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## Helping Hands

Piney Kesting

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# HELPING



# HANDS

*How student volunteerism can inspire good citizenship and good academics.*

*By Piney Kesting*

**S**OME OF SHERI EDWARDS' sixth-grade students are wearing earphones that make it hard for them to hear. Several others have wrapped their fingers in tape, making them difficult to move. And before the end of class, all will have snacked on unsweetened Koolaid and sugarless cookies. The bland food, muffled ears, and stiffened fingers are all part of a role-playing exercise designed to show kids what it's like to grow old.

Edwards, a teacher at the Nespelem School, a rural elementary school on the Colville Indian Reservation in Nespelem, Washington,

ally, interdisciplinary learning is a major component of educating their young," explains Edwards, whose Intergenerational Service-Learning Unit not only teaches students how to help others, but also integrates what they learn as volunteers into their academic curriculum. "You can pull in so many different parts of almost any curriculum when you're working with elders."

Edwards focused on mental health, human growth and development, diet and exercise, and life events in her self-contained sixth-grade classroom. She selected a detailed bibliography on elders that included short stories, books, poems, and magazine ar-

ton, was giving her students a crash course in aging to prepare them for volunteering at the local convalescence center. "By the end of these exercises," she says, "they realized how hard it is to have these impairments, and they learned what they had to do to help each other or to help themselves."

Like many teachers around the country, Edwards has discovered that student volunteerism can fit into various aspects of the curriculum, motivate at-risk students, and improve academic performance. Volunteers not only see concrete examples of difficult-to-grasp abstractions, they also experience personal growth and become better citizens.

"Service learning enables young people to do something real and then make that connection to an abstract idea," says Alice Halsted, executive director of the National Center for Service Learning in Early Adolescence. "Democracy, responsibility, and caring are abstractions to them. If students can practice them, and then in the classroom delve into what they mean, they have a basis for understanding."

Several years ago, Edwards was looking for ways to make the curriculum more culturally relevant for her students, 98 percent of whom are Native Americans. After talking with parents and other members of the community, Edwards came up with a list of service-learning options that included improving the schoolyard and playground, planting a school garden, and working at the convalescence center. She presented the list to her students and they chose the center.

"Respect for elders is a key value of Native Americans and, tradition-

### **Sheri Edwards**

Nespelem Elementary School  
P.O. Box 291  
Nespelem, WA 99155  
(509) 634-4541

**Grade:** 6  
**Subject:** all  
**Students in class:** 15-25  
**Students in school:** 270  
**Cable provided by:** TCI

### **Jim L. Sills**

Alexander Graham Middle School  
1800 Runnymede Lane  
Charlotte, NC 28211  
(704) 343-5810

**Grade:** 9  
**Subjects:** civics, TV production  
**Students in class:** 15-31  
**Students in school:** 725  
**Cable provided by:** Time Warner's Cablevision of Charlotte

**National Information Center  
for Service Learning**  
1954 Buford Ave., Room R290  
St. Paul, MN 55108-6197  
1-800-808-SERVE



