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MAKE A PAWS-ITIVE DIFFERENCE  
EXPLORING SERVICE-LEARNING IN KINDERGARTEN

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## **ABSTRACT**

As a kindergarten intern for the Professional Development School at The Pennsylvania State University, I observed my students and their social needs. Many of my students lacked social skills necessary to become active citizens within a democracy. For most students, school is the first foray into a public institution in which students may come across an issue they want to change. I considered how to show my students that they are agents of change through service-learning. Service-learning provides a context in which students, even young ones, can practice democracy and citizenry. There is a lack of empirical research discussing elementary aged students and civic engagement, including service-learning. Through systematic data collection, interviews, and surveys I describe the processes of service-learning within a kindergarten setting and discuss whether my current group of kindergarteners found success with service-learning.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Chapter 1 Introduction to the Problem .....	1
Description of the Teaching Context .....	1
Rationale .....	3
Main Wondering .....	3
The Project .....	4
Chapter 2 Review of Relevant Literature .....	7
Civic Engagement .....	7
Student Voice and Youth-Adult Partnerships .....	12
Service-learning .....	14
Chapter 3 Methods.....	17
Description .....	17
Pre-Intervention Data Collection .....	17
During Service-learning Data .....	19
Chapter 4 Data and Analysis .....	22
Carpet Time “I-Messages” .....	23
We Are Alike, We Are Different .....	24
The Trust Walk .....	26
Surveys .....	27
Whole Group Discussions.....	29
Discussion .....	32
Chapter 5 Conclusion.....	38
Implication for Future Research.....	39
Appendix A Student Survey and Interview .....	42
Appendix B Parent/Guardian Survey.....	44
Appendix C PAWS Letters .....	45
Appendix D Classroom Profile .....	48
REFERENCES .....	49

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction to the Problem**

#### **Description of the Teaching Context**

As a Professional Development School intern during the 2012-2013 school year, I work with Kindergarteners at Lemont Elementary School in the State College Area School District. My class is comprised of nineteen students, ten boys and nine girls. One student left my classroom after the first week of March, and now there are eighteen students: ten boys and eight girls. The age range of my class is between five and six. All children are of European descent, although there is a wide range in terms of socioeconomic status. Every child in my class has attended either daycare or a preschool program prior to entering Kindergarten. It is a young class with a majority of the birthdays occurring in the summer. This may impact the maturity of the class as a whole.

In my class there is a constant flow of students coming and going. There are four students in my class who receive Response to Intervention (RTI) for reading in the morning, and two students who receive RTI for math in the afternoon. In addition to traditional RTI services, two children in my class receive enrichment reading once a week in the afternoon, and two students and two rotating guests attend the Friendship Program. The Friendship Program is provided through the School Psychology graduate program at The Pennsylvania State University. The two selected to attend the Friendship Program struggle with anti-social and impulsive behaviors; often the antisocial behavior is a result of the students' impulsivity and hyperactivity. Also, about half of our students receive additional Occupational Therapy (OT) help. They do not work with the official Occupational Therapist, but with her para-professional once a week. Each

child was individually screened, and when they are working with the para-professional they work with a specific motor skill for which they need help (*See Appendix D for classroom profile*).

The majority of the students leave the classroom at least once a week for supplemental instruction. As a result, my mentor and I are constantly catching students up to speed with what they missed. In addition to the missed work, students who are out of the room more than others are often on the outskirts of the classroom community. Also, the lack of prior community building brings different struggles to creating a cohesive classroom environment. Some of our students focus internally and do not engage with peers in a pro-social manner, such as showing empathy, compassion, and kindness. Throughout the day, we allow the children time to play with math manipulatives in a group, free-time setting. Meaning there are not demands placed on the students as to how to play with the manipulatives and most children group together and play games with the manipulatives. I observed many students parallel playing and not responding to the needs of others around them. A child would be sitting by a group of children building figures with the math manipulatives mimicking the group's behavior. Neither the child nor the group addressed the other.

To increase pro-social behavior prior to the service- learning unit, we implemented Friendship Friday. On Fridays, students have a chance to engage with each other in pro-social ways based off of activities that were teacher planned. For example, we planned a Friday about I-messages and conflict resolution. Another Friendship Friday dealt with likenesses and differences between classmates, while another focused on trusting each other. Friendship Friday is our approach to incorporate the importance of community and community skills within our classroom environment. These Fridays were meant to happen every week, but ended up happening inconsistently and the skills were not reinforced or practiced throughout the rest of the week.

