



Character Leadership: Integrating Learning with Service

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Pine Point School, a dynamic partnership of students, faculty and parents of diverse experiences committed to academic excellence, stresses the importance of individual accomplishment and the power of collaborative effort. In all that we do, we seek to develop students with strong minds and caring hearts.

While there are myriad ways in which Pine Point furthers its mission, one example illustrates the school's commitment to truly integrating learning with service. Every 8th grade student is required to demonstrate his or her English Skills in the form of a Service Learning Project.

We first have the student choose a place in the community where they can offer assistance to people or animals that are somehow at risk. During their service work at the placement, each student keeps a journal to share with his or her classmates. We then ask them to choose a work of literature that is somehow related to the concept of service or to the site they have chosen. Following this, the students must complete extensive research on their area of service and prepare to write a lengthy essay on the entire experience. Finally, working in concert with a faculty advisor, the students work in small seminar groups to prepare for a 20-minute oral presentation and defense of their work before a panel of judges.

The student must answer six fundamental questions during the course of the project:

- What are the needs of my chosen site?
- What can I do to help?
- What did I actually contribute?
- How did my research increase my understanding?
- How has the experience changed me?
- Looking back, what would I have done differently?

Students are required to complete a minimum 200-word journal entry for each site visit. The literature read in conjunction with the service also requires a minimum of eight 200-word minimum journal entries. The research essay asks the student to respond thoughtfully to the six essential questions, provide an analysis of the relationship between the book and the service experience, and give an analysis of their research including proper bibliographic references. The essay is developed throughout the project, but the actually writing is completed in one extended sitting. The presentations include a summary of the essay, visual displays, and a question and answer period.

Our students are given one-on-one verbal feedback as well as a rubric analysis of their strengths and areas in need of improvement. The videotaping of each presentation is used to augment the assessment process. At the end, students are asked for their input [also videotaped] on how the



process can be improved.

Three examples

1. A student sought to work with an autistic child at a nearby center for students with special needs. The student made the arrangements with the agency, became trained, and spent nearly two months weekly doing assigned work with the student. For his book, he chose to read “Flowers for Algernon” and researched the condition described as autism with an emphasis on the hidden talents of all human beings. He continued to visit his new friend well beyond the requirements of the project.
2. A student set up an internship at a humane society, working with and caring for the animals. She cleaned cages, walked the animals, groomed, and learned to attend to those who were sick. She learned about the community work of the society and the difficult decisions that sometimes needed to be made. For her book, she read “Old Yeller”. She continued to work at the humane society well beyond the required time frame, and organized a fundraiser for the organization.
3. A student enjoyed reading “The Grapes of Wrath” as he firmed up his regular work at a local soup kitchen. He delved into the local, regional, national, global, and historical aspects of hunger and homelessness, and he worked diligently at the facility with preparing, serving, cleaning, and stocking the pantries. The School now hosts an annual hunger banquet which raises awareness about the complex issues surrounding poverty and hunger in societies around the world.

Each strong mind and caring heart was inspired in his or her learning; and in turn, inspired us all.

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