



CONNECTING POINTS

POINTS CONNECTING

REFLECTIONS of ENGAGEMENT

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C O N N E C T I N G P O I N T S
P O I N T S C O N N E C T I N G

THE CENTER FOR SERVICE-LEARNING
MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE
MESA, ARIZONA

DUANE D. OAKES, FACULTY DIRECTOR

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COVER PHOTOGRAPH
BY TERESE HILL

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Acknowledgements

Reflections of Engagement

Over the past 13 years, I have witnessed many acts of service from students, faculty and staff members who have come to understand the power of service in their lives. They have become engaged in their communities in an attempt to make this world a better place. I have witnessed communities change from the hours of service rendered in their behalf. I have watched our youth and senior citizens share their talents and stories with us. I have seen the classrooms at our colleges come alive through guided reflection and thought provoking discussions about issues facing our communities. This book is a tribute to the thousands of individuals, who have participated in these programs, and a challenge to all who read our reflections to join us in making our communities a better place to live!

There are many who have helped make this journey a success, the students, faculty and community partners who have worked with us as we implemented our service-learning programs. I express gratitude to President Larry Christiansen and Dr. Gail Mee for the encouragement that I have received over the last few years in support of community building activities here at Mesa Community College. With their support service-learning has become a powerful teaching methodology at MCC. We are helping reach our mission and fulfill our value of community. A special thank you to those who have served as mentors and colleagues along the way: Tammie Quick, Maren M. Mouritsen, Lois Bartholomew, Maria Hesse, Marybeth Mason, Leslie Hamlett, Gail Robinson, Lynn Barnett, Lyvier Conss, and many more!

This book is our attempt to celebrate the civic engagement our MCC students, faculty, staff and community members have done over the years. This book would not have become a reality without the support of the GEMS Grant, awarded by the Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges and the Corporation for National and Community Service and a grant from the Scottsdale League for the Arts.

Also, I would like to acknowledge, the students, faculty, staff and community members who submitted articles and photographs for this book. I want to recognize MCC Media Arts students for their support in the production of this book and the upcoming website. I also want to recognize Jonelle Moore, Alison Whiting, Dawn Russell and Susan Taffer for editing the articles. I would also like to thank Dr. Paul Elsner for writing the forward, and Ken Costello and the Office of Institutional Advancement for their advice and guidance along the way. Thank you to Erika Wren and Alison Whiting, for helping to administer the two grant projects. A special thank you to my wife, Geniel, and my family for their support, encouragement and their example of service over the years.

The power of service can involve and touch everyone, and in the words of Martin Luther King, "Everyone can be great because everyone can serve." My challenge to you is to start serving and looking for ways to improve your community.

Duane D. Oakes
Faculty Director, Center for Service-Learning
Mesa Community College



Forward

DR. PAUL ELSNER

For students, the central learning derived from a higher education experience must go beyond the credits and course completions and even the degrees and certificates issued to them.

The real certification is how students come to feel their connections to the community. Also, how their years in college formed their sense of engagement and how as citizens they can create, sustain, and redesign activist enterprises that make our world a less woeful place.

The writers in this remarkable book reflect on their roles as contributing citizens, engaged in the most central of all learning—building a better community and affecting in the most positive ways the quality of life for those whom they touch. Higher education unfortunately, may have lost the sense of this most animating principle. In my work, I too often hear that we process students better than we engage them.

This publication gives me hope; its personal testimonies of engagement by mostly students reflect the best ideals for these complex times.

Paul A Elsner
Chancellor Emeritus of
The Maricopa Community Colleges
and Founder and President of
Sedona Conferences and Conversations





PHOTOGRAPH BY DUANE D. OAKES

Light Bulb Moments

KELLEY STEWART

It has always amazed me that a person can go through life doing something that is second nature to them, something that they can do without much thought, and then—bam, it hits them—and they have just learned something that should have been apparent years ago. I describe those revelations as light bulb moments, brief moments in time when the intensity of the thought is like a thousand lights coming on in the same space. The past year of service-learning through Mesa Community College has been a series of light bulb moments for me.

Volunteering time to my community has been part of my life for the past twenty years. I always enjoyed the effort of service and the results of the

effort, but I did not realize that there was something more to gain other than personal satisfaction for doing the right thing. I did not know that I had much to learn about civic engagement.

One light bulb moment was learning the difference between project reflection and personal reflection. Previously, I had participated in conversations that included reflection about what went right or wrong and how the service project could be better next time. Unfortunately, that type of reflection only benefited the project and really did not impact me personally. Through service-learning, I learned that personal reflection goes deeper than the logistics of the project; it is an intense process that helps a person discover their intrinsic gifts.

Another light bulb flashed when I heard a speaker at the Colorado Campus Compact: Decade of Engagement Conference suggest this consideration for addressing societal issues: “Does the solution enable the population to have an active role in the

resolution of the problem?” It makes sense that if the community or neighborhood does not participate in improving their own circumstances, then how can we expect them to rise above the problems? Clearly, civic engagement cannot be about charity work; instead, the greater reward of civic engagement is the empowerment of a community to address its own issues. Active civic engagement changes ordinary citizens into community leaders who are empowered to affect their own future and the future generations.

At a retreat designed to prepare student-leaders for a culturally diverse society, I learned that we each have the ability to change the

answers; we do not have to accept society’s historical views of bias or separation. My light bulb moment came when I realized I am not my parent’s generation, nor am I the next generation, but I am now old enough to be “the generation.” I am part of a generation of change, and I accept the challenge to be actively involved out on the field of change. As “the generation,” I have the responsibility to be a civic engagement role model for future leaders. My education in service-learning and civic engagement has prepared me to illuminate societal issues so that others might find their own light bulb moments. ●





PHOTOGRAPHS BY DUANE D. OAKES





PHOTOGRAPH BY MELISA UMBOWER-WOOLFORD



Living in a Democracy Is Not Easy

JASON METCALF

Our class discussion this week centered on the different ways that we perceive an ideal society. Initially in the discussion, there was an inherent consensus that this society should be democratic in form and free in function, allowing a citizenry their full ability to exercise their God-given rights under a rule of law as prescribed in a constitutional democracy. This dialogue of freedom and rights even went beyond the bounds of liberties that the

Brainstorming and dialogue are only the beginning of a long journey to a freer and more responsible society.

