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Fostering Learning, Fun, and Friendship Among Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders and Their Peers: The SO (Service-Learning Opportunities) Prepared for Citizenship Program

It's like a colored cube. You try to put it together, you get so frustrated you want to throw it at the wall and smash it. But you have to take time; you have to cooperate with it. You have to make it go the way it needs to go. When you finally do it, you're like, man, I'm kind of glad I didn't throw it at the wall and smash it. So I know how to do what I need to do now. I know what I need to do to make this cube work. And sometimes life is like that. And you need to be patient. You need to get all your anger out and cooperate with this cube — with the cube of life. ... Yea. You need to stay in control. You need to cooperate. You need to have fun and see if they (others) will have fun with you. Just like this cube, and you can try. You could throw the cube at the wall; you can break the cube, but it won't get you anywhere. You won't learn anything. You won't make new friends. You won't have fun. *Comments of a 5th grade boy with ADD and LD*

It never occurred to me that being a citizen-leader meant being responsible, understanding diversity, cooperating, caring and respecting others. It took a while and the path was very rocky, but I [learned] these characteristics and the results have been astounding. *Comments of an undergraduate education major, Rivier College*



Photo by Howard Muscott

What would you call a program that aims to teach students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and their peers, core character traits through mentoring experiences with older students? How about a program that helps high school students explore careers in human services while they learn to build relationships with young children and caring college buddies? Or one that provides opportunities for college students to learn to teach and collaborate with others by implementing a character education curriculum they develop themselves? What name would you give a program that involves all three groups of students in projects that are of service to their schools and the local community? Would you call such a program innovative? Inclusive? Creative? The children call it FUN, LEARNING, AND FRIENDSHIP. The high school and college students call it service-learning. Governor Jean Shaheen of New Hampshire called it a Gold Circle Partnership Achievement Award winner in 1996 and 1998 and the New Hampshire Partners in Education named it the best multi-school partnership in the state in 2000. We call it simply, SO Prepared for Citizenship.

SO (Service Learning Opportunities) Prepared for Citizenship is a national demonstration model service-learning (SL) program supported by the Council of Independent Colleges, the Learn and Serve America program, the New Hampshire College and University Council and the New Hampshire Department of Education. SO Prepared is a collaborative partnership between Rivier College and four schools in the local community: Dr. Crisp Elementary School; Presentation of Mary Academy; Nashua High School; and Bishop Guertin High School. The 15-week after school program is designed to teach elementary and middle school students social skills and attitudes that will build character and enhance citizenship (New Hampshire College and University Council, 1997). The primary recipients are students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) and other disabilities, and students at-risk for school failure due to behavior problems, although non-disabled students, and gifted and talented students also participate. Faculty and families from Dr. Crisp and Presentation of Mary Academy nominate students who would benefit from extensive character education programming and a relationship with a high school or college student. Students from Nashua and Bishop Guertin High Schools serve as mentors for the children and run the program as a SL experience with faculty support. In the six years the program has been in existence, more than 125 children and over 175 high school and college students have participated. The purpose of this article is to describe the SO Prepared program in detail by taking the reader through the stages of SL program design and implementation first outlined by Duckenfield and Swanson (1995) and modified by Muscott (1999). The six stages implicit in SO Prepared for Citizenship are: (1) preparation; (2) action; (3) reflection; (4) celebration; (5) evaluation; and (6) reconfiguration.

Designing and Implementing a Successful Service-Learning Program

Stage 1: Preparing for Success

Identifying and meeting community needs.

Meeting actual community needs is at the heart of SL. The National and Community Service Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12572 (a) (101) defined SL as a method under which students develop newly acquired skills and knowledge through a combination of active participation and structured reflection in thoughtfully organized, real-life service experiences that meet actual community needs. The SO Prepared for Citizenship program grew out of community-based needs identified by two local schools located near Rivier College. In meetings with teachers and administrators from Dr. Crisp Elementary and Presentation of Mary Academy, the most prevalent need was to expand the character education curriculum taught to students beyond the school day, both to increase the atmosphere of respect and cooperation in their schools and to prepare students for citizenship. According to the staff, incidents of disrespect between students including cursing, bullying, and fighting were increasing among some students. Similarly, acts of compassion and cooperation were slowly disappearing, particularly in unstructured situations such as recess, free time, and at lunch. Both schools were interested in fostering leadership development, team building, collaboration and civic responsibility to enhance the essential skills of citizenship. Other needs identified by the partners were for good role

models, cooperative activities, experiential learning opportunities, positive interactions among diverse ethnic groups, and skill development in math, science, reading and art.

