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Service Learning

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Social Studies Moves into the Community

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with many writing strategies, techniques, and styles and integrating them into their experiences as writers. I was able to give them plenty of time. The three basics of writing—time, ownership, and response—were an integral part of this report (see Atwell 1987).

Real Purposes

The class was an active workshop. Students constantly responded because they had a real audience—the people attending the Exceptional People's Awareness Day Exhibit.

The genre chosen by the students, the picture book, incorporating all aspects of the writing process, supported the curriculum. Real writing for real purposes supported the regular education students. And the community service learning/inclusion process supported the special education students. Because there was such a fine line between community service learning and inclusion, the two processes supported and reinforced each other. This fine line enabled us to weave curriculum into real-life experiences and enrich the learning of both regular and special education students.

Reference

Atwell, N. (1987). *In the Middle*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann.

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Social Studies Moves into the Community

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Active Citizenship Today, a program of service-learning pilot projects in the Omaha Public Schools, demonstrates service learning with a corollary, the examination of public policy. Five projects, involving students in geography, history, and government classes, illustrate what students have learned through community service.

From Omaha to Washington, D.C.

One project, developed by a high school Honors Geography class, began by asking students what they wanted the United States to look like in 10 years and what needed to be done to achieve that goal. They isolated what they considered to be the country's most serious problem: the budget deficit. They then invited knowledgeable people to speak to the class on the deficit and potential solutions to the problem. Among the speakers were the mayor of the City of Omaha, the governor of Nebraska, and the congressman from Nebraska's Second District. After the class felt they had acquired as much information as possible, they developed a series of recommendations and then surveyed other social studies classes, families, and neighbors on their reactions to the recommendations. Armed with this information, the class developed proposals for how the federal government ought to deal with the budget deficit.

Two representatives of the class went to Washington, D.C., and presented the report to a member of President Clinton's staff and requested that it be forwarded to the President. They later received

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acknowledgment of the report from the President's Office. Although the students realized that the budget deficit was not the sort of problem they could solve themselves, they wanted to have some input on an issue so crucial to their future.

State Expert Witnesses

A high school government class examined the bills introduced in the Nebraska legislature for a year and decided to concentrate on one that proposed lowering the blood alcohol level for the definition of "drunk driving." The students invited an emergency room nurse, a drug and alcohol counselor, and a policeman to talk with them about the bill. The class traveled to the state capitol where they met with several state senators, including one who had co-introduced the bill. Students formulated their opinions on the bill and, as a final step, wrote letters to their senators. Unfortunately, the bill died in committee. This was another lesson: one in the reality of politics.

Community History and Geography

A geography class decided to combine a community-needs survey and a lesson in geography. The teacher presented background about the community, and the class gathered information about the history of Omaha from local museums. The head of the Historical Preservation Section of the City Planning Office took the students on a bus tour of the neighborhood, pointing out different types of domestic architecture. The students then began their own survey, recording every single building in eight blocks of the shopping district and its present use. City directories in the public library helped them determine what kinds of buildings had been on each lot over the past 100 years. Using computers, they made a series of historical maps showing how the types of businesses in the community had changed over the years and discussed the reasons for the changes. They then drew up a community-needs survey based on their research.

Welfare Recommendations

Another government class took note of the fact that the Governor of Nebraska had appointed a task force to make recommendations about changes in the welfare system. They invited two state senators from the

task force and the Douglas County Commissioner responsible for oversight of welfare to discuss the welfare system and the suggested improvements. A critique of the task force plan was followed by students' recommendations for welfare system change. Finally, the governor visited the high school to receive the students' report and discuss it with them.

Student Museum

An American History class teamed up with the local Western Heritage Museum to learn about the creation and funding of the museum, the acquisition of artifacts, and the development of exhibits. The class discussed society's need for and support of museums. Working in groups, students chose a topic for an exhibit which they will create. The museum and the school will host a reception for the students and their parents and will display the students' exhibits. The students will serve as junior docents at the museum.

* * *

These are examples of the way in which projects can be developed around public policy questions. In each project, students incorporate the policy examination of service into their academic studies and make policy recommendations, or provide service relating to the issue in some way. Students are using the community as a laboratory to learn about the world in which they live.