United States of America allows its own citizenry. Universal health care and an equally funded educational system for all its citizens are a few examples of the wide range of rights students in the class saw as necessary for an ideal society. As important as all these ideas are to the formation of a more perfect social order, a critical aspect that is

vital to this process was left understated by the students (including myself). This understated attribute is civic engagement—meaning that the citizenry of a free nation must actively participate in government and civil society to affect change. I must admit that throughout the discussion, I was ignorant of the fact that these lofty ideas being illuminated by us are actually attainable. A democracy is an ideal society that survives if, and only if, the citizens of such a society engage their government in a meaningful active manner.

Living in a democracy is not easy. Granted, the benefits outweigh the frustration and strife created by such a free society that allows a hearing for all views. There are no unreasonable limits to an ideal society, and because of that fact, it might be misperceived that such a society would not be sustainable for a group of free people. But, that notion is naïve, for there is nothing that we cannot achieve when we put our hearts and minds to it.



Herein lies the problem with galvanizing people to the cause of creating a freer state. A more liberal state brings more responsibility for its citizens, and responsibility is resisted by a minority of our society. With so many hearts and minds to influence, how does a leader or a party persuade so many citizens that participation and debate is necessary on a massive and localized scale without offending them and causing them discomfort because of an infectious laziness and complacency? This behavior unfortunately keeps approximately sixty percent of eligible voters out of the polls on election days. Only a small minority of registered voters are innocent of these offenses, and I have a feeling that the Greeks would have applied the adjective *idiotic*, absent minded and ignorant, to the present political and civic mindset of most citizens of the U.S.A. It has only been hinted by politicians that this country needs people to step up and get in the game if they want a chance to solve our complex problems.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that our class discussion is essential to the cause of creating a more ideal society. Brainstorming and dialogue are only the beginning of a long journey to a freer and more responsible society. But, it is a journey that requires civic engagement in order to be successful. Furthermore, it is surprising that this calling is not heeded by more of our citizenry because we live in a society that caters to political development. And, we have a system that has to listen to the majority, but only a minority of progressive thinkers exists and that is what an ideal society will require. ●



Democracy

LINDA B. ROSENTHAL M.A.,
NEW YORK UNIVERSITY
MCCCD GOVERNING BOARD



Democracy is alive and well in the United States, as evidenced in our state by frequent elections and initiatives which appear on our ballot. What is disturbing to me, however, is the percentage of voters who actually vote. Years ago, when I served as a precinct captain for my precinct, it was common for over 80 percent of voters to get to the polls to vote. Now despite the ease of voting, early ballots, etc., the percentage of voters has dropped alarmingly. I am at a loss to understand the reason for this, but I do know something ought to be done to overcome it if our democracy is to survive. I personally do not believe that 30–50% of voters ought to determine who governs us. Will each of us help the situation in some way to assure the survival of our democracy? Can our colleges assist the community in this endeavor? ●





PHOTOGRAPH BY JANET VOGT



Life Heroes

DIANE CHAVEZ

The drama of our lives challenges us to demonstrate sheer bravery and a strong will. Those virtues characterize the common ideal of heroism, and we all have the potential to be heroes. When our true nature is challenged through adversity, a true hero shines even in the darkness of uncertainty. For it becomes the test of our mettle to never give up.

Genuine heroes inspire us through their experiences. I am moved by the courage of Linda, a veteran and student of Mesa Community College. She was plagued with a physical handicap after the Gulf War. Daily, she faces the disability that causes her to have periodic paralysis in her legs. The condition, Gulf War Syndrome, put her running career in question. She also copes with loss of appetite and chronic fatigue, which are difficult for an athlete. She overcame the challenge when she returned to college by running a track meet and winning a medal. That was one of the

A survivor of life embraces the wisdom learned from his or her trials and shares them with others.

many rewards proving through hard work and determination that anything is possible. She is now focused on her major in psychology. Linda is a war hero and proves everyday that she is a life hero as she gets back on her feet.

Life's storms strike without warning. I dealt with my own tragedy when I was sixteen years old. After a severe car accident, I was comatose for seven weeks. Then I had to relearn how to walk, talk, and even smile. Today, that smile remains my trademark of strength, courage, and love for life. MCC has been my educational home since high school, where I have continued my hopes and dreams, despite the roadblocks that I am overcoming with God and hope. The insights that I have gained from life's misfortunes have granted the gifts of compassion, bravery, and strength as an example for others.

A survivor of life embraces the wisdom learned from his or her trials and shares them with others. The conquest is always in view, leaving no room to acknowledge defeat. A hero holds on to the promise of faith in this beautiful gift, we call life. ●

The Undaunted

SUSAN TAFFER

Dawn—It enters the day with unspeakable silence. The kind of silence that echoes a bird’s morning tune, like the nasty crash of crystal against the plaster wall, it reverberates against the eardrum. It slices the mind in an attempt to break the spirit, fragments of the eve’s memories flash with every musical note. The mark of the broken vase is still there, more deeply cut in the center of the scar revealing the darkness of the lattice workings underneath. Like a shamed child she picks up the pieces of frosted glass from the floor, a wedding gift from her aunt, one of the few memorable items left of their celebration six years ago. All other pieces of her elegant crystal collection had met with a similar fate, mirroring the fragility of her soul’s connection to her sense self. *Sleep*—It would soon have to overtake her, unlike the hours passed in the night as she sat staring against the

It’s only glass, she thinks, no broken bones this time.

blankness. Afraid to think of the future, blocking out most of the past, suspended in the terror of more violence, she is unable to act. She believes there is no rationality to her taking action. No normal consequences appear from doing what she thinks is good and right. There is only the guesswork, the unraveling of the possible cause to the episodic brutality. What had she done to bring about his beating this time? Or—perhaps she could bleakly attempt to define the sordid comic cluster of behaviors that would typify a calmer night. It would seem to her that the only means of controlling her world was to determine what she had done in her life to somehow deserve this.

“It’s only glass, she thinks, no broken bones this time.” The marks on her throat will swell only a little more, they could still withstand the snug fit of her turtleneck shirt. Perhaps the weather would remain cool and no one would notice her improper attire. The bruises on her arms and legs could also be covered up and hidden out of sight. Her right





DRAWING BY GLENDA NIEMAN

thumb ached, maybe it was broken, but she didn't think so, as long as she could move it. As the fear-induced numbness began to fade, the weight of her physical pain persisted. *Today*—It would be the day that she summons the courage to leave. If she could only get the glass picked up before the children came downstairs for breakfast, she would then move through the morning undaunted.