Are there chances for them to practice pro-social behavior, before the service-learning project? If so, describe here.

### **Rationale**

Service-learning provides a way to connect an abstract curriculum to the students' world in a way that empowers and enlightens the students. In addition, service-learning is one option to connect student voice and civic engagement. Service-learning provides a space for students, regardless of age, to practice democracy within the classroom and the community. Being placed in kindergarten I was curious about how service-learning happens within the primary band (K-2) of elementary school. In addition, there is a lack of empirical research in the primary band about service-learning, so I wanted to help create space for future research.

Service-learning allows students to take ownership over their learning. Through service-learning, students can practice agency and responsibility. Kindergarten is typically a child's first foray into the public school institution, and as a result my students have not experienced service-learning nor have my students been involved with their own learning, and decision-making. As a result, my mentor and I have been scaffolding this service-learning unit for the students and trying to understand the process of service-learning within a kindergarten context.

### **Main Wondering**

Through whole group and small group observation I began wondering, "*What is the process of service-learning within a kindergarten context?*"

Sub-question: *“What is the teacher’s role within a primary setting to scaffold the process of service-learning?”*

## **The Project**

My mentor and I<sup>1</sup> realized that all of my students had never been engaged with meaningful service, so we had to maintain a high level of leadership throughout the project. I hope that by being engaged in a project that hopefully the students find meaningful, these students will be more likely to engage with their own meaningful service within their community in the future. I chose the topic of pets because I saw how animated my students would become when discussing their own family pets. For example, one student asked, “Can I bring in my dad’s phone to show you my new dog?” Then, the student brought in her father’s phone to share her new pet with us. Also, my mentor and I volunteered at humane animal shelters and have a passion for helping animals. The connection between my mentor, my students, and myself centered around pets. Even if the students did not have a dog or cat, some have lizards and fish, while others tell us, “I want a dog but my parents won’t let me because my dad’s allergic.” We began by introducing the students to the concept through read-alouds and asking the question, “Do you think all pets have homes?” Initially, we primed the students with the books about pets, including The Big Pets by Lane Smith.

I read the book Before You Were Mine by Maribeth Boelts and we reviewed the five things all living things need to survive: the sun, air, water, food, and shelter. Focusing on primarily shelter. We discussed what our shelters are and what shelter provides us. I asked the students if they thought if there were homeless animals in State College. Then, I asked the

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<sup>1</sup> My mentor and I will be referred to as “we” through the duration of the paper.



students what they thought an animal shelter was and if we had any in State College. Afterwards, we discussed what animal shelters might look like and how animals come to be at an animal shelter. In addition, I uncovered that many of the students thought the word rescue was synonymous to being found instead of being saved. At length we discussed the difference between being found and being saved. We introduced Centre County PAWS and explained that we have a friend, Deana Washell, who volunteers there and would be able to help us think of ways we can help the animals residing there.

Following Deana's response, the students and we figured out how all of us could help the animals at PAWS. With our guidance we discussed how we love reading and how it would be great if we could get the entire school involved. So, with the help of the Literacy Committee, the idea of a family literacy event benefitting PAWS was proposed to the staff. With the help of the art department, my students created "Thank You" cards for future PAWS adopters. At the time of submission, the family event called Make a PAWS-itive Difference Night had not occurred but was scheduled for May 17, 2013.

To prepare for the family event, the students will practice writing informatively and persuasively as well as writing narratives. We are connecting our service-learning to Common Core writing kindergarten standards. We will write flyers to inform other students about Centre County PAWS and animal shelters, in addition to creating an iMovie that will showcase all of our efforts throughout the project. Allowing students to speak, inform and persuade older students and other community members to help us with the event will allow the kindergarteners to understand the power of their collective voice and see the change they can impose. The definition of service-learning, according to Kaye (2010), is a

Research-based teaching method where guided or classroom learning is applied through action that addresses an authentic community need in a process that allows for youth initiative and provides structured time for reflection on the service experience and demonstration of acquired skills and knowledge (p. 9).