Meetings with the faculty at Nashua and Bishop Guertin High Schools and Rivier College produced another set of needs. These included understanding the citizenship building character themes of respect, responsibility, justice, trustworthiness, and caring, experiential learning opportunities, and positive interactions among diverse ethnic groups. These needs dovetailed beautifully with those of the elementary/middle schools. Moreover, the faculty at all three schools expressed the desire to enhance the curricular experience of both high school and college students by infusing SL experiences into their academic experience. Mentoring and teaching younger students character education traits in a supervised environment was seen by all the constituents as both a vehicle for promoting school-to-career success for high school and college students planning careers in the human services and as a way of improving retention and graduation rates. The program would aim to meet these needs by providing hands-on experiences with diverse populations of students in a real life SL experience that is evaluated and processed in a classroom environment. In addition, the program would provide a context for older adolescents and young adults to consider, evaluate, and act on civic principles, relating them in a vital and immediate way to their coursework in education, social and behavioral sciences, religious studies, and child care classes. Out of all these needs came the birth of SO Prepared for Citizenship.

Connecting service-learning to the Rivier College curriculum.

SO Prepared is supported by over thirty SL courses at the college. Participation in SL is a graduation requirement for Rivier undergraduates, and most fulfill this curriculum obligation by registering for a “plus one-credit” option attached to one of their courses. Under this arrangement, students earn an additional academic credit by performing community service associated with learning outcomes for a particular course and completing a variety of additional requirements spelled out in an individual contract with the professor. The requirement can also be accomplished through classes that have a SL component built into the syllabi itself.

College students participating in SO Prepared usually perform the direct service role of mentor with a young buddy, or curriculum coordinator. The curriculum coordinator's role is to prepare and deliver the formal lessons for each character trait. For example, students taking a children's literature class would contract to research, modify, and teach lessons on one or more of the character traits using books and other literacy activities. Additional direct service roles include program coordinator and behavior management coordinator.

Cultivating mentors.

Werner and Smith (1982) identified a trusting relationship with a person who cares and informal sources of support as significant protective factors in helping children at-risk for poor life outcomes become resilient, competent, and autonomous young adults. The development of a trusting 1:1 relationship between a high school or college student and their buddy is at the heart of SO Prepared. Throughout the program, the high school and college students are coached to provide consistent, informal support to the younger students while assuming the three relational roles of caregiver, model, and mentor outlined by The Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (1999). According to The Center, mentors maximize their influence on young people when they serve as: (1) effective caregivers who treat their younger students with respect and worth while helping them succeed at program activities; (2) moral models who demonstrate a high level of respect and responsibility in their interactions with others and discuss morally significant events; and (3) ethical mentors who provide direct instruction and guidance through explanation, storytelling, discussion, encouragement of positive behavior, and corrective feedback when students engage in behavior that is hurtful to themselves or others.

An intensive training process includes five hours of instruction for the high school and college mentors prior to the program and two and a half hours of follow-up training each month. The content of the training includes modules on mentoring, the nature and needs of students with EBD, behavior management techniques and interventions for deescalating conflicts, SL, and the character education curriculum.

Creating partnerships for program leadership.

In a review of research on best practices in SL, Shumer (1997) concluded that strong leadership from individuals and strong administrative support were crucial to program success. Fortunately, the SO Prepared program has experienced both these fundamental elements from its inception. The organizational structure for the multi-school partnership has evolved from simple, makeshift arrangements to a relatively sophisticated infrastructure which links faculty and administration from Rivier College with their counterparts at Nashua and Bishop Guertin High Schools, Dr. Crisp Elementary School, and Presentation of Mary Academy. The success of the program is due in large part to three leadership teams that take responsibility for planning, coordination, and problem solving. They include the Planning and Implementation Assessment Team (PIAT) and one leadership team for each school-based program.

The principal functions of the PIAT are to support the integration of all aspects of the program and to serve as liaison with faculty and staff at their respective schools. Specifically, the team members: (1) discuss vision, refine needs, and recruit students; (2) set goals, activities, and the calendar for the year; (3) make recommendations for programming, (4) help design development and training activities; (5) help coordinate the final celebration awards banquet; and (6) help assess program effectiveness. The PIAT accomplishes its activities through four 1/2 day meetings throughout the year and weekly communication between the SO Prepared director and each school liaison. The PIAT is comprised of faculty, staff, and students from each of the four schools in the partnership. The composition of the team varies slightly from year-to-year but always includes key participants who play leadership roles at each school. These include the directors of the program and the service-learning coordinator from Rivier as well as key college student leaders who serve as program coordinators for each school and one or two faculty members from each of the four community schools. The faculty members from each school serve as liaisons between the college and their respective schools.

