do all children in America have everything they need?
5. Do all children in America have everything they want?
6. Do all children have their own books at home? Why or why not?
7. How could you help children who may not have books at home? Describe.
8. Do you think all children are able to go to the library to get books?
9. How would you feel if you did not have your own books?
10. How would you feel if you did not have everything you needed?

Appendix B

Parent Survey

Parent Survey for the Need of Service Learning Projects at The Academy
Community Service Projects at The Academy

Dear Parents,

Please fill out this survey in response to the questions that apply to the degree of community service conducted at the Academy, and the degree of understanding the children have in relation to underprivileged families. This information will be beneficial in improving the amount and quality of service learning projects implemented in the lower school curriculum. Please fill out the survey and return to the office.

I appreciate your time and effort.

Sincerely,
Ms.
Kindergarten Teacher at the Academy

Please circle the number that best matches your feelings based on the following scale:
Strongly disagree-5 disagree-4 neutral-3 agree-2 strongly agree-1

1. Students at the Academy understand the importance of helping others at a young age

5 4 3 2 1

2. Students at the Academy take part in an adequate number of community service projects

5 4 3 2 1

3. Students at the Academy can relate to underprivileged families

5 4 3 2 1

4. Students at the Academy are willing to share their luxuries with people in need

5 4 3 2 1

5. The community service projects in the past at the Academy are invaluable learning experiences

5 4 3 2 1

6. The majority of teachers and parents at the Academy would be willing to take an active role in service learning projects

5 4 3 2 1

7. Teachers and volunteers at the Academy would be capable of contacting and working with reputable charities

5 4 3 2 1

8. Students would gain a better understanding of the hardships underprivileged families face after completing service-learning projects

5 4 3 2 1

9. Community service is an important issue that should be added to the curriculum at the Academy

5 4 3 2 1

10. You would enjoy volunteering in service learning projects

5 4 3 2 1

11. Service learning projects at the kindergarten level will influence the children to continue to be volunteering citizens in the future

5 4 3 2 1

Appendix C

Pre-Project and Post-Project Survey Data Table

Survey Question Asked	Pre-Project Rubric Score	Post-Project Rubric Score	Difference + or -
Question 1. Students at the Academy understand the importance of helping others at a young age.	3.5	1.5	+2
Question 2. Students at the Academy take part in an adequate number of community service projects	3.5	1.5	+2
Question 3. Students at the Academy can relate to underprivileged families	4	1	+3
Question 4. Students at the Academy are willing to share their luxuries with people in need	3	2	+1
Question 5. The community service projects in the past at the Academy are invaluable learning experiences	3.5	1	+2.5
Question 6. The majority of teachers and parents at the Academy would be willing to take an active role in service learning projects	2	1	+1
Question 7. Teachers and volunteers at the Academy would be capable of contacting and working with reputable charities	2	1.5	+0.5
Question 8. Students would gain a better understanding of the hardships underprivileged families face after completing service-learning projects	1.5	1	+0.5
Question 9. Community service is an important issue that should be added to the curriculum at the Academy	1	1	0
Question 10. You would enjoy volunteering in service learning projects	3	2	+1
Question 11. Service learning projects at the kindergarten level will influence the children to continue to be volunteering citizens in the future	1	1	0

Appendix D

Community Service Participation Time Charts

Community Service Participation Time Charts

Community Service Activity	Time in Minutes and Coordinator Signature
Book reading project to earn money for books for people in need.	70 Minutes
Flower planting project	180 Minutes
School yard cleaning project	90 Minutes

Appendix E

Observation Charts

Daily Observation Charts for Tracking Anecdotal Notes

Date	Student responses and actions	Notable changes in perspectives of students
Ex. 5-10-2006	Ex. Students are enjoying the project and are taking interest in the students from the Elementary.	Ex. The students are beginning to realize that the students from the inner-city school are not much different from themselves.
9-15-2006	The students are enjoying writing pen pal letters. The students are also improving their letter writing skills and are memorizing the five parts of a letter.	The children have recognized that the students in the inner-city school do not have the writing skills that they have. The students said they are glad that they are writing pen pal letters so the inner-city students can practice their writing.
December 17, 2006	The students have wrapped up the books and have delivered them to the children in the inner-city school.	The children said they feel good knowing that they have helped others. They are eager to start the next phase of our service learning project.