Potentially, the most dangerous time for a woman in a domestic violence situation is when she leaves her abuser.

—Rethinking Violence Against Women,
R. Emerson & Russell P. Dobash, 1998.

Academia has uncovered many facts about the dynamics of domestic violence, yet much of society remains locked within the walls of ignorance. Advocates for victims of domestic violence know that society asks the wrong questions. Instead of asking, “why doesn't she just leave,” we need to ask the question, “why does he do that to someone he loves?” What kind of society permits, ignores, or avoids punishment of such a devastating crime? Too little is being done to halt the painful reality of domestic violence and its victims. I shall continue to dedicate my life's work and educational research to heighten the awareness of the demoralizing effects of domestic violence and abuse. ●



Being There

JEFFREY LU

A dark-skinned student-cook put a black flamed-broiled hamburger on my ketchup-mustard-and-a-slice-of-lettuce-and-tomato white bun. I added an orange slice of Kraft's American cheese on top of the beef for a cheeseburger. Then I gathered a stack of Lay's potato chips and a diet Pepsi. I looked around at blacks, hispanics, whites, international students and faculty dancing, chatting, and singing to the beat of a music blaster of rap to rhythm and blues. I loved this scene. The party was a reunion for students who attended the leadership retreat in the spring of 2003. The retreat taught this Asian-American man to step outside of the box of his culture and to help other people by using his own rules of engagement.

Munching on a cheeseburger, I am reminded of how privileged I am. I became aware of my privileged status through an exercise at the retreat. We were asked to agree or disagree with a series of questions by either moving forward or backwards depending on one's answer. What made the activity

interesting was that we had to close our eyes until all the questions had been asked. What a surprise! There were at least a hundred people moving about simultaneously. When it was over, I thought I would be in the usual back of the bus. Instead, I came to the front.

Looking back, I saw far too many people left behind. I know now that my family helped me to grow. I also know I chose the hard route in life instead of the easy temptation of money, fame, and

Munching on a cheeseburger, I am reminded of how privileged I am.

dope. Yet, I need to do something for Mesa Community College: To the international students, I will be a speaker for injustice. To the minorities, I will seek to understand and respect each dreamer. To the teacher, I will respect his or her view even though we may disagree. To the workers, employees, and visitors, I will be open to learn from them. If I'm privileged, then I must act to join our community



members to forge a better future. One can never underestimate a person's potential.

Finishing the burger, I go for the chips. And, again return to the memories of the leadership retreat, I think about another challenge—breaking a one-inch board. The speaker explained that everyone can do the impossible—breaking a board with our bare hands. I knew I could do it. I've studied the martial arts since I was ten. However, there was a twist. They were not required to break the board alone. The point was to support and be supported by others while doing the seemingly impossible. An encouragement from a friend or ally can make the

difference when facing barriers to difficult tasks. Others have done it: Martin Luther King, Jr., Marie Curie, and Bruce Lee. Why can't I? I'm still breaking new records. I want to share the joy. So, I now encourage others to run for leadership positions, to read to kids, to volunteer for worthy causes and to go after their goals. A faith in others can make a difference in building up our community for the greater good.

By being privileged, I need to help others. By encouraging others, I can indirectly cause positive change for the better. These are my rules for engagement. ●



PHOTOGRAPH BY MELISA UMBOWER-WOOLFORD





PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL MONTESA



A Few Words on Service

SHANE McNEIL

“I need to do something. I need to give something back, because I’ve taken so much.” For several months prior to actually doing my “service,” these thoughts kept passing through my mind. Of course, these thoughts were true, but how was I going to do this? Service was a completely new concept, and I had no idea where to start. Yet, like so many things that are meant to happen, the means found me.

My “vehicle” to service, would be AmeriCorps. When I heard about the program, I thought, “Excellent. I can always use extra money for school.” I had been thinking about doing some kind of community service anyway, so decided to use this as a sort of springboard for both. Not exactly the most altruistic attitude, but hey, for me, it was a start. To make a long story short, my experience with AmeriCorps and the Center for Service-Learning have not only enriched my life by giving me the feeling that I am making a difference, but have also taught me so much about myself. I’ve become a more focused

individual, no longer feeling that I’m drifting through life. By helping others, I have helped myself. You see, service is an investment, and there are many forms of payment for this investment.

Helping others enriches your soul, whether you’ve helped them understand a concept that they couldn’t grasp before or serving them in a soup kitchen. You never forget the looks on their faces. You also meet so many good people, you become

Not exactly the most altruistic attitude, but hey, for me, it was a start.

“connected,” and of course, community service always looks good on a resume. However, in the grand scheme of the universe, even these

things are insignificant. The true investment with service is in the future. It’s in the people, and the return on the investment is shared by everyone. ●





PHOTOGRAPH BY ALISON WHITING



Sometimes Service-Learning Finds You

CHRISTINE BECKMAN

“They’re laying off engineers again.” That’s the greeting my husband gave me as I came home from turning my grades in for the fall semester. My husband had survived many layoffs at Motorola over the past few years, but this time he thought he might be “walked out” like so many of his co-workers. Not wanting to have financial concerns over the Christmas holiday, I reluctantly called the chairman of the Speech Communication Department and volunteered to teach a class over the winter intersession.

On the first evening of class, I walked in and looked at my students. They all looked so sad! I asked them to introduce themselves and tell why they had given up their evenings to be in the intensive three week Introduction to Human Communication class. A few had recently failed the same course and wanted to “get it over with” in three weeks. Some needed a “quick fix” to repair their low GPA’s; scholarships, grants or car insurance were in jeopardy and this was their last hope.

In short, I was feeling sorry for myself for needing to teach over the winter break—and they just wanted to get the class over with.

We shuffled through the first week. Then an e-mail changed everything. Before heading to class on our second Monday together, I stopped to check my e-mail. There was a greeting from my neighbor, Dr. Manuel Vanegas. He was visiting his native country, Nicaragua, and he mentioned how sad it was seeing the children in Managua. Apparently, the city was wet after three weeks of constant rain, and few families had the luxury of owning dryers.

As an instructor, I am amazed at the generosity of my students.

In the humid air clothes took forever to dry, and the result was lots of children in cold wet clothes.