A distinct leadership planning team exists for both Dr. Crisp and Presentation of Mary Academy. The main role of the team is to coordinate and oversee all aspects of the weekly operation of the program including activities related to training, programming, behavior management, and reflection. Each team consists of one faculty member from the college, one faculty member from the school, and the student program coordinators for each program. Curriculum coordinators and mentors also participate in planning activities from time-to-time.

Stage 2: Action

Developing and implementing the curriculum.

In national studies of experiential programs involving adolescents (Conrad & Hedin, 1982) and independent schools (Levinson, 1986), researchers found that the more connected the service activities are to the core curriculum, the greater the likelihood of high quality academic learning. Keeping this in mind, the SO Prepared program was designed around the Six Pillars of Character developed by the Josephson Institute (1998) and directly aligned to the Nashua School District's character education program. The four traits covered include: (1) respect and appreciation of diversity; (2) caring and compassion; (3) trustworthiness; and (4) fairness and justice. Each trait is taught as a series of lessons

that typically lasts three-to-four weeks. College students, majoring in education and functioning as curriculum coordinators for a specific group, design the weekly character lessons in collaboration with their professors. The lessons include art, literature, social studies, science, math, or drama activities and are taught by the curriculum coordinator in learning centers during the formal learning center time. The curriculum coordinators are provided the sample lesson plan format utilized by the department of education for pre-service teacher training purposes and encouraged to follow the entire format. Each lesson is designed to last one hour and includes: (1) a definition of the trait; (2) exposure to prosocial examples; (3) a discussion of examples and non-examples; (4) a hands-on guided practice activity; (5) a reflection designed to enhance generalization; and (6) a method to assess student learning. For example, one literature-based lesson for the theme of justice and fairness had a pod of 4th grade students reading, *Androcles and the Lion*, by Janet Stevens. The story is a tale of Androcles, a slave who runs away from his master and befriends a lion with a thorn in his paw. After reading the story and discussing the issue of justice and slavery, the students were led into discussions of fair and just laws or rules versus unfair and unjust laws or rules. Working in cooperative groups, the students produced examples of both types of laws or rules and created a just solution to an unjust rule or law. The activity culminated in the groups creating posters to illustrate the new rule or law.

Building collaborative learning teams.

The program involves three sets of interconnected learning teams between children and mentors. First, buddy teams are created by matching every young student to a high school or college student according to a variety of criterion that suggest compatibility and potential for mutual gain. These include shared interests such as art or sports or complimentary personal traits such as an outgoing or more reserved personality. Next, partner teams are identified. Partner teams consist of two or more buddy teams in which high school and college students co-teach the younger students. The partner team format allows for ease of instruction in small groups. They also provide an opportunity for the high school and college students to learn with, and from, each other. Finally, larger teams called learning pods are created. Each pod usually consists of two partner teams or eight people. Some pods consist of students from one grade (e.g., first or second) while other pods are multi-grade (e.g., fourth and fifth). In a typical year, four pods consisting of 32 children and 32 buddies participate at Dr. Crisp, while three pods of 24 children and 24 buddies participate at Presentation of Mary Academy.

A typical afternoon at SO Prepared.

Each weekly session lasts two hours and follows a structured format beginning with “buddy-up” time, followed by opening circle, followed by learning center time and then closing circle. Once the students arrive, they immediately report to their learning teams to “buddy-up” with their high school or college mentor. After connecting with their buddy and teammates to socialize and eat snacks, the students complete a short 5-10 minute activity supervised by their mentors related to the trait under study. During the initial week of the monthly theme, these activities can serve as “pre-tests” to determine the student’s entry knowledge about the trait. For example, students might be asked to define respect and

create a drawing in which respect is symbolized visually. A similar activity might be used as a “post-test” to assess learning at the completion of the theme. The activities vary based on the grade level of the pod.

Once these warm-up activities are completed, the entire SO Prepared community comes together to begin the formal program for the afternoon. The “opening community circle” activities begin with a cooperative game designed to provide physical exercise and promote collaboration. One favorite, called the “Human Knot”, begins with everyone holding hands and then twisting over and under each other without letting go. Once the “knot” has been sufficiently entangled, the goal is for the group to untangle itself without talking. Once the game has been played, the community gets together to discuss what they learned from the game, and what it means to them. A typical reflection question might be, “What does our ability to untangle to knot have to do with respect?” At the completion of the reflection, the program leader facilitates a discussion of the topic for the day and the individual team’s tasks. For example, if the week’s topic is “justice”, the group discusses what “justice” really means and the ways people act “justly” to others in school, at home, and in the larger community. Students from three or four learning teams then combine to form the larger learning pod at their grade level and proceed to the learning center that contains the formal curriculum described above.