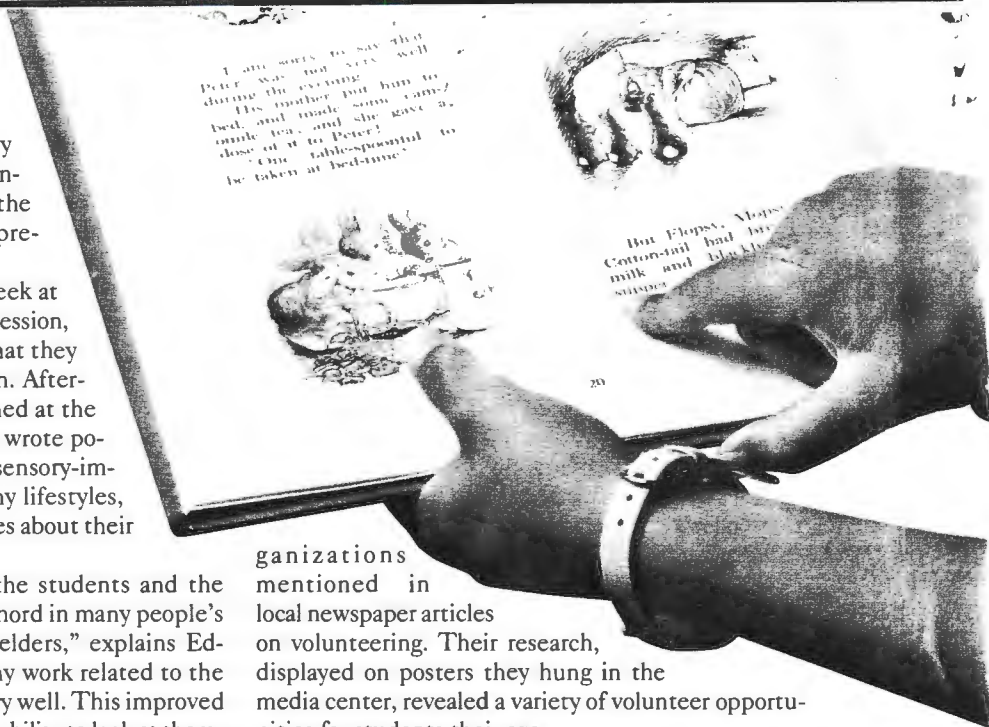
ticles about elders around the world. They read and discussed these works and engaged in role-playing prior to working at the center. "I wanted them to be totally prepared," she says.

Her students spent one afternoon a week at the center for three months. Before each session, they created checklists and discussed what they planned to do, what they hoped to learn. Afterwards, they talked about what they learned at the center. During the project, the students wrote poetry, created a brochure on how to help sensory-impaired elders, made posters about healthy lifestyles, diet, and nutrition, and delivered speeches about their work to the class.

The project was a success for both the students and the community. "It really touched a strong chord in many people's hearts that the kids were helping the elders," explains Edwards. As for the students, she says, "Any work related to the service-learning unit was always done very well. This improved their communication skills, as well as their ability to look at themselves and at others, and to figure out how to help people."

In Charlotte, North Carolina, Jim Sills' ninth-grade students at the Alexander Graham Middle School also discovered that caring about your community can make schoolwork more interesting. A "hands-on" civics teacher, Sills decided to involve his students in community projects when he reviewed his new textbook last year. "It just seemed to pop out at me that you not only teach about the Constitution and the government, but that you try and get the kids actively involved in something other than just studying the textbook," he says. "Getting them involved in projects in the community would give them a feel for responsible citizenship."

Early in the school year, Sills used *Citizens' Stories—Democracy and Responsibility in American Life*, an Assignment Discovery program about people who work to help their communities, to introduce a chapter in the textbook. After previewing the program, he showed it in class, and followed it up with discussion. He later divided the students into small groups where they brainstormed about community problems such as crime, drugs, and homeless children, and thought of projects in which they could become involved. Then he had his students research and answer ten questions about the or-



ganizations mentioned in local newspaper articles on volunteering. Their research, displayed on posters they hung in the media center, revealed a variety of volunteer opportunities for students their age.

During the course of the school year, Sills' students swung

## THE BIG HELP

Volunteering is what Nickelodeon's new campaign, The Big Help, is all about. "In talking to kids, we have found they want to show that they can do something to help," says Nickelodeon President Geraldine Laybourne. "Our goal is to provide opportunities for kids to have an impact on their world, and in doing so to feel better about themselves."

"When kids take pride in their community and feel they can make a change, it's a very positive role for them," adds Deni Frand, a consultant on the project, which is geared toward kids ages six to 14. "When you feel empowered in a community, you are also less likely to do damage to it."

