

Senior Capstone 3

13 Dec. 2013

Friendship Project

Picking my junior classes was simple. Pick the easiest classes and make my senior year fly by as fast as it can. While picking classes I had to pick at least two English classes. Of course I picked the obvious English 12A, but a class called Senior Capstone really stuck out to me. The class description said it was a class where you, and a group of people work together to create a service leaning project. I right away knew that I wanted that class. Now being in the class for a couple weeks I am so glad that I chose that class.

It looks good on college applications, resumes, and is just nice doing stuff for others. One major thing I really enjoy about this class is that it's not just some boring lecture class. It gives us the responsibility to pick our project, decide when things are done and have the freedom to leave campus and work on the project. It lets us be the adults that we are, and show that as senior we can take on these responsibilities.

What is service? Service is donating your time, money and energy to help someone or something in need. We got split up into small groups and we all wrote down words that either described what we thought was considered some kind of service or the words we think of when someone says the word service. Some words we wrote down were time, money, service, helping others, energy, blood, and when the receivers gain something. After we wrote that down the class got together to write down what the class thought was service and we came up with when you are sacrificing time and energy and

are helping others. It was close to my group's definition, but they left out money because you don't always need to donate or raise money in order for it to be service. Since we were allowed to pick our groups, I decided to work with a group of girls I know. I chose the girls I knew were good workers, I could work with and that were my friends so I could also make the experience enjoyable.

Brainstorming took a long time since there are so many opportunities in the community for service projects. We all wrote down our own ideas and wrote the pros and cons of each idea. Then we got together and shared our ideas we each came up with and discussed what ideas we could and couldn't do. Some ideas the girls I'm working with came up with included, working at a soup kitchen, volunteering at Devos Children's Hospital, volunteering at a school with special needs children and working with older people with Alzheimer's. After writing out all the pros and cons and writing down a list of things we could do with each idea we finally decided that working with special needs children was the best idea for us all. We decided this because it's a project that works with the time restrictions we have, easy for us to do and still a good project to do.

After we all decided on working with the special needs kids we went right to researching about special needs children, and the needs of them. In order to make sure we correctly knew what the term "service" was we looked it up on Wikipedia. Wikipedia defined service learning as "Service learning is a method of teaching that combines classroom instruction with meaning community service". Another type of service is just plain service. One is just plain service which is "an act of helpful activity". The big difference between the two is service leaning and plain service is in service leaning you actually learn stuff and go out and teach others while helping others. While plain service

is just helping others. While looking up tool kits for service learning my group and I found a website which tells you the five steps for service learning. They start off with inventory and investigation with is when you catalog the interest and skills of peers, find a need, and begin to pick partners. My group did this by writing down ideas we all have then going around and discussing it in order to help see what others think and start seeing who you want to work with. Preparation and planning is when you collaborate, develop a plan, and divide up responsibilities among the group. This is something my group did very well. We all talked about what are strengths and weakness, as in working and managing stuff in order to split up the work among us four. Next is action which is where you decide if the project has value, purpose, and meaning. Is it going to make an impact on someone or something? After action is reflection where you look back on what you did and discuss it. What happened? What differences were made by this project? And receive feedback by others and discuss others projects. Lastly, there is demonstration which is just showcasing what you did. Tell others, peers, teacher about your projects. You can write a newspaper article or make a presentation about it. My group all worked and looked up tool kits in order to help us with our service leaning project, but unfortunately the websites we were provided were no help to my project.

Since my group decided on sticking with the special needs project we decided that the need for this project was to help them develop friendships and give more awareness to special needs and how they need more attention. To provide for this need we will spend as much time with the kids as we can. We will talk, hang out with them, help them with schoolwork, do activities and learn more about special needs children in order to help others understand as well.

Part 2: Working with special needs children can be both difficult and rewarding. It is a challenging process that with the right knowledge can be simple. Special needs children need to interact with other children to help develop good motor and communication skills. If not trained or have the right knowledge and skills to work with a special needs child it can be a very long and difficult process for both you and the child, and potentially slow down their learning process even more.

One thing that can help working with special needs children is routine and structure. Having a daily and routine schedule can help the child handle activities in the classroom and have an idea of what will be next, if there is no set schedule for the classroom the child can feel stressed or even overwhelmed. If there is a big change in the schedule slowly transitioning to the activity can help the student better handle the situation. You could use intervention routines to help your child also. An example of this could be with a child with poor language development, changing their diaper and continuously saying a phrase to associate the phrase or words with what you're doing. Having some routine during recess or play time is key for a special needs child. Having them know when recess is helps the child time manage during the day in order to participate with other children. It also helps the child know how long play time is so they can fully participate in the activities without wasting any of their time. By playing games that are repetitive can help teach the child new skills or lessons, such as memory with cards and remembering which card is where (Thompson). Introducing yourself, interacting with them, and keeping a positive attitude are key aspects to working with special needs children. Don't ask a lot of questions because most children generally don't like answering all the questions we have for them. Another tip is to observe the child.