After the formal lessons are completed, the students get back into their smaller learning teams to debrief and complete a behavior checklist consisting of items connected to the curriculum. A copy of the citizen-leader evaluation form is provided on the following page. These forms are then collected and passed on to each child’s classroom teacher.

The culminating activity each week involves a “closing community circle” in which students and mentors share what they made or learned and describe any prosocial behaviors that were observed throughout the afternoon. The weekly ritual for sharing involves each member of the community putting their hand on the shoulder of the person to their right and walking counterclockwise in a circle around the cafeteria or gym. Any person who passes the specified spot in the room (e.g., under the basketball hoop) can say, “Stop” to the

community and share an anecdote. Students are coached beforehand to describe specific prosocial behaviors that others have exhibited which relate to the trait under study such as, "I want to thank Kaitlyn for being caring today when she helped me brainstorm ideas for my poster" or "Jack showed fairness today when he took turns writing and illustrating the story during our lesson." After the behavior is shared, the student says, "Go" and the process continues until another person passes the spot, and says, "Go" and so on until everyone has had at least one opportunity to contribute.

Service-Learning activities at Dr. Crisp and Presentation of Mary Academy.

In keeping with the overall program goal of enhancing citizenship development, all the SO Prepared community members participate in SL projects designed to benefit their schools and the larger community. Service-Learning at SO Prepared provides an immediate context in which elementary and middle school students learn to cooperate with peers and mentors to meet the needs of their community in a friendly, challenging, and fun-filled environment. Each year, the leadership team accepts suggestions from students and faculty as to projects that might meet specific community needs. The ideas are discussed with the mentors and coordinators at training sessions and students during the program itself and consensus is used to determine the experiences selected for implementation.

SO PREPARED FOR CITIZENSHIP CITIZEN-LEADER EVALUATION FORM

A PERSON OF CHARACTER * IS TRUSTWORTHY * ACTS RESPONSIBLY * IS FAIR AND JUST * IS CARING
* TREATS ALL PEOPLE WITH RESPECT * IS A GOOD CITIZEN

Student Citizen-Leader: _____ Date: _____

Adult Buddy: _____ Pod: _____

School: PMA or Dr. Crisp Grade: _____ Teacher: _____

TODAY AT SO PREPARED, MY BUDDY: Please place a check for each behavior

Character Traits and Behaviors **Excellent** **Good** **Needs Improvement** **Not Applicable**

Showed TRUSTWORTHINESS by

1. Telling the truth and keeping his/her word.

Showed TRUSTWORTHINESS by

2. Not asking a friend to do something wrong.

Showed RESPONSIBILITY by

3. Setting a good example for others.

Showed RESPONSIBILITY by

4. Following directions.

Showed FAIRNESS & JUSTICE by

5. Treating all people fairly.

Showed FAIRNESS & JUSTICE by

6. Not taking more than their fair share.

Showed CARING by

7. Helping others.

Showed CARING by

8. Not being mean or insensitive to other people.

Showed RESPECTFULNESS by

9. Being courteous and polite.

Showed RESPECTFULNESS by

10. Not abusing, demeaning, or mistreating anyone.

Showed GOOD CITIZENSHIP by

11. Playing by the rules.

Showed GOOD CITIZENSHIP by

12. Doing his/her share of the activities.

Please include any comments or examples of character on the back of this form.

Thank you for sharing your time to complete this form

Some indirect SL projects occur as natural parts of specific themes and the planning and implementation activities occur throughout the month and culminate with a full program. One example would be the holiday food drive for local food banks that occurs in December and corresponds to the trait of caring and compassion. During the month, SO Prepared students design posters, decorate drop-off boxes, and write informational letters describing the types of food and procedures for collection that are distributed throughout the school. Each week, the drop-off boxes are checked and, if full, new boxes are produced. Inventories of items are tallied and, if necessary, requests for specific items are written and distributed to insure that the variety of items requested from the food banks is collected. At the culminating session of the month, all the items are brought into the cafeteria, tallied, and sorted by item to produce relatively equal distributions. Members of the SO Prepared community then bring the food to the various food banks in the area.

