

Workshop 6

Civic Engagement

Key Concepts

- The ultimate goal of service learning in civics is to connect meaningful service in the school or community with academic learning and civic responsibility.
- Service learning requires both volunteer service to community and active learning-through-doing of the skills needed to identify, address, and resolve community needs.
- The involvement of the community in what the students are doing affirms their importance as citizens.
- Service learning projects should progress in complexity as students mature.
- Students should be able to select projects that are of interest and importance to them.
- Connecting students with professionals in the community who are working on issues of importance to the students gives students access to a significant amount of data and resources that would otherwise be more difficult, if not impossible, for them to find.
- It is important to connect the concepts students are reading about in their texts with authentic events, people, and processes in their community.

About the Lesson

Overview

This program shows a group of 11th- and 12th-grade students at Anoka High School in Anoka, Minnesota, a suburb of Minneapolis, engaging in a significant way to improve the quality of their community. All students in Anoka are required to participate in service learning in order to graduate from high school. Students begin with simple teacher-defined activities in the ninth grade and become progressively more involved and self-directed as they progress through their high school years. In this Human Geography class taught by Bill Mittlefehldt, a 30-year veteran of the classroom, students work in teams to define a project, choose and meet with a community partner who can help educate them about the seriousness of the issue and its current status, conduct further research on the identified problem, and present the problem and their proposed solutions first to their peers, and then to a special session of the Anoka City Council. This lesson satisfies state and national standards while helping deal with the needs of today's teens and today's communities. The primary methodology presented in this lesson is service learning.

Context

Teacher: Since 1973, Bill Mittlefehldt has worked at Anoka High School in Anoka, Minnesota, teaching civics, economics, geography, American history, law, futuristics, psychology, Western civilization, community service, applied problem solving, environmental issues, and quality training. Prior to Anoka, he taught for several years in Riverside, Illinois. Mittlefehldt has made numerous professional presentations at conferences and has published several articles about his service learning experiences in Anoka. He also has been recognized with many awards, including having been twice nominated for Minnesota Teacher of the Year. In the summer of 2000, Mittlefehldt and his daughter paddled for 65 days from Duluth to New York City, a distance of 1,650 miles, to gather stories of civic and sustainable collaboration. Mittlefehldt holds a Bachelor of Arts in political science from Lawrence University in Wisconsin, a Master of Arts in religious studies and a Master of Divinity degree from the Chicago Theological Seminary, and a Master of Arts in curriculum and instructional systems from the College of Education at the University of Minnesota.

School: Anoka High School is the largest high school in the state of Minnesota. Its current enrollment is about 3,300 students and it is still growing. The school was recognized nationally as an Excellence in Action site in 1993.

Anoka is a suburban city of approximately 17,600 people, located at the convergence of the Rum and Mississippi Rivers. The Rum River runs right behind the school. The city is about 18 miles northwest of Minneapolis and 25 miles from St. Paul. Anoka is located in one of the fastest growing counties in Minnesota with a population of over 270,000. The city was originally a farm community and has maintained its historic downtown main street. Around 1900, Anoka began to be swallowed up by the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area.

Course: Human Geography is a nine-week course that meets four times a week for 85 minutes per class period. It is a social studies elective for 11th- and 12th-graders and includes students of all ability levels, including students with special needs. The course curriculum has nine major units and an applied civics project, which is the activity focused upon in this program. The thrust of the course is on how people interact with the land, the region, the culture, and the landscape over time. Students use maps extensively to help understand the key components of change in their community.

The nine units are as follows: Geography and Human Geography; Maps, Perspectives, and Technical Tools; Earth and Changing Geographic Environments; Human Origins: Family Tree and Population; Civilization and Urbanization: Designs for Living; Regional Issues and Environmental Stress: Air, Water, Land, Biodiversity, Energy (AWLBE); Regional Issues, Environment, and AWLBE; Sustainable Minnesota: Learning Our Way; and Sustainable U.S.: Learning Our Way.

The Applied Civics Project, in which students identify and work on a community issue related to what they are learning, also has a nine-week sequence: Introduction to Task and Total Community Quality; Select Team, Topic, and Partner; Research Team Topic: Begin Defining Problem; Research Team Topic: Begin Articulating Solutions; Research Team Topic: Improve Problem-Solution; Prepare for Presentation: Rehearse Teamwork for Presenting; Final Class Presentation and Written Report.

Workshop Session

Before Viewing

Define service learning. Review your school's community service requirements for graduation. Make a list of service projects in which students might participate in your community and list them in order of difficulty. Discuss or write in your journal: Can you have community service without service learning? Should they or can they be separated?

Watch the Video

Watch the video, stopping at the end of each segment. Use the following questions as a basis for discussion and reflection. If you are not attending the workshop with other teachers, use your workshop journal to respond to at least two questions per lesson activity.

Introduction

- How would you help students identify community service projects that are appropriate for their age and ability?
- Given the geographic size of the area and the length of the class period, Anoka students can complete a meeting with a community partner and return to school within one class period. How would this work in your school? What modifications would you need to make?

Activity 1. Discussion of Text Reading

- What role does the textbook play in this lesson? Can a lesson use a textbook and still be considered constructivist? In what way? How do you typically use textbooks?
- How does Mittlefehldt help students connect what they are reading in their text to real life? What kinds of questions might you ask students to help them make these connections?

Activity 2. Student Field Research

- Make a list of sources students might turn to in their communities to conduct their field research. What actions could you take to help them increase the list? How would you prepare community officials to be good "community partners" who could stimulate student learning? How would you prepare your students to get the most out of their meetings with community partners?
- Mittlefehldt says that it is important for students to assume some responsibility for their community. What are some ways other than service projects that this goal might be met?

Activity 3. Small Group Project Work

- Mittlefehldt points out that it is much more complex to assess affective learning than it is to assess cognitive learning. Do you agree? Why or why not? If you were to develop four levels of accomplishment for affective learning, what would they be?

Activity 4. Presentation Rehearsal

- What are the benefits and challenges of peer assessment? What other forms of assessment could you use for this portion of the lesson? How much significance would you place on this activity in your overall assessment of a student's work for the semester?

Activity 5. Presentations to the Community

- What is the value of this activity for the students? What is the value to the community? How does the activity help students achieve the course goals and meet state or national standards?

Before Next Week

Assignments

- Review the next reading assignment that you will use in your class. Look at the handout called Connection Points available with the Lesson Materials in the Lesson Plan section of the workshop Web site and develop a lesson that uses “connection points.” Teach the lesson and reflect on its success in your workshop journal.
- Review those sections of the Web site that you have not yet read, e.g., Essential Readings, Other Lessons, Teacher Perspectives, and Student Perspectives.

www.learner.org/channel/workshops/civics