I decided to print the e-mail and read it to my class. We might not be enjoying our winter break, but at least we had dry clothes to wear!





PHOTOGRAPH BY ALISON WHITING

I finished reading the e-mail and looked at my students. “See . . . not everyone has it as ‘good’ as we do.” I put the message down and started my lecture. Soon, a hand went up. “Why don’t we all collect socks and send them to him?” Another student quickly added, “Since we are working in groups for our next assignment, why don’t we see which group can bring in the most?” Knowing that money can be tight for students, I said, “Okay, but it’s not a requirement—it’s a choice. We’ll just do this for fun, and I’ll give candy to the group who brings in the most clothes for the children.”

The next evening I grabbed a plastic bag, remembering I’d be collecting their donations. I opened my class door, and I will never forget what I saw. My students were laughing and teasing each other over the amount of clothes they had been able to collect. Each of the five groups had a huge pile of clothes! Forget the plastic bag—it took three students to help me get the clothes to the car!

The clothes were shipped to Nicaragua, and each evening my students wondered if I had heard from my neighbor. The whole class burst into applause when the e-mail finally arrived saying how the clothes had been taken to a school, and the children were so grateful to get the new, dry clothes from the Estados Unidos!

During the spring semester I was invited to a party at Dr. Vanegas’ home. I was telling the story about how my winter intersession class “came to

life” once they started helping others. Dr. Vanegas’ son is a teacher, and he was quick to point out “there are lots of people right here who could use help. Our school provides breakfast and lunch for our students because the parents are struggling to make ends meet.” I listened as Luis Vanegas described conditions at Academia del Pueblo, a Title I school serving low-income families in South Phoenix.

My students in Introduction to Human Communication just happened to be starting the “Small Group Communication” section of the course. I had never incorporated “service-learning” into my class before, but I kept thinking about the school and the conditions Luis described. Since my students were going to be engaged in problem-solving groups, I decided to “give them” their problem. Luis’ fourth-grade class all came from low-income families who didn’t speak English at home. Our problem became, how can we help these 30 students understand new English words which will benefit them? As a class we decided that we could teach the English words for healthy foods on the food pyramid. I called Luis with our idea, and he said the children would love it, and my first service-learning project began.

My class was divided into four groups. One group visited Dr. Maureen Zimmerman, who teaches nutrition classes at MCC. She helped them put together a fun lesson plan for the children, focused on deciding which foods should be eaten “seldom,



sometimes, or always.” One group designed nutrition games for the children. One group planned ways to raise money, and the last group organized food bags for each child to take home.

It took two weeks to coordinate everything. The students in the games group made a cardboard ocean with a ship titled the “SS T-bird”! They made fishing poles for the students to throw in the ocean so they could catch health food. The money group raised \$95, and the group making the food bags were able to get 30 bags donated from Starbucks. They used the \$95 to buy apples, oranges, bananas, granola bars, and string cheese. On each of the bags they attached a sheet of paper with the Spanish and English words for the contents.

Eleven of my students were able to go to the school on February 27, 2003. The students in the class were so excited to see us. My students divided the class up, and half went outside to play the nutrition games and half stayed inside to learn about the food pyramid. I was so proud of my students as I watched them teach and play games with the children. After 20 minutes the children switched,



and those who had been playing came inside for their nutrition lesson, and the other left for their turn to fish and play games. At the end my students had the children take turns hitting a piñata they had filled with bags of trail mix. The hard part came when it was time to leave. At first the little girls in the class wanted to hug each of my students and hold their hands as we walked to the car—then the boys started circling everyone saying we couldn’t go unless we promised to come back the next day! I think it took twenty minutes to say good-bye! Once my students and I made it to the parking lot, they kept thanking me for allowing them to do this!

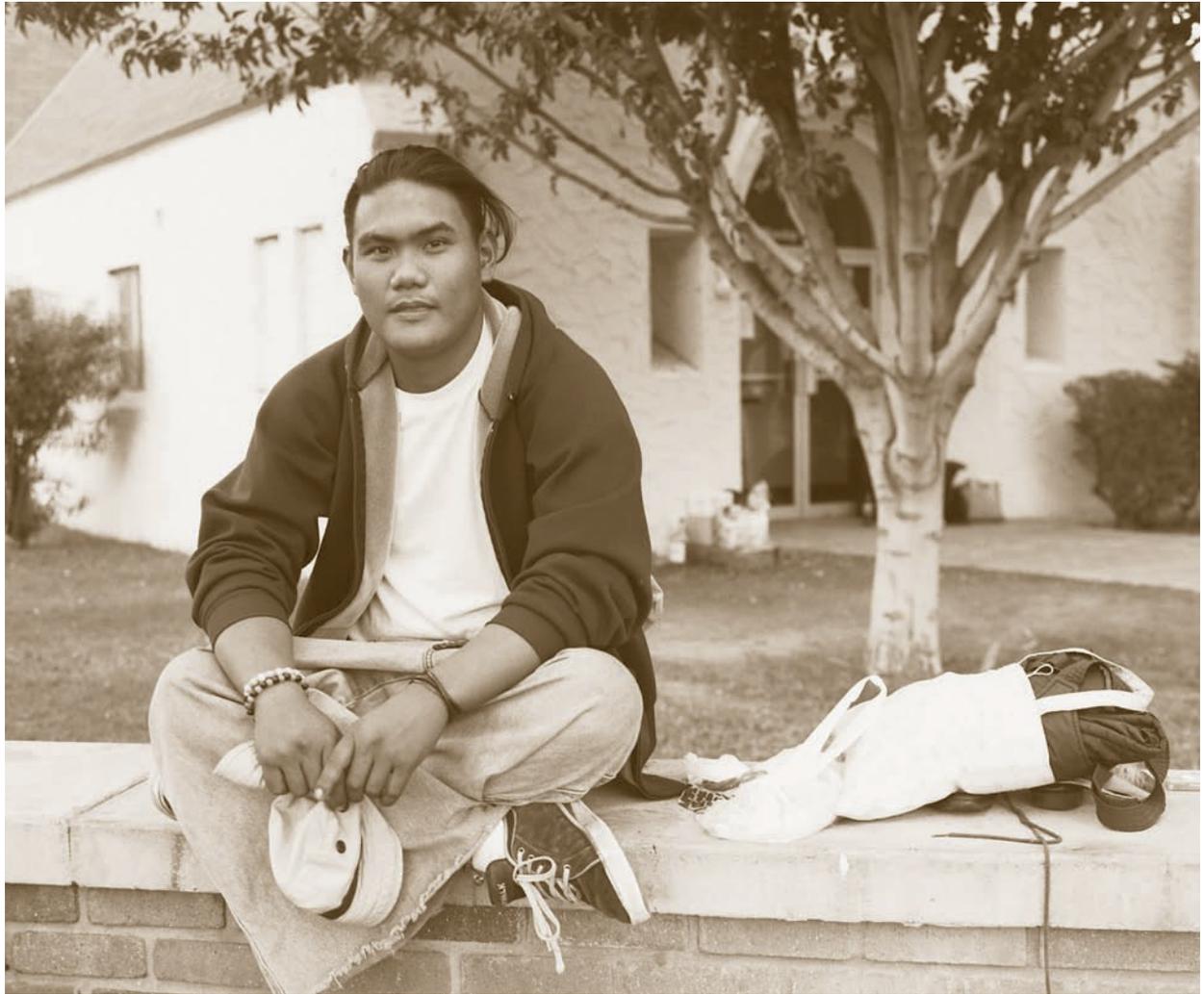
As an instructor I am amazed at the generosity of my students. They willingly gave of themselves, including the biggest gift of all—the gift of time. Incorporating service-learning into my classes was new for me, but I’m now a believer! I have a lot to learn about helping students identify areas in the community where they would like to help. With my two experiences, I presented the issues to the class. I would like to let students take more ownership in the process by encouraging them to identify whom they would like to help.