Other SL projects, like the school-wide recycling programs at each school, are ongoing throughout the year and are integrated into the weekly schedule. For example, as part of the school-wide recycling program at Dr. Crisp, students from the 6th grade pod (some of whom are part of the school's recycling club) and their mentors use the informal time before opening community circle to go around the school and retrieve the paper recycling bins that are located in classrooms and common areas in the school. The bins are brought into the cafeteria and given to the younger pods to sort, pack, and transfer to the large recycling containers outside the building. Once emptied, the recycling containers are redistributed throughout the school by the 6th graders. Each week, members of the 6th grade pod get information about the amount and type of material recycled from the school-based program from the City of Nashua and share the data with the entire community.

Stage 3: Reflection as an Ongoing Process

Wade (1997) defines reflection as "a deliberate thinking process that is applied to an experience, idea, or issue" (p. 95). Kolb (1984) argued that the process of reflective observation is a foundation for learning itself, enabling the learner to expand knowledge through active experimentation. Caim and Kielsmeier (1991) describe five essential ingredients of quality reflection in SL programs. First, reflection must be an outgrowth of program objectives that are clearly stated. Next, reflection must be structured to maximize its benefits. Third, reflection must occur continuously throughout the experience. Fourth, opportunities to reflect must be integrated in students' coursework. Finally, a variety of experiences are necessary to connect with students' differing learning styles and variations in service projects.

SO Prepared has integrated all of Caim and Kielsmeier's elements in the design of the program. Reflection is directly connected to objectives in the specific character education lessons, behavior evaluation process, and SL experiences for the elementary and middle school students. Reflection that relates specifically to objectives identified in high school and college course syllabi such as school-to-careers, working with students with disabilities and those from diverse backgrounds, teaching language arts, and behavior management is included both on-site and in the students' respective classes. Methods for reflection include discussion, writing, role-playing, case studies, reports, and public presentations. Both formative activities, occurring weekly in training and program experiences, and summative ones, occurring at the end of the experience,

are built into the schedule. One example of the formative process is the half hour of guided reflection between program and curriculum coordinators, faculty, and mentors that takes place each week after the children leave the school; another is the written reflection that is included as part of each lesson plan and completed after the lesson is taught. An example of questions used for guided reflection at the end of a session is presented on the following page.

Stage 4: Celebrating Accomplishments

A celebration and awards ceremony takes place at Rivier College each May at the conclusion of the program. This culminating event highlights the achievements of the entire community at each school and is open to all the participants and their families. Faculty and administration of each school, and other invited dignitaries from the community also attend. Each year, more than 200 people attend the 3-hour gala event that includes a large display of student work, student presentations of the various character traits, an awards ceremony, a live music performance, and refreshments. The leadership teams from each school plan the overall program; individual curriculum coordinators work with students and mentors to develop the individual student presentations. Over the years, students have written and read their personal reflections of learning, growth, and friendship, performed skits, and sang songs.

While every member of the community receives a certificate and a SO Prepared t-shirt, a formal awards ceremony serves as the culminating activity for the celebration. Awards that reflect the basic character traits and elements of the program are presented by category to deserving students and faculty members. In keeping with the idea of SO Prepared as a participatory democracy, students, mentors, curriculum coordinators, and leadership can all nominate, provide supporting documentation, and greatly influence the potential award winners. Consensus nominations from each pod are encouraged and awarded. The names and criteria for each award, are listed on the next page.

SO Prepared for Citizenship Program: Citizen-Leader Award Categories

Director's Leadership Award: This award is given to the person on the SO Prepared team who has shown the most overall leadership development in program and people development.

Caring, Compassion, and Service-Learning Awards: These awards are given to the children who have exhibited the character traits of caring and compassion, both in weekly interactions with peers, and through their involvement in the service-learning activities. These students exhibit empathy frequently, engage in random acts of kindness, and are helpful to people, especially those in need.

Honesty and Trustworthiness Awards: These awards are given to the children who have exhibited the character traits of honesty and trustworthiness by telling the truth and exhibiting behavior that shows (s) he can be trusted to do the right thing during the program.

Fairness and Tolerance Awards: These awards are given to the children who have exhibited the character traits of fairness and tolerance in their attitudes and behavior. These students consistently respect the rights of other peers and adults in the program while appreciating the diversity that exists in people that are different from them.

Resiliency Awards: These awards are given to the children who have exhibited the character trait of persistence in overcoming challenges in their lives. These students have shown resiliency in their efforts to improve their behavior in order to become a leader in the SO Prepared community.

Outstanding Mentor Awards: These awards are given to high school and college mentors who have exhibited character in the development of productive and caring relationships with their buddies.

