



Service Learning for Future Teachers: The Keys to Establishing and Sustaining an Anti-bullying Service-Learning Initiative

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The curriculum and instruction model found in most American classrooms for at-risk students is remedial, is focused on transferring information in the form of facts and procedures, and is not recognized as knowledge to be used to solve problems.

The concept of contextualized learning environments arises out of the recognition that students, particularly at-risk students, who are introduced to concepts and strategies without meaningful context will view them as irrelevant to daily life. At-risk students respond best to personal attention that gives curriculum relevance; however, many schools lack the funding necessary to provide such intervention.

And that's where service-learning for pre-service teachers comes in.

Anti-bullying service-learning programs bring pre-service teachers into an at-risk classroom to help create a contextualized learning environment where “things come together.” It provides the environment in which at-risk students can acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes useful when problem-solving in *real life*. As schools struggle to create safe environments, efforts have been traditional and largely ineffective. Programs are often begun as government, school and/or community initiatives. Schools that suffer high incidences of violence may house a building-based police or parole officer as a means of addressing school safety; however, some educators believe that a police presence has a negative impact on teaching and learning. Monitoring students when they move through the hallways and in places where they congregate, such as restrooms and the cafeteria is the most common strategy in the prevention of school violence--**but bullying does not occur here.**

Bullying occurs in your classroom—and it occurs within 3-5 seconds, as students enter and exit the classroom--making it very hard to see. The best prevention strategy for bullying is developing a classroom action plan so students know what to do when they observe a bully/victim confrontation.

And that's where service-learning for pre-service teachers comes in.

A service-learning partnership in which pre-service teachers develop and deliver a lesson plan intended to help at-risk students to identify and to diffuse potential violence/bullying and to identify safe responses to violence/bullying can be an innovative way of affecting positive social change at lots of different levels!

Early intervention is necessary to prevent youth violence/bullying. Student-centered activities and curricula that focus on the value of individual uniqueness, the strength of diversity, and the appreciation of world cultures can also focus on anger management, impulse control, and mediation and conflict resolution skills—they are not mutually exclusive nor is one the match and the other the powder keg. Surprisingly, early discussions and activities about the negative consequences of racism and prejudice provide children with positive ways of getting personal needs met without expense to others different from themselves. Self-esteem development through activities that modify beliefs and related behavior are certain to decrease the incidence of aggression. Especially for students living in poverty or in difficult family circumstances, anti-bullying activities can help transform negative feelings into positive coping skills.

Service-learning is being recognized as an important context within which development of human service-oriented teachers becomes attainable. If early exposure to real life situations for pre-service teachers is intended to foster an awareness of civic responsibility, then this requisite demands working with at-risk children in low-performing schools. Pre-service teachers who are given the opportunity to engage in culturally diverse activities and encouraged to engage in critical reflection that challenges the status quo will be more likely to, when given the opportunity to synthesize information and experience, develop and demonstrate social justice in their own classrooms.

"Service-learning is not a program of charitable endeavors, where one party is the giver and the other the taker. In service-learning, learning can be defined as the accomplishments of tasks which meet human needs in combination with conscious educational growth" (Franta 1994).

The long-term benefits of student-centered anti-bullying service-learning and contextualized instruction has been associated with increased student engagement with schools, better attitudes towards schools, better attendance, and fewer disciplinary and behavioral problems. An anti-bullying service-learning program affords a way to help current classroom teachers--including those in middle school--teach values, morals, and ethics and to help their students develop a sense of self-worth and a connectedness with school. A contextualized learning environment is a powerful arena that encourages important social interaction between students.

SUMMARY

The diversity witnessed in America's classrooms often results in violence/bullying as students bring their biases, prejudices and anger to school. Social inequalities are a major issue facing the nation today. Service-learning is a tool through which pre-service teachers become familiar with their communities while being given the opportunity to work together to construct solutions to real problems.

WORKS CONSULTED

<http://www.ericdigests.org/pre-928/risk.htm?ABCDEFGH>

www.ericdigests.org/pre-9212/civic.htm

TEACHING TO CHANGE THE WORLD, Oakes and Lipton

THE TRULY DISADVANTAGED, William Wilson

SAVAGE INEQUALITIES, Jonathan Kozol