

YOUTH VOICE EXAMPLES

EXAMPLE ONE: In September of 2008 two teachers in Clintonville, WI were continuing the yearly tradition of reading the local newspaper weekly to their third grade students. During the first weekly reading, the teachers and students came across a letter to the editor from a local resident. In the letter, the individual questioned why the time capsule buried at city hall in 1978, had not yet been dug up, though it was intended to be unearthed after 25 years. The students calculated that this project was 5 years overdue! Students spend the year working with City Council to dig up the capsule and engage the community in preserving their town history. It was the children's initial questions about a local newspaper letter to the editor that led to our inquiry of the time capsule status. Once the children had the cooperation of the city, they were eager to continue. The class determined what work had to be done, split that work into committees, and met with adult leaders to accomplish the said tasks. While some community partners were "prepped" for the impending contact, students themselves called, wrote, or emailed all community contacts. Children did a majority of the set-up, digging, and clean-up of the actual digging event. Through classroom discussion of committee times (struggles and successes) the children were involved in evaluating their experience. *Clintonville, WI*

EXAMPLE TWO: The Flashcard Company was a busy place at Roosevelt Elementary School in Kenosha. Third graders were busy all year making vocabulary flashcards to donate to second grade students. The flashcards help give the second graders a head start on their learning while allowing the third grade flashcard makers to review the vocabulary words. Students surveyed the second grade teachers first, to investigate need. They discussed multiple solutions, but arrived at the flashcard idea because it could easily be done without a lot of teacher direction. This project built upon the service-rich culture of Roosevelt Elementary School and was designed to serve the school community. The goal of this service-learning project was initially to make plenty of sets of flashcards using the sixty word second grade district word list. The teacher saw this project as a great way for third graders to review high frequency words in a way that made learning meaningful to them – through helping younger students. This project helped build a sense of community between the second and third grades. The second and third grade teachers were in regular contact to make sure the cards were meeting the needs of their students. In addition, the students learned to make donation requests to support their project. A local printing company, Active Printing, as well as the KUSD copy center responded to students' requests for scrap paper for the flashcards. The students sent thank you cards to the donors and made the community partners aware of their progress. This yearlong service-learning project incorporated youth voice with the election of student "officers" for the project. The students held an election and nominated a President and two Vice Presidents. The officers were responsible for encouraging all students to participate and helped secure donations of materials to make the flashcards. The officers also made a presentation to District teachers and staff about their project. All of the students were so involved with their service-learning project that they are willing to stay inside during recess to make the cards! Once the Flashcard Factory met their original goal of making flashcards of all the second grade words, they decided to start phase two of the project and make flashcard sets with the third grade high frequency words. *Kenosha, WI*

EXAMPLE THREE: Eighth grade Mahone Middle School students in Spanish 101 classes not only wrote a book, but they did it in two languages. As part of a service-learning project, students picked a topic, wrote, and illustrated a bilingual children's book while keeping in mind the essential questions of the unit- what makes a good book? Who can benefit from translated reading materials? The project helped students master vocabulary and grammar concepts as well as technology skills as they put their books together. The books were donated to the children's ward at local hospitals as well as the Ronald McDonald House. This project allowed the 8th grade Spanish teachers the opportunity to address learning outcomes in building vocabulary, verb usage, sentence structure, non-adjective agreement, punctuation, pronunciation, intonation and storytelling techniques. This project was an opportunity for students to choose a topic of interest and develop their skills in discussing and writing in the target language. Students also drew on their knowledge and experience with technology through the use of computer software and accessing websites. Students had a lot of voice in the design and creation of their books. The teachers and librarians worked together to have students critically review award winning children's literature to determine what makes a quality children's book. Students were coached to use these qualities in their own books. Students had complete freedom to pick the topic of their books. Students were so engaged in the creative process of this project that many took their own digital photos to illustrate the books. This project empowered self-directed learning and students were required to make sure they were on track with their project. Students understood the rubric that would be used to grade their projects. After learning about the three community partners and their services, students could decide to which agency they wanted to donate their completed book. *Kenosha, WI*

EXAMPLE FOUR: In one elementary school, students were asked to solve problems they identified within their school and its immediate surroundings. First-grade students reported that kindergartners were running in the hall and that this running made the hallways unsafe. The teacher asked the students to document the problem, which they did by counting and graphing the number of running incidents during several timed periods during the day. The teacher then asked the students to brainstorm the potential reasons why the kindergartners may be running and what solutions might address these reasons. Students initially said that the kindergartners were running because they were lost and they needed hallway signs. They solicited names for the hallways from the kindergartners, held an election to name the hallways, and made signs for the hallways. When they measured the incidence of running again, the first-graders found that the problem was not solved. They then studied how speed was controlled in society and came up with the idea of licenses for the students. They brainstormed what should be on the licenses and composed a letter to a nearby hardware store to request the materials needed to make licenses. They created a license for every kindergarten student and then measured the incidence of running once again. The first day after the licenses were issued, the running had stopped. However, the running resumed the next week, when many kindergartners either misplaced their licenses or realized there were no negative consequences for running. Back at the drawing board, the first-graders then devised other possible solutions. The teacher allowed the students to choose solutions and to make mistakes until they finally solved the problem. In so doing, the teacher covered many reading, writing, math, and social studies standards. At the end of the year, the students scored high on all measures of academic and civic engagement and felt that learning was fun.

*Unpacking What Works in Service-Learning:
Promising Research-Based Practices to Improve Student Outcomes*
Available from the NYLC Resource Center at www.nylc.org
Excerpted from "Growing to Greatness 2007"
Copyright © 2007 National Youth Leadership Council. All Rights Reserved