Programs designed for home viewing include The Big Help telethon from September 30 to October 2, during which kids can call a toll-free number to pledge their time to participate in all kinds of community activities. On Big Help Day, October 15, they will fulfill their telethon pledges. Nick will televise a number of these activities live from several cities around the country, and will also air a special edition of *Nick News* that night.

Several commercial-free Cable in the Classroom programs will be available for teachers to tape and use as motivators or discussion starters. They include:

- *Nick News*. Each Cable in the Classroom episode in September and October features a segment about volunteer activities benefitting a community or individual. See listings under Social Studies: Elementary for details.
- *Letters of Helping*. Kids around the world create short videos that explain what helping means to them, why they do it, and what they are doing. Aired October 5, 13, and 28 at 5:30am ET.
- *Nick News Special Edition: The Big Help*. Linda Ellerbee spotlights Big Help Day activities, and shows viewers how kids are making a difference and how they can help year-round. Aired October 19 and 27 at 5:30am ET.

For a copy of Nickelodeon's "how-to" pamphlet that will help students participate in the campaign from anywhere in the country, call 1-800-NICK NET, or write Nickelodeon Elementary, 1515 Broadway, 21st floor, New York, New York 10036.

## Helping Hands

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wholeheartedly into the spirit of volunteering. They collected more than 700 cans of food for the local food bank in Charlotte, participated in a separate school food drive, raised \$1,300 for the spring March of Dimes Walk-a-thon, and adopted the street in front of their school as part of a roadside clean-up project. Every two months, wearing safety vests donated by the PTA, they collected trash along their stretch of road. Time-Warner's Cablevision of Charlotte videotaped the students cleaning their adopted street for a promotional spot. The school's television production class, which Sills teaches in addition to the social studies classes, also taped the clean-up for an in-school broadcast.

Feedback from the community was very positive. Parents commented at PTA meetings, or sent notes to school expressing their support for the project. Parents involved in volunteer organizations often supplied information and contacts. And the project earned Sills a Cablevision Cable in the Classroom Award, supplying his school with a \$1,000 grant to buy more equipment for the video production class.

Knowledge gained through volunteering helped students both in class and out. When a local business executive, invited to class by Sills to talk about corporate responsibility, mentioned his company's participation in a food bank, Sills' students enthusiastically joined in the discussion because they had conducted a canned food drive of their own. "It was helpful for them to see adults also doing community action," says Sills. He has seen students continue working for church or youth groups after school, too. In general, he believes, they are all more aware of volunteer opportunities. "This is an on-going lesson," he says.

**W**hile an increasing number of teachers are discovering the academic benefits of service learning, community organizations are also finding out how effective student volunteers can be. Several years ago, Renee Holley, a program coordinator at The Center for Children and Families in Jamaica, New York, approached the principal at South Jamaica Junior High School 8. She was looking for student volunteers for the Kids' Success Program, a tutoring service for elementary-school students. Usually, college students from York Col-

lege tutored third- and fourth-graders from PS 40 and PS 48. But the demands of college often interfered. Holley thought the nearby junior high could provide motivated volunteers. She was right. Students involved in the attendance-improvement program enthusiastically volunteered.

"Most were graduates of PS 40 and 48, so they would be working in their own community," Holley explains. The students named themselves the Adolescent Teacher Squad during their first meeting, and have proven to be more reliable than the college-age tutors. "They are such dedicated tutors," she says, "they even show up in the snow."

Approximately 18 junior-high students participate in the squad, which works all year tutoring about 60 younger children in reading, art, computers, and music. They also teach youngsters how to write autobiographies and stories. Holley prepares her teenaged tutors by using materials and tapes from the National Center for Service Learning in Early Adolescence and by training them in conflict resolution. Every Tuesday, prior to the weekly tutorials, Holley meets her volunteers to plan the week's activities, discuss individual concerns, and to reflect on what the work means to them.