Faculty Leadership Awards: These awards are given to faculty from the partner schools that have shown consistent leadership in supporting the SO Prepared program through their interactions with children, mentors, and faculty.

Student Curriculum Leadership Awards: These awards are given to students who have consistently designed outstanding character education lessons for the students in the program.

Questions for Guided Reflection SO Prepared for Citizenship Citizen-Leader Reflection Form

Leaders are like eagles; They don't flock; you must find them one at a time.

Quote courtesy of Charlene Ziehm, Rivier College

Name: _____

Date: _____ Buddy's Name: _____

School of Service: Dr. Crisp or PMA
School You're From: Rivier or NHS or BG

Take a few minutes and answer the following questions in the space provided. You may write ideas, phrases, or complete sentences.

1. What did you learn about your buddy this semester?

2. Please indicate one or two goals you want your buddy to achieve by the end of the year?

3. What supports did you give your buddy to achieve your goals for them or for them to become a more responsible citizen-leader?

4. What did you learn about yourself this semester?

5. What did you learn about caring this semester?

6. What did you learn about respect this semester?

7. What were your favorite activities and why?

8. What were your least favorite activities and why?

9. Is there anything else you want to share?

Stage 5: Evaluating Program Effectiveness

Formative and summative assessments.

Each year, the program is evaluated using a number of formative and summative measures to determine whether it is meeting the needs of the children, their families and the high school and college students. The yearly evaluation includes both formal instruments and informal assessments. While it is beyond the scope of this article to include all the outcome data collected over a five-year period, selected results consistent with the overall evaluation set will be highlighted here.

Throughout the program the children participate in formative assessments of what they have learned about each of the character traits and their own personal growth. The evaluation process includes informal written responses to questions about character education, student work samples, and the rating scale evaluations of their behavior completed by their mentors introduced earlier. Results of these informal assessments reveal that SO Prepared had a measurable impact on the majority of the students with EBD and other disabilities, as well as their non-disabled peers, in terms of increased knowledge about responsibility, caring, trustworthiness, fairness and justice, appreciation of diversity and improvements in behavior.

The results of these informal assessments are consistent with other more formal summative assessments completed by teachers, parents, and the students themselves. For example, results of pre and post-tests of behavior using the Classroom Participation Scale: Student Behavior Instrument (Tannenbaum & Levine, 1968) completed by referring classroom teachers during the 1999-2000 program indicate that the majority of students improved their overall behavior. In addition to the mentor and teacher generated data, surveys of parent satisfaction completed at the end of the 1996-97 and 1999-2000 programs indicate that parents from both the Dr. Crisp and Presentation of Mary Academy were extremely satisfied with the program and what their children learned. For instance, 22 of 24 (92%) parents contacted by phone in the spring of 1997 expressed nothing but positive comments about the program. More recently, parents from both schools were mailed surveys and asked to provide feedback about the program, including giving it a grade, and providing information about what their child learned. Follow-up phone calls were made to non-respondents. Of the parents who responded in one form or the other, 18 of 20 (90%) rated the program an A+, A, or A-, and the other 2(10%) rated it a B. Most parents indicated that SO Prepared helped their child to work with others, show more respect, and increase their willingness to share responsibilities. One parent commented: "My child has become more outgoing and seems to better enjoy the company of peers. She is more social and less shy. She is more confident. Thank you for giving my daughter the unique opportunity to learn through service."

The most formal evaluation of the program to date was an ethnographic study of the 1997-98 program by Muscott and Talis O'Brien (1999). The program evaluation was designed to assess a select group of participants' knowledge of the curriculum and their perceptions of the program. In this study, the researchers analyzed data gathered from in-depth ethnographic interviews of 19 students with behavioral, learning, and language disabilities and those identified as at-risk for identification that participated in the program. Using qualitative methodology, Muscott and Talis O'Brien found that the children were

extremely satisfied with the program and gave it high grades. The students believed the program taught them, among other things, how to cooperate with students of different ages to solve problems, what it means to be a citizen-leader and a member of a team, how to be responsible when confronted with the answers to a test, and how to reach out to peers from diverse backgrounds who are new to the school. Overall, four broad themes were generated from student responses. The students expressed responsibility for their actions, responded to the ideas of cooperation and teamwork and respect and appreciation of diversity, learned to make new friends, found learning about character to be fun and rewarding. The comments of the 5th grade boy with ADD and LD at the beginning of this article were part of this study and reflect his learning about cooperation in particular.

A personal story of success.