Source?

You need to be able to tell what is upsetting the child or making them happy. Its good nonverbal communication you two can have. Having the special needs child interact with other children can help with their communication skills, and help them develop more friendship. Having the kids separated from other children won't allow them to fully develop their communication skills and helps them feel like everyone else instead of feeling isolated. Staying positive is one of the most important things you can do. If you're negative it can bring a negative environment for the child. When times get tough or the child is acting out just having a positive outlook on the situation can save you from having a terrible day to just a rough patch in the day (Wang).

With the right skills and knowledge, working with special needs children can be a very rewarding and good experience. If people become more informed while working with special needs children, it can save both the child and worker both a great amount of stress. It can also help the child have a better learning experience.

Part 3: Starting this project was frustrating at first. It started off with just me and Brianna. We had several ideas ranging from anything like volunteering with special needs children to volunteering our time at an animal shelter. We finally decided to volunteer somewhere with special needs children. While trying to decide ho| to go about it and where to do it at Sam and Kiersten joined our group. After researching places and things to do we started emailing different schools in our area with special needs programs. We had some problems while doing this. I first emailed [REDACTED] because [REDACTED] [REDACTED] said a group last year went and had a blast with the kids. About three days later my group had a meeting with [REDACTED] about emailing [REDACTED]. The principle received an email about us trying to volunteer our time not at our own school. I thought

this was ridiculous, if we are trying to donate our time why does it matter where we choose to do it? Even though I didn't completely agree with [REDACTED] and our principle we couldn't let this get in our way of finding a place to volunteer at. We had to use our resources and talk to the special needs teacher here at Lowell to find out some good contacts to have to find a place to volunteer at. [REDACTED] ended up emailing [REDACTED] Elementary and [REDACTED] Elementary, but there was a scheduling conflict. Finally, we found out that there was a teacher at [REDACTED] Elementary, [REDACTED], who was willing to let us volunteer in her classroom and work around all of our busy schedules.

After several emails with Mrs. [REDACTED] we decided that the best time for all of us was Tuesdays and Thursdays during our senior capstone class. We were all nervous going into this because none of us have experience working with special needs children. The first day came around and no one knew what exactly to expect. When we got to Mrs. [REDACTED]'s class she informed us that we will be helping the children with their reading skills, learning their suffixes and prefixes, and helping with their comprehension of words they read. The kids were very nervous to work with us, which I would be too if I had to read in front of a bunch of strangers. When we walked into the classroom we saw four kids, so each one of us had their own kid to work with. We were happy about this because we were hoping to have one on one time with them so we can make sure they all get help and so we can get to know them on a personal level. Each kid was different in their own way. [REDACTED] was a cute, shy kid. He was a good reader, but just needs to be asked a lot of questions to make sure he comprehends everything he reads. [REDACTED] was a very hyper kid who will talk your ear off. He reads just how he talks though, fast. The only girl of the group, [REDACTED], loved attention. She could talk about herself all day. She is

more of a slow reader and gets distracted very easily. Lastly, there was the kid I worked with, [REDACTED]. He was a slow reader, and if he didn't understand a word he would skip over it or just guess.

It took a couple times for the kids to warm up to us. They would come from their normal class, and see us and just looked so disappointed to see us there. [REDACTED] was the worst about this, he would walk in and make comments like "oh man" "Their here again?" We never took this personally because we knew they didn't mean anything by it, so we just laughed it off. Since we could observe the kids in this class, we wanted to be able to see them in their normal class to see how they do in that class as well. Going into the class we saw just how crazy the class was and how hard it was for them to concentrate in that environment. Just being in their class for a half an hour, I couldn't even concentrate or even hear [REDACTED] trying to talk to me. I honestly couldn't imagine having their reading and concentration problems and trying to do well in that class. As the weeks went by, we starting noticing improvement in all the kids reading and comprehension, and they even started warming up to us finally. Since we were so thankful that the kids were willing to let us come into their classroom and work with us we decided we were going to put together a goodie bag for each kid full of stuff they were interested in or stuff they needed. Since my kid, [REDACTED], was interested in chess I bought him a chess set, Dinosaurs, Avengers coloring book and a bunch of other little things like pencils, eraser and candy. Giving them their goodie bags was such a great feeling. We were all nervous they were not going to like them, but thankfully they all loved their stuff we gave them.