Some of Holley's dedicated tutors are now on the honor roll at school — one was the class valedictorian. "The program improves their academics," says Holley, "because they show up for school now. I think they try harder because they know they are junior teachers." She has been told that her program is unique because she has a large number of young black male volunteers, some of whom have stayed on for three years. Her students often want to know if they can come back as high-school students.

"They live in a community full of crime and drugs, and they are looked upon as being very successful without having to do those things," she concludes. "I grew up in this community, too, so I feel like I am also doing something. It's a good feeling." ■

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*The National Center for Service Learning in Early Adolescence, at the Center for Advanced Study in Education at the City University of New York, has a clearinghouse of over 150 service-learning programs around the country. The center offers a start-up kit, bibliography, video, and a teaching guide for educators interested in motivating their students. They also offer mini-consultations. For more information, call (212) 642-2947, or write: 25 West 43rd Street, Suite 612, New York, NY 10036-8099.*

# Clearing Up Copyright

*For a media specialist, getting cable can be an opportunity to teach the teachers about copyright — without being the “bad guy.”* By Mary Morris

**A**T TIMES, I HAVE DETESTED COPYRIGHT. During my 17 years as a library media specialist, I've had many teachers refuse to hear about copyright (ignorance may not be a defense before the law, but it helps one avoid feeling guilty). I've seen teachers storm out the media center door, angrily shouting, “Well, then, I won't show anything!” I've heard innumerable tirades about inadequate funding. And, one dismal day, I had a former administrator, concerned about teenage crime, project an old, off-the-air program to an auditorium of students without acquiring the copyright owner's permission, despite the irony of breaking a law to teach compliance with the law.

Don't misunderstand me. It is hard to fault teachers who care so much and have so little. It is extremely difficult for a media specialist whose primary task is providing resources to say, “I cannot give you what you need and you may not use what you have in your hand.” But as an information professional, I support the law. It is instrumental to the continued production of the multitude of resources available today. What I needed was a way to make copyright compliance easier and more palatable. Getting cable gave me that opportunity.

Lack of resources is a reality in Show Low School District #10. We serve a small rural community in Arizona's White Mountains, 50 miles from the New Mexican border and four hours drive from any city. Our 2,000 K-12 students enjoy fresh air, pines, and a nearby ski resort, but must depend almost totally on school-provided educational materials.

Educational media are scarce here. There is no county public library. Arizona's fee-based interlibrary loan system makes obtaining books prohibitively expensive for small schools. Most high-school students do not have access to computers. Some families live outside the range of television transmission, unless they own a satellite dish. At a time when learning increasingly depends on resource access, Show Low's students seem cut off from essential learning tools.

## Mary Morris

District Media Specialist  
Show Low Schools  
1350 N. Central Ave.  
Show Low, AZ 85901  
Phone: (602) 537-2901, ext. 165  
Schools in district: 7  
Teachers in district: 120  
Students in district: 2,000  
Cable provided by:  
Post-Newsweek Cable

But the need for educational resources, however great, never justifies violating the law. As the growth of Show Low's student population threatens to outrun all funding, administrators delay purchasing other essential items to ensure that all



**Mary Morris: copyright education, not just enforcement.**

students have textbooks and supplementary reading materials. Each year teachers spend more of their personal dollars for school supplies—but no one claims need as a reason to pilfer them from stores. “It's for the good of my students” does not excuse shoplifting. Nor should it excuse “copy-lifting.”

When my district recently shifted Chapter 2 funding from purchasing library books to buying the video equipment we needed to receive cable and satellite programming, copyright protection threatened to become an area of major confrontation. With all of these new resources available through the district, teachers would no longer be able to quietly violate copyright protection on their own—now they had to ask other school officials to do it for them. Thanks to collaborative effort, we turned this potential problem into a catalyst for education.

With its many commercial-free, copyright-cleared offerings, cable provided the opportunity to change from “You may not...”