Geography Outreach Program

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My Geography Outreach Program addresses several problems in my community. We promote geographic literacy, a global perspective, and school sponsored after school activities, giving students the opportunity to enrich their learning. My Geography Outreach Program is based in a local Title One Elementary School, which up to this point, had never had a PTA sponsored after school activity. My action plan brings in a free service that promotes higher education, as well as presenting high achieving students as role models for the kids.

I use education to address these problems. There have been 2 sessions and a total of 10 classes. Each session met once a week for 5 weeks. Each class focused on one continent. We open the first class by writing everyone’s name and country of origin, then we locate it on the map. We explain the basics of geography (compass rose, continents ect.), which we review at the beginning of every session. Then the class divides into three groups, getting more individual time with each of the student teachers. We read cultural stories to them from the continent we chose to focus on that day. After the stories, we locate landmarks that were mentioned. We teach the kids how to use an Atlas through this exercise. At the end of the class, the three groups reconvene but as separate teams. In these teams, the kids compete in a game of geography trivia.

I have established a partnership with the PTA at Twinbrook, attaining the required permits and permission necessary to start an after school activity. By doing this, I have also benefited the PTA, showing them the process involved in sponsoring a program, and setting up a system by which to do this. Basically, it was a learning process for both of us. Mrs. Pickell, the President of the PTA, was extremely supportive even when the Principal failed to follow through.

I have successfully run two sessions of my Geography Program, each of them consisting of 5 classes and 12-15 students.

I am in the process of creating a website, as well as making the club sustainable, that will continue even after I graduate.

Mrs. Pickell (the PTA President), Justine and Jennifer (fellow students) have all been working with me on my project. Mrs. Pickell has helped with the administration, approving the Program, and signing off ssl forms. Justine and Jennifer have helped with the classroom teaching, working with the kids, and picking the necessary books at our public library.
I have learned how simple it is to make a difference. Moving through the administrative swamp is hard, and trying to work with unreliable people can really frustrate plans; but once I set in my roots, and came in contact with a strong support network things fell into place. Working alone makes your ideas vulnerable to being dropped by the wayside, but with a group of people helping you, and holding you to your word, motivation comes much more easily. I have become much more confident in my ability to orchestrate social action plans, and I take myself and my beliefs much more seriously now. I think it is important that ideas just don’t stay ideas, but become something tangible. I have already started my Spring project. I am running a book drive for Twinbrook ES, by advertising at my high school. I have just received permission to post my flyers around the school.

I feel that my Project has benefited the students, teachers, and the PTA at Twinbrook as well as my coworkers, Jennifer and Justine. The students all built the groundwork for a growing interest in the world and its people outside of their own small community. They have been opened to a new perspective. The teachers have thanked my coworkers and me on many occasions. I feel like the PTA and the teachers are more motivated to take that extra step for their students and their school. I feel that, along with myself, Justine and Jennifer have a greater feeling of empowerment and responsibility for their community.

There were several occasions that my project was at risk of falling to the wayside. There are two reasons it did not: my support network and my belief in my cause. My support network held me to my word, and made me responsible. I worked with these people and I worked for them. At this beginning stage (the hardest stage) nothing was really concrete. I did not yet have a personal connection with my future students. I didn’t feel a real, immediate responsibility to them. Working with a small support network made my project feel much more real and less abstract.

I believe in my cause. I believed that what I would do would actually make a difference. It was a sweet and simple plan, totally attainable. This aspect was, to an extent, a double-edged sword. It was, at times I felt, too simple, and thus too easily dropped. But then I would think what a loss it would be to my community, an injustice, and so I persevered.

The Leadership Symposium on Social Action really helped. I was, at that point, at the very beginning stages of my project. Hanging out with all my BELL friends, having fun, talking, and learning, was refreshing. The atmosphere re-inspired me. It made me feel powerful when I was just starting to feel a little helpless. I’m glad that I already had my project in motion and had the beginnings of my support network back home because the support group at the Symposium didn’t really transfer home. But the inspiration I felt there was the perfect jump start and decompression, that I needed to get my Project really moving.