By responding to the people in my life, I feel my students were able to make a difference to others. I want to encourage my students to keep their ears and eyes open. If their hearts are open and listening, service-learning may just come to them! ●



PHOTOGRAPH BY TERESE HILL





PHOTOGRAPH BY MICHAEL MONTESA



Impacting Families in My Community

MARGIE L. PHILLIPS

Linguist Deborah Tannen has said, “The biggest mistake is believing there is one right way to listen, to talk, to have a conversation—or a relationship.” This point has been driven home for me on a daily basis, especially regarding my AmeriCorps and service-learning assignment at a local behavioral health facility.

Jewish Family and Children Service (JFCS) began their services shortly after World War II. Four Jewish women knew that their friends and neighbors were in emotional pain and identified a need in their community that wasn’t being met. Together, they began recruiting therapists to provide this service. Today, JFCS has offices from coast to coast. Individuals of all walks of life and faiths can find assistance with their mental health needs, as well as some financial assistance.

I am fortunate to have had the opportunity to volunteer and serve my AmeriCorps commitment at the Mesa, Arizona, office of JFCS for the past

year. During this time, I have performed such tasks as answering phones, scheduling appointments, and checking in clients for their appointments. I have received training in screening clients for their first time appointments and assisting them in locating additional outside services and resources. Also, I have assisted clients in filling out requests for food share boxes, filling out and filing their AHCCS (Arizona state funded health care program) applications, as well as referring them to the agency’s Helping Hands program. It is gratifying to help clients obtain services they so desperately need and to watch their growth after having received those services over a period of time.

My service at JFCS has strengthened my desire to work in a public service agency. Between this service and the lay Christian counseling (non-ordained, non-professional), I participated in through my church for a number of years, I have learned that I have a gift of working with people suffering from potentially serious problems. I was

instrumental in assisting a woman suffering with severe depression, when I continually called to reschedule her appointment each time she failed to

I was thrilled when her therapist informed me that my interaction with her was a beneficial part of her therapy.

arrive. She has been receiving assistance for the past several months, and it is heartwarming to see the tremendous difference in her since her first visit. I also developed a rapport with a senior female client who was grieving over the death of her daughter and constantly snapped at the support staff. I was thrilled when her therapist informed me that my interaction with her was a beneficial part of her therapy.

My service with AmeriCorps and my work with the JFCS have been instrumental in redirecting both my professional and personal life. Not only will I continue to volunteer in my community after my 900-hour AmeriCorps contract is fulfilled, but this experience has helped me to change my career focus. I have acquired an overwhelming desire to work in the mental health field; therefore, I have declared a major in social work. When I have finished my current studies at MCC, I plan to transfer to ASU in the fall of 2004 to complete

both the bachelors and masters programs in social work. This decision was recently further reinforced by a 50-year-old woman calling to thank a supervisor for the courage I had given her to leave an abusive relationship and find a safe haven. She stated that she had been too afraid to leave her home until I spent the time to listen and care.

I have always felt there was more I could and should be doing with my life. The maturity that comes with parenting started me along the path I needed to take to find my direction. The service I have been involved in and the friends I have made continue to guide my way. ●



What I Learned from a Class of Fifth-graders

DEBORAH PAPER

While serving at Adams Elementary School with fifth-graders, I learned some important lessons. The first is that not every school is run the same way in every community. Second, no two students are the same in any school setting. And, third, the familiar and comfortable way is not the only way to do things. As a bonus, I had a few of my misconceptions challenged.

Adams Elementary has served the youth of its community for about thirty years. The surrounding neighborhood is composed of a combination of older single-family homes and apartment complexes. Most of the families are two-income households, and the majority of the students are of Hispanic origin. I was assigned to classroom five which looks out on the courtyard in the heart of the school.

My supervising teacher, Mrs. C, received the Teacher of the Year Award in 1998. I expected to learn a lot. The atmosphere in her classroom was created by several strategies to keep the day

running smoothly, featuring music, interactive games and physical activities. These strategies were effective because most of the students came to Mrs. C's class because other teachers were unequipped to

When I challenge my own thoughts, feelings and beliefs, I end up learning more about different cultures, beliefs and communities.

deal with them or simply didn't have the time to fully address their needs. A large number of students had multiple diagnoses. Mrs.

C had three students that stand out as examples. The first student is Brooke*. She has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). OCD is a disorder where the individual must complete a certain number of routines or rituals in order for their life to make sense. If an individual is not allowed to complete these rituals, they can feel out of control and may become depressed. Darien* was first introduced to me as a child with anger



issues. As I discovered through the course of my service, Darien's father had passed away three weeks earlier. I believe his anger stemmed from feeling that his father abandoned him. Terry*, who has ADHD, came to Mrs. C's class because his other teachers just couldn't handle him. When he arrived, he used foul language and became violent if told what to do in a confrontational manner. Mrs. C worked hard to get him to calm down and succeed in her class.