SO Prepared has always been conceived as a program designed to build character through relationships between "older buddies" and "younger" buddies, many of whom exhibit challenging behavior. This year, the relationship between Tom (not his real name), a 7th grader, and his college mentor Kim stands out as tribute to the program model and the young people involved. Tom does not easily bond to adults and his need to test limits is typical of young adolescents with impulsive behavior. His initial testing behavior turns most adults off and he represents a management challenge for an experienced classroom teacher, let alone a pre-service teacher or high school student. Once an adult gets through Tom's initial bravado by enforcing limits and being respectful without becoming counteraggressive, Tom can be respectful and a pleasure to be around. Kim became his "big buddy" when his original mentor for the fall semester did not return in the spring. Tom had bonded to his male mentor and was both frustrated and angry when he left. Moreover, he did not want a female buddy, but there was no male to replace him.

Tom pulled out all the stops and tried to start a conflict and test Kim's authority on the first day. His pattern began with silly comments to the other male adolescent that in turn overstimulated the boys and lead to the use of foul language, negative statements directed at the girls in the pod, or refusal to participate in the program. Initially, Kim was dejected and

hurt by his unwillingness to respond to her guidance and his clearly disrespectful behavior. Fortunately, she wore the character trait of resilience like a badge of honor and was willing to keep trying to reach him by finding small things that they had in common. In her journal she reflected on that difficult beginning with the comment: "I was determined to make this relationship work".

Initially, the director of the program worked closely with her on a management plan. When Tom participated and acted appropriately, she was to use verbal praise and reinforce his behavior. When he broke a major rule, she was coached to find a quiet corner and go through the social problem-solving strategy used in the program. At first, the director modeled the strategy for her during our three-person conferences. If the intervention for major rule infractions is successful, it ends with the student committing to specific prosocial behaviors for the remainder of the afternoon. The more important goal of course, is for the students to follow through on their commitment for an extended period of time. Predictably, Tom did not initially respond to Kim's authority and the testing continued. Like most young people without specific training, Kim seemed mad at his misbehaviors at times. However, to her credit, she worked hard to control her emotions and more importantly, her counteraggressive behavior toward him. After each program, the director reinforced the small gains she made with him and coached her on management strategies. They also talked about his need to test and the mature way she was handling the testing period.

The testing period dragged out for a few weeks and the director worried that Tom would wear her down. Fortunately, Kim had a strong character and a willingness to learn. It was also helpful that the last theme of the year was self-management. By the end of the semester, they had become close buddies and he had become a full participant in the group. Much of his anger and need to undermine the activities of the pod had disappeared. Equally important, he was able to admit that he liked her and was even willing to have his picture taken with her, get on her shoulders, and reflect on a number of things that they did during the past month that he enjoyed. These were things he had refused to do at any time previously during the year! Moreover, both his teachers and mother

reported less episodes of angry, defiant behavior and more cooperation at school and at home.

In the *Service-Learning 100* class at Rivier College for which she received credit, Kim discussed the growth in both Tom and herself over the course of the semester in her final written reflection.

I thought this would be an easy project, no hassles. What I really found though, was a challenge — a challenge to strengthen myself and to strengthen Tom's life. And on the days when my energy was low it showed in Tom, as he would become agitated and fidgety. I learned that no matter how low I was feeling when I got there it was up to me to walk in with a smile because it would make all the difference in the way Tom would respond. I learned a lot from Tom and I received new ideas and ways of thinking from him. He, in turn, became my mentor also.

Stage 6: Reconfiguration

It is inevitable that all SL programs will need to respond to changing community needs, leadership, resources, and other fluctuating variables. Moreover, the process of both formative and summative reflection and evaluation will have produced information that should be used to improve the quality of the program in the future.

The last stage in a fluid process of program design is reconfiguration. Reconfiguration is the conscious effort to make informed changes to program design based on changing circumstances and information gathered from the dual processes of reflection and evaluation. At SO Prepared, the program leadership and the PIAT meet at the end of the year and at the beginning of the year to process this information and make the changes necessary to improve the program. This process has, over the years, resulted in numerous substantive changes in terms of ages and characteristics of students served, recruitment activities, training, curriculum, and the structure of the weekly activities. □

Closing Thoughts

The theologian Martin Marty once remarked that contemporary civilization is being threatened by a loss of a sense of community that has always characterized tribal peoples. Service-Learning offers a unique opportunity to enter into community with a variety of people from all walks of life. Through the SO Prepared experience participants can be of service and be served by children and youth who have extraordinary gifts and talents and those who have learning and behavioral challenges, by people who share similar religious views and those who don't, by individuals whose skin color is the same and those who look different, and by members of the community who have wealth and advantage and those whose riches lie within their hearts and minds and spirits. There is an old African proverb that says it takes a whole village to raise a child. SO Prepared for Citizenship is one such village in action.

