

### Diversity Day at Beardsley School, Bridgeport, CT

Subject Matter: Reading, Research Skills, Oral Presentation, Character: Cooperation, Respect



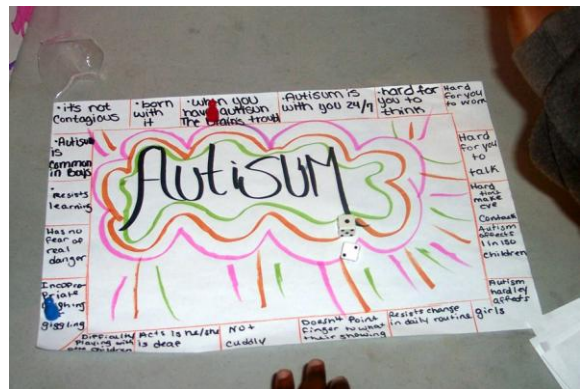
Two sixth-graders describe their research on Attention Deficit Disorder to an interested 4<sup>th</sup> grader.

Two sixth-grade classes at Beardsley School in Bridgeport, Connecticut collaborated during the study of human disabilities to create a teaching activity for their peers and younger 4<sup>th</sup> grade classmates. The teachers Dawn Schirizzo and Nicole Vetter chose this activity to develop their students' reading, writing literacy and presentation skills through the research project. The project also included the character goal of building understanding for those with disabilities.

This low income and highly diverse urban school received support from SEE to purchase books that told stories of children with disabilities. Additional research was completed by the students on various disabilities that included: cerebral palsy, paralysis, autism, spina bifida,

downs syndrome, mental retardation, blindness, deafness, dwarfism, ADD and ADHD. The students worked in teams of two or three and learned about the condition they selected, read stories about individuals who lived with these conditions and created an informational board (similar to a science fair display) and learning activity to supplement the narrative on the information board.

For example, one sixth-grade team researched the topic of autism and created their information board to include a game where fourth-graders would role dice to advance on a spot along a board-game path. Each location included a description of the symptoms experienced by someone with autism.



The presentation to fourth-graders was made on Diversity Day. The sixth-graders set up their information boards on tables around the perimeter of the school gym. Individual fourth-grade classes entered and divided into pairs of students who were then picked one information board to begin their Diversity Day experience. One of teachers kept time so each pair of fourth-grade students had four to five minutes at each information board before they would move to the next station. There were more stations than could be visited in one period with a total of 17 disability information boards.

Student presenters and visitors demonstrated genuine enthusiasm and engagement during the event. When a visitor asked a question of the six-grade presenters, there were clear and well prepared responses demonstrating authentic understanding of their subject. All sixth graders questioned agreed they had learned meaningful information in this project and were glad they had participated. One girl noted, "I had never heard of autism until we began this study."

Similarly, the fourth-graders who participated appeared engaged and interested in the presentations. Multiple inquires with fourth-graders resulted in positive responses to the experience and interest in what they were learning. There was clearly positive energy in the gym as the event proceeded. The sixth-graders repeated the process for each of the three, fourth-grade classes at their school.