One student, who taught me to be more culturally sensitive, was born in Africa. When I asked her about the upcoming *Harry Potter* movie, I realized how little I knew about other cultures and religions. Her father did not allow her access to anything that dealt with magic, mythical creatures or witchcraft. Mrs. C explained that those subjects were contrary to their religious beliefs. Later that day, I went to the library and am still reading about African tribal cultures.

Another misconception was to believe that all elementary students were alike, regardless of their culture, race or ethnicity. I have learned to approach each student differently. I also believed that all students spoke English. However, one of the students had the lessons translated for her by a classmate. I found that I couldn't really get to know this student well because she spoke very little

English and I spoke very poor Spanish. As a social work major, I have decided to learn other languages to maximize the help I can provide to clients who have language barriers.

Adams Elementary has some wonderful programs that are available not only to the students themselves, but to the families as well. One program is the Adams Family Resource Room. This room is available to the students and their families. In this room is everything a family might need. It is stocked with toiletries, paper goods, canned foods and clothes. The school will provide clothes for the entire family, even diapers if a family needs them. The parents can request this service on their own or be referred by the teacher. However, the important fact is the use of the resources is kept confidential.

In conclusion, I learned that for me to be a more efficient social worker, I must continually challenge what I am comfortable with. When I challenge my own thoughts, feeling and beliefs, I end up learning more about different cultures, beliefs and communities. My goal is to become more culturally aware so that I may serve all people regardless of color, race, ethnicity or gender to the best of my ability! ●

*All names have been changed to protect privacy





PHOTOGRAPH BY
MICHAEL MONTESA



Democracy Depends on Citizen Engagement

STEVEN PALMER

Democracy can be a fragile form of government. Democracy's fragility is caused by its dependence on the citizenry for participation. In a pure democracy, a government is ruled by the people. Because we live in a representative democracy, the citizens have a strong say in government policy decisions, so a democracy is only as strong as the people's willingness to assume the responsibilities of citizenship. Because, if the people can affect the government, it is necessary that they be as informed as those who they elect for office. Thus, for citizens to be effective, they need to possess certain attributes. The most important attributes for a citizen are to practice informed voting and to participate in the democratic process.

Our democracy depends on the citizens to make wise choices when electing officials to any level of government. If an ineffective official is elected, then that official may make bad decisions, and the blame can be placed partly upon those who elected him. Therefore, it is necessary for a citizen

to cast an informed vote. Unfortunately, the bipartisan system does not help to create informed voters. When an election occurs, the voters feel comfortable voting for their party candidate, thinking the candidate will share the voter's views.

Voting solely based on party membership can be a dangerous act. A candidate can claim membership in a specific party but may hold extreme views that

Citizens need to exercise their power; otherwise they will lose it and thereby lose control of government.

the voter does not agree with. Another problem is that even if

the candidate running for office has similar views to those of the voter, it does not mean that the candidate is best suited for the position. An informed voter must look beyond party membership. It is impossible to say that all Republican presidents or all Democratic presidents were bad choices for the Presidency. It is entirely necessary to know a candidate's background and his or her





PHOTOGRAPH BY JANET VOGT



qualifications for office. If John Doe did a great job as mayor, it might be a good idea to vote for him for governor no matter which political party he runs under. A person who votes without knowing about the candidates is worse than a non-voter.

Informed voting is not the only attribute that marks an effective citizen. The effective citizen should also become involved in how his or her country is run. Becoming involved can be as obvious as running for an elected position. Since most people will not be running for office, it is easier for a citizen to become involved in his or her community. Community involvement could simply mean joining the PTA or lobbying to get a stop sign placed where one is needed. The government provides the funding for many institutions, such as schools, but the system requires citizens to make sure that the funding is being used in the best possible way. An effective citizen goes to meetings and stays aware of major events in the community. Good citizens will learn about an important issue and decide their opinion. They will support that which they think is right and oppose that which they think is wrong. It is a citizen's job to try and change what is hurting the community. Mayors cannot know about the problems in their city unless the people tell them there is a problem. It is important for a citizen to be involved in more than just voting.

Citizens do not always recognize the power they have over government. Since most people do not recognize their power, they do not use it. Not using the power that is a right of citizenship creates a void in the political system that must be filled. If the citizens do not take advantage of the power they hold, then someone else will. If the citizens continue to ignore their power and responsibility, the power will soon no longer be available to them. This relationship between citizenship and the ability to govern can be compared to a muscle in the human body. Use of the muscle increases its strength, but inactivity will soon make the muscle incapable of the simplest task. Citizens need to exercise their power; otherwise they will lose it and thereby lose control of government.

The main attributes of an effective citizen are being knowledgeable and participating in their government. These two qualities will help to keep democracy working. It is understood that government cannot control every aspect of a country. A democracy needs for its citizenry to become involved in its communities and to fill in the gaps that government cannot control. If the people ignore this responsibility, someone will take the power that the people once held. When the people lose their power, the government will no longer be a democracy. If the population no longer participates in the democratic process, then democracy will cease to exist. ●



One Child at a Time

SUE DOUGLAS

Mesa Arts Academy is a kindergarten–8th grade publicly chartered school owned and operated by the Boys and Girls Clubs of the East Valley. Housed at the Club’s Grant Woods Mesa Branch, in a neighborhood that is often identified with the Southside gang that infests its streets, the Academy serves a diverse population and provides unique opportunities for service-learning students from Mesa Community College. Fifty percent of our primary students arrive at the Academy speaking no English. Over 80 percent of our population qualifies for assistance under the Federal Free and Reduced Meal Program. In addition, we serve a large population of students who have learning disabilities or health impairments that keep them out of mainstream public school classrooms. The Academy is

I begin by telling them that each one of our students is gifted. This sometimes initially disappoints a service-learning student who arrives expecting to “fix” a broken student.

the kind of school that district administrators use to justify low test scores, poor attendance, and lack of parent involvement. And yet, over the eight years we have served students, the Academy has posted some of the highest gains in test scores of any school in the state, maintains an attendance rate that exceeds both State and District averages, and comes very close each year to achieving its goal of 50 hours of volunteer participation by each family. To achieve these results, we rely heavily on the support of our community partners such as Mesa Community College and its service-learning students. Our philosophy, “It takes a whole village to raise a child,” encourages and supports these volunteers who become valuable members of our community.