In the beginning of this project I honestly didn't care for it, just because we didn't really click with the kids. After we got to know the kids on a more personal level, I loved

going. Just being able to help these kids with their reading, which was a huge problem for them, was such a rewarding feeling and a good learning experience. I would definitely recommend this project to future kids in this class. The advice I would give the students is to not waste time. The whole project takes awhile to find a place to volunteer at where it fits everyone's schedule. Just have fun; volunteering is supposed to be a learning experience and fun!

Part 4: Trying to decide what issue to address was easy for me. I've always wanted to have the opportunity to be able to work with children who have special needs. I was curious what it was like to be able to work and interact with them on an academic level. Going into this project I had a positive attitude, with somewhat unrealistic goals for the project. As a result of this project I was expecting to learn more about special needs children, how they work, and give more of an awareness of how they need more one on one interaction in the classroom. I was so nervous about not being able to find a location to volunteer, wondering if the classroom would be willing to work with us, and just being able to finish our project while volunteering at our location. Some problems that my whole group was afraid of were, all of our schedule clashing due to the fact that we all work and I attend college during some nights. During our actual project with us visiting and working with the kids no big problems occurred, besides some snow days, which just limited our time with the kids. In order to fix these problems we never missed a day to make sure we had as much time with them as possible. To decide what days we were going to go we talked it over with the teacher and then discussed as a group what days and times would fit everyone's schedules. Even though we did have two snow days, we never missed one visit with the children. I was very proud of my group for sticking with

our commitment to this project and the children we volunteered with. It was a rewarding feeling knowing that we, as a group, can start a project and finish it with no problems and on time. Makes me realize just how grow up and responsible we are.

There were a lot of thoughts and feelings flying through my head. Arriving at the site was when reality hit me that we were actually going through with this project. I was very anxious walking into the room, just not knowing what to really expect and not knowing if the kids were even going to like us or want to work with us. Leaving the classroom for the last time was definitely a different experience compared to the first day. It was a bittersweet day leaving. We were all ready to leave just due to the fact that now we had a lot of work and papers to write, but since we started to get to know the kids we didn't want it to end. We just wanted to keep coming back and continue to see their progress with both their reading and comprehension.

Going into this project we really didn't need any materials or anything. To prepare we just asked the teacher if we needed anything then went from there. One thing as a group decided to get were goodie bags for the kids, a way to say thanks for letting us come in their classroom and work with them. I'm glad we decided to do this because just seeing the kids' reactions was definitely worth it. I wouldn't do anything differently for our project, other than maybe do it during the spring so no snow days can get in the way and if we had more time to do more than two visits a week. Now looking back I can tell that we made a difference. During the project I was starting to question myself because the kids weren't sure if they liked us and I didn't see a difference being made. I think just seeing them improve on their reading and comprehension was a big enough difference for me. Even though I personally don't think we fully achieved our goal to give more

awareness to children with special needs children, seeing progress is enough and rewarding enough for me.

I couldn't have picked a better group to work with. We were all determined, hard working and just made the project fun. We all participated with the project and no one just did all of the work. My group members made me enjoy my experience working with them and the children. I felt good and happy about our beginning and end result we had during this project. We did have some confusion about what exactly we were doing sometimes because we did have a couple days where we should have stayed at school and work on our papers, but decided we didn't want to miss working with our kids. Another confusion we had was the goodie bags, when we were getting them, when we were giving it to them and if we were giving the same bags, or customizing the bags to fit each kid we worked with. These were just minor confusions that were easily talked out and cleared up with just getting together and talking it out instead of texting or trying to explain it to one person at a time. The activity we were required to do with the children was kind of confusing for us because we all had to think of something that was academic, to their learning abilities, something the teacher approved of, and of course something the children would enjoy doing. After discussing with the teacher and having the teacher and some of her colleagues give us some ideas, we decided the best thing we could do with the short time we had with them and their leaning abilities was to have them fully read their AR book, with ^{few} little to no mistakes, and take their test on it, receiving a 80% or better on it. This was a good activity to do because the children are required to read thirty minuets a night and try to take one AR test a week, but the teachers were starting to notice that none of the students were doing that. This of course affects their learning

progress because if they are not practicing their reading besides the reading they do in the classroom there will never be progress with them. Doing this both my group and the students realized that it only takes thirty to forty minutes to read a book and score a good grade on their AR test. This gave the kids motivation to read because they saw how fast it takes them to complete a book and pass their test. Plus with each AR test they take and pass, they receive points, and if they have so many points they can receive a prize of some sort.

This project was an eye opener for me. It made ~~we~~ step out of my comfort zone and work with children with special needs who I had no experience with and realize just how responsible I can be. Five years from now I think I will remember just how rewarding and difficult this could be. I will also remember how much time I spent on this project and just how long my papers ended up being. The research we did definitely helped my group with preparing working with special needs kids and how to interact with them correctly. The research we did helped us realize that we need patience, schedules and skills to help them read. This was a project I am proud I finished and definitely a learning experience.

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