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A learning pod from Presentation of Mary Academy performs a skit about respect at the annual SO Prepared celebration and awards ceremony
Photo by Howard Muscott





Photo by Howard Muscott

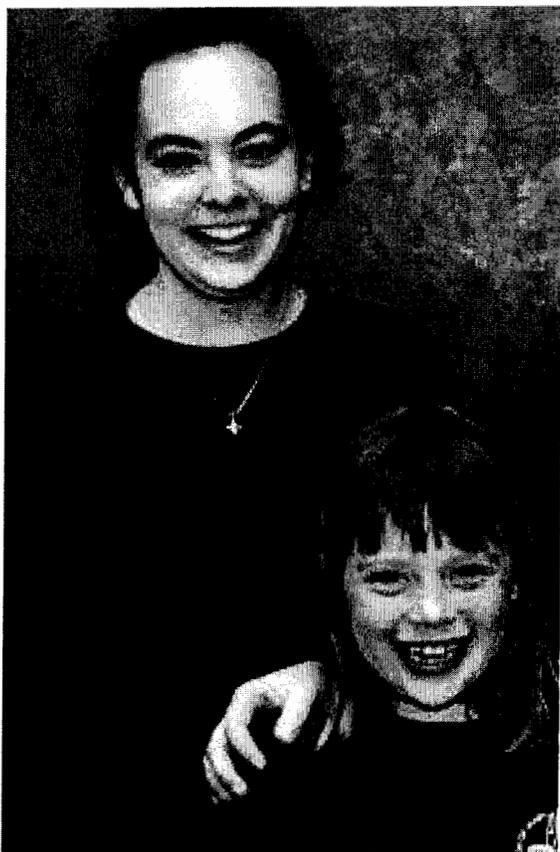


Photo by Howard Muscott

Final Reflections of Selected Rivier College Students from the 1999-2000 SO Prepared Program

- The best thing about SO Prepared is making a new friend and feeling that you can make a difference in a child's life. I enjoyed going to meet my buddy every week and many times I felt I learned as much as she did. I left thinking about the idea (respect, tolerance, etc.) and trying to see how that idea was part of my own life, too. The one suggestion I would have is to make the training sessions shorter.
- I always looked forward to going to SO Prepared even though for the most part I had a very difficult buddy. Nevertheless, he was a great kid. Timmy, once he really got to know me and to know the SO Prepared program, really started to control himself and to have a good time. He learned how to think about other people beside himself and he was getting along with the other kids.
- I loved SO Prepared. I learned so much about myself and about the kids we worked with. I saw how much fun a kid can have when they are learning something through experiences and not just through verbal teaching. I had two buddies this year, and at first I thought that would be hard. But, in fact, it was great. They came from two different backgrounds and I learned from them both. One difficult thing for me was to remember when I was around them that everything I did and said was a pattern for them. They do what they see even though you may not be thinking that you are "teaching" them at that particular moment.
- What I have learned with the SO Prepared program is that no matter how good you are with children, there is always room for improvement. You'll always have a child in a group that presents a challenge and each challenge you must approach differently. Overall, it was an eye opening experience. I believe that my buddy learned that he could trust me. He was very shy at first and wasn't sure what he could or couldn't tell me. However, he opened up nicely at the end. The best thing about SO Prepared is that I learned how to adjust to various kids' feelings. The most difficult thing I found was the weeks I worked with two kids at once, especially when one child did not want to cooperate. That could be very frustrating.
- SO Prepared has opened my eyes to a new experience and to strengths that I did not know were in me. I never knew I could work with children. Every time I leave SO Prepared I am amazed at the work I have done that day. Not only by myself, but also with the help of my peers and my buddies. The children have truly brought out a side of me that I never knew existed. My buddies have come to realize that I am their friend, rather than a teacher. I know they appreciate me and the time I spend with them, even if it is hard for them to show it sometimes. I think we all learned something new about ourselves this year at SO Prepared.
- I really enjoyed SO Prepared this year. I thought it was a wonderful program for both the young children and the adults. I learned how important it is for children to have mentors or role models. They really look up to older people. The topics of SO Prepared were great also. The children learned how to be respectful, courteous, how to treat others fairly, and so much more. This program made me think of how these terms affected the children, and I noticed if one child misbehaved, other students would remind them to be fair and respectful.



Photo by Howard Muscott



Photo by Howard Muscott