Service-learning students who apply at the Academy initially tell me they are surprised and impressed by the positive atmosphere on campus.



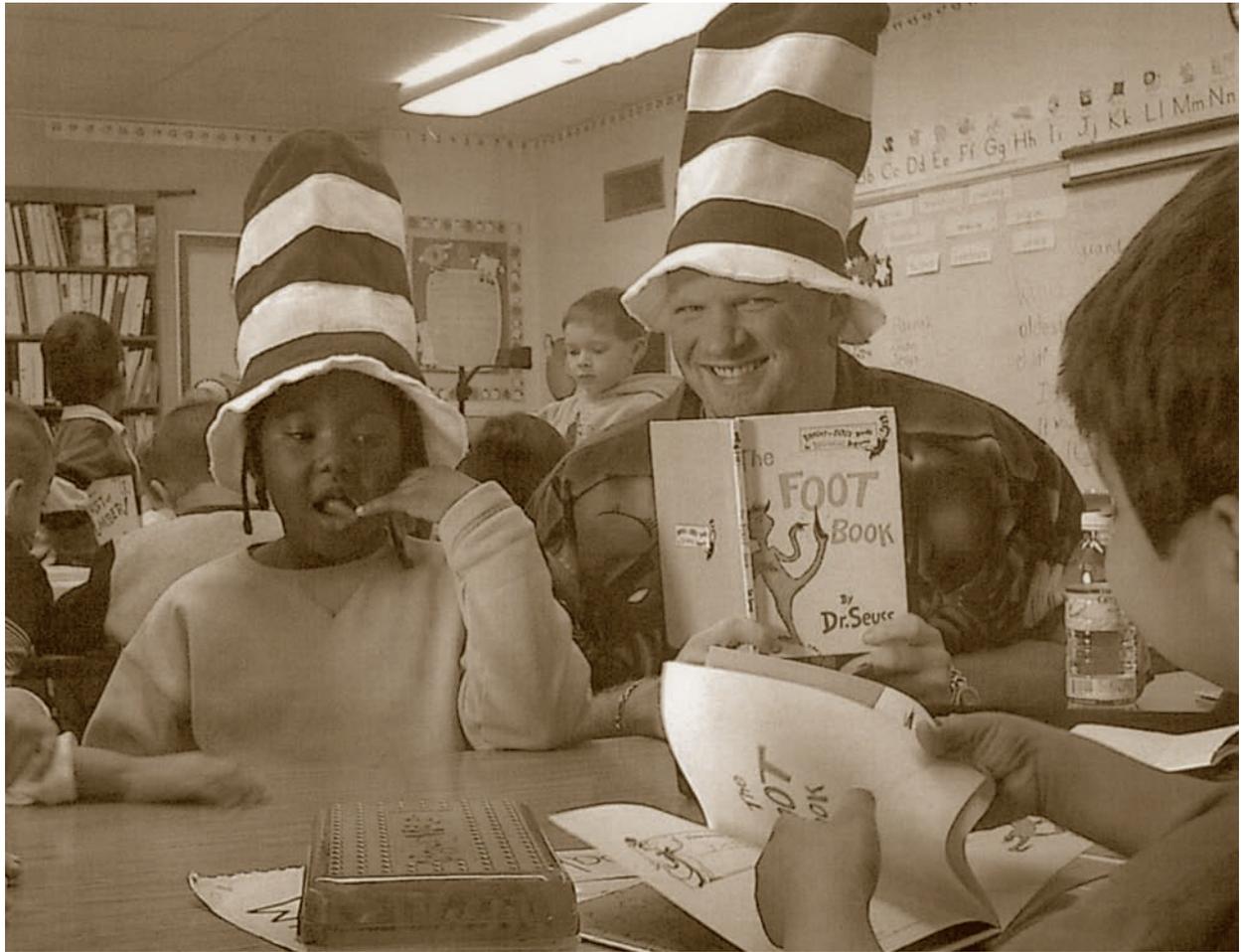
The students they meet are smiling, openly friendly to visitors, and are quick to request assistance. When I show new volunteers through the classrooms, our students often run up to them and ask, “Can you help in my classroom?” For many service-learning students, this is unexpected. “Don’t these kids know that they have problems? Aren’t they aware that they are poor? Why are they so happy to be at school?” My goal when I orient each new volunteer is to first change the way they view our students. I begin by telling them that each one of our students is gifted. This sometimes initially disappoints a service-learning student who arrives expecting to “fix” a broken student. The fact that our “gifted” student is considered by most schools to be a liability or problem comes as another surprise to our service-learning volunteers. As they interact with these students and realize that many of these kids do indeed fit the “at-risk” category, the college students change their view of service-learning and their perceptions of why they are here. It does not take long for them to develop a personal relationship with one or more of our students. That is when they begin to realize that service-learning is not just a program; it is the opportunity to bond with another human being who

Service-learning volunteers are usually recruited to be tutors in reading or math; however, our goal is that they also discover that they too have gifts.

may not have the same opportunities that many of us take for granted in our lives. They also develop the understanding that service-learning is a two-way street and that, if they are open and genuinely engaged, they will learn as much as they teach. Service-learning is more than just a gift to the receiver; it should also be a life-altering change for the provider.

I spend time interviewing each volunteer before recommending placement in a classroom or work area. It is important that the volunteers themselves identify a need and recognize that they have the skills and tools to fulfill that need. An important aspect of the initial interview process is uncovering the unique gifts that the volunteer has to offer our students. Service-learning volunteers are usually recruited to be tutors in reading or math; however, our goal is that they also discover that they too have gifts that go beyond sitting with a student and listening to them read or correcting “math fact worksheets”. Because we are an arts-based school, our students have the opportunity to interact with artists from many disciplines. Although our charter requires us to hire only Arizona certified teachers for our academic programs, it also mandates that we bring in professional artists to enrich our students’ artistic abilities. Many of the volunteers who join us have an interest or an artistic talent that they would like to develop. We schedule them to tutor in math and reading, but also encourage them to participate in the arts electives with their





PHOTOGRAPH BY LUPE CONTRERAS





PHOTOGRAPH BY ARCELIA TOVAR



students. This gives them the opportunity to explore their own creativity and grow artistically while they are fulfilling their volunteer obligations. When our students see their tutors also as learners, they begin to realize that learning is not something attached to a classroom; it is a lifelong process that encompasses more than knowledge that can be measured by a standardized test.

This change in attitude is a critical component of our service-learning partnerships. It is not uncommon to find a service-learning volunteer being tutored by one of our teachers after school, using our computer lab to do research for a paper, or filling a bag at our food pantry. One work study student who has volunteered in the same classroom for almost two years is particularly effective in motivating students who have a combination of learning disabilities and ADHD. I have never seen John sit still; however, I have seen him engaged for hours explaining the same problems over and over without losing patience or making his students feel awkward or stupid. His favorite phrases are “I know you can do this. Math is hard. Let’s try another way.” That same volunteer received tutoring in algebra from one of our gifted 8th grade students. He also shared his talent as a musician in our guitar class when he realized that many of his “special students” were learning to play that instrument.

This concept of “going the extra mile” or reaching past the agreed upon service takes our service-learning students out of the mode of fulfilling a minimum number of hours to earn a specific credit or honors designation. Teresa joined our kindergarten program as a work study student two years ago. After many hours of working with second language students and helping them not only to speak English, but also to read in English, she was faced with sending them home for the summer to primarily Spanish-speaking households. She was an education major experiencing the same dilemma as many classroom teachers who have worked so hard over a school year. Instead of complaining, Teresa decided to “level the playing field.” She looked for curriculum resources and asked the Academy staff

Then, I laughed because every child sitting at Mike’s table was wearing a stocking cap on his head. Each of those boys looked ‘just like Mike.’

to help her develop a summer program that would meet the needs of her students. Then

she convinced the local Club staff to offer scholarships for “her kids” in their summer camp program so parents would not have to drive their children to school in the middle of the day. She recruited several MCC students to help her in the classroom and procured donations of school supplies and free field trip opportunities so her students would have an enriching and exciting summer program. Two of



them have successfully completed second grade mathematics and are reading chapter books. Although Teresa eventually ran out of work study hours, she kept her program going as an after-school activity throughout this past school year. In addition to this program (Reading Enrichment through Math and Science), Teresa has become involved in the Mesa Boys and Girls Club activities and serves on their Board of Directors. I suspect that her emerging skills as an activist in the non-profit sector will eventually become a career for her. Service-learning promoted life-long learning and encourages compassionate interaction. It reminds each one of us that we live in a global community and have the power to impact the look and feel of that community. That is why it is so empowering, regardless of whether one is on the giving or receiving end.

I remember a service-learning student who applied to work at the Academy this past year. He was “huge”, not in girth, but in attitude and behavior. He fidgeted at our initial interview and seemed much too large for my small office. Although I walked him through our academic classrooms, I wondered if he might better fit into our P.E. or after-school sports program. At that time our kindergarten teacher was desperately in need of someone to work in her learning centers the same days that he was available. Despite my concerns that he would not fit into a room of “little” people, she recruited him right into her kindergarten

program. Mike showed up his first day wearing a stocking cap pulled down over his head, and I shook my head as I left him sprawled out on one of our miniscule kindergarten chairs, long legs and arms protruding in every direction. Two weeks later, I

For every volunteer we have the privilege of hosting, there is a story.

checked into the kindergarten classroom. There was Mike sitting at a table of five year-old boys,

still looking like an octopus perched on the top of a rock. What amazed me was that each one of those little boys was listening attentively to Mike explain the mystery of money. As he eased them from the concrete to the abstract, then back through a hands-on activity, I thought “what a gift he is to our kindergarten teacher and our children.” Then I laughed because every child sitting at Mike’s table was wearing a stocking cap on his head. Each of those boys looked “just like Mike.” It was obvious that every one of those little five-year-old boys wanted to be “just like Mike.” Later I asked him how it felt to be a role model. He said that he was initially uncomfortable with that role, but had come to realize that he had no choice. He told me, “Mike’s Guys are cool”. He also made it very clear to his little friends that “Mike’s Guys read and write and do their homework.” The classroom now sports a permanent bulletin board labeled “Mike’s Art” where students can hang the artwork they do if they finish their work early. Of course, the drawings





PHOTOGRAPH BY MESA ARTS ACADEMY



and paintings I find on that board are as bold, colorful, and creative as Mike himself. I doubt if he would want his fraternity buddies to know that under this “real guy” exterior is a budding artist. The children that he has touched will never forget him or the valuable lessons he has taught them.

I believe that the impact of the service-learning program on the Mesa Arts Academy can best be described by a question asked by a student volunteer. She had arrived to help in the office and noticed that my administrative assistant left her desk every day to serve lunch to students. Nicole immediately offered to take her place in the cafeteria. One day after serving lunch to 180 students, she returned to help sort through a huge donation of clothing, backpacks, and school supplies. Sitting on the floor in the middle of these piles she asked,

“How could you do this without volunteers?” The truth is, Nicole, we couldn’t. Our volunteers have helped turn our “school” into a vibrant learning community that recognizes the needs and celebrates the gifts of its members.

For every volunteer we have the privilege of hosting, there is a story. As the year draws to a close and I reflect on the impact that Mesa Community College students have had on our school community, I realize that this is something that cannot be answered for years to come. I do know that they are making a difference in this world, everyday, one child at a time. ●





The Mural at Thomas J. Pappas School

Artist credit: John Carlen,
Mesa Community College student

Design idea: Teresa Ottesen,
Mesa Community College student



The mural at Thomas J. Pappas School Tempe was funded by a generous grant from The Scottsdale League for the Arts.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALISON WHITING

The “Follow Your Dreams” mural that I painted at Thomas J. Pappas School really makes me feel good. It also brightens up a playground that is normally whitewashed and dull. It helps me to realize my purpose to be creative and expressive and give back to the community. Don’t let anybody or anything keep you from following your dreams!

—John M. Carlen



Final Thoughts

LARRY K. CHRISTIANSEN
PRESIDENT
MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A college education is more than a collection of classes. Our challenge is to instill in each person a commitment to service and the feeling that involvement is not an isolated experience. It is a lifetime philosophy.

Reflected in these pages are the commitments of individuals to our community. This commitment takes many forms, impacts many people, helps and guides many organizations. Citizenship has, as its foundation, participation. I applaud the students, faculty, and staff who are engaged in our community. We must support the participation that is reflected in the thoughts, the ideals, and the examples of this publication.

Thank you to our community, our students for sharing, and our faculty and staff for providing the opportunity.

Larry K. Christiansen
President
Mesa Community College