The PAWS project is service-learning because we are connecting the Common Core standards to the community need of homeless animals. According the Humane Society of the United States (2009) there are approximately six to eight million animals entering shelters each year and half of these animals will be euthanized. Centre County PAWS is a no-kill shelter, any cat or dog that is received will stay at the shelter until that cat or dog is adopted. We are trying to promote proper pet care, including neutering and spaying, and emphasizing the importance of no-kill shelters.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

In order to understand service-learning in its fullest potential, one must consider the broader categories of civic engagement and student voice. Then, determine how both of these categories contribute to service-learning in the Kindergarten context. In addition to broadening the view to civic engagement, then funneling down to the specific subcategory of service-learning, one must consider the lack of empirical research done at the primary level (K-2 band) on civic engagement, student voice, and service-learning. Much of the relevant research has been conducted at the middle school or high school level and, therefore, must be adapted to be developmentally appropriate for Kindergarten. The definition of civic engagement is blurry. Some view civic engagement with a mainstream lens, seeing civic engagement as voting and writing letters to the senator of the state, for example. However, there is an underground aspect of civic engagement, which adults may deem inappropriate, activities such as graffiti or involvement in a group that promotes the decriminalization of marijuana. Personally, I recognize the mainstream and underground interaction with government as civic engagement. However, this paper focuses more on the mainstream level of civic engagement in that our students are not engaging in behavior that some may believe inappropriate or subversive.

#### **Civic Engagement**

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) discuss the implications of educating students to be certain types of citizens. Educators continue to look for new and different pedagogies to teach students about democracy, such as civic education and service-learning. However, there are

inconsistencies between educators and between educators and policymakers about “what is good citizenship and what good citizens do,” (p. 237). What kind of citizenship will lend itself to creating a better democratic society? Additionally, Youniss, Bales, Best, Diversi, McLaughlin, and Silberstein (2002) explain that adolescents will be looked to as policy changers in the future and must experience collaboration with adults in order to know how to civically engage with their communities. Astruto and Ruck (2010) explain that research is focused on adolescents because teens are capable of hypothetical thinking and consider multiple perspectives. There is a lack of research for children under the age of thirteen, but particularly between the ages of two and seven because children at that age are considered egocentric and unable of high order thinking, such as considering multiple perspectives. Research done at this age is primarily focused on psychological and developmental growth and looks for antecedents to political activism in adulthood.

However, Serriere (2010) poses a counter argument to the notion that young students are incapable of being “self reflective members of a justice-oriented classroom” (p. 60). Serriere asserts that children are “not necessarily anymore egocentric than adults” (p. 61) and are capable of understanding the social workings of their world. Through this and referenced research, Serriere states that young students are able to collectively deliberate and reach a reasonable consensus. She continues by asserting through her observations that adult themes with regard to “gender, race, class, language, and power” (p. 62) were apparent in “children’s work and play” (p. 62). Preschool children are exhibiting notions about themselves and the world around them without adult interference in which the author did her initial research. Adults seem to wait for children to be ready for certain “issues like fairness, justice, and equity” (p.62) however, if we are patient and observe, we can see that these themes are already influencing young children.

With the high stakes testing environment that is currently in place in many United States’ schools, kindergarten closely resembles first grade and first grade resembles second grade, and

this trend continues throughout a student's schooling. Kindergarten used to focus on quality play; however, this has been removed from many kindergarten classrooms because of standardized testing. Quality play allows children to develop the skills necessary for future civic engagement such as executive functioning. Executive functioning is defined as inhibition control, cognitive flexibility, and working memory. These qualities of executive functioning are intertwined with prosocial behaviors such as sharing, cooperating, helping others, being honest, and having a respect for one's and other's emotions in addition to helping children understand complex concepts such as democracy and society. When children are allowed to engage in quality play, educators are allowing children to figure out how society works and the type of citizen that student may become within a democratic society (Astruto & Ruck, 2010). Although, many issues adults deem children to be developmentally ready, or not, are apparent in preschool children and some child play may be seen by adults as oppressive (Serriere, 2010). Through "photo-talks," (Serriere, 2010, p. 62) Serriere shows that children are capable of "reenvisioning public life"(p. 65). To take a step further, Serriere engages the students in "carpet-time democracy" (p. 65), in which she used this time with the children to reflect on their play. Children portrayed in the photos are asked to act out the scene and reflect on alternatives to the ending. The students are allowed to act out the alternative and then consider what changed from the initial scene. Then, "the leader" (p. 66) asks the children if one alternative or solution works best for the collective, "a consensus" (p.66) is not the goal rather she wants the children to understand the multiple perspectives of the group. This allows children to have agency and adults are capable of fostering their agency without taking complete control.

Westheimer and Kahne (2004) outline three types of citizens that are commonly emphasized in civic education: personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented. In addition, Westheimer and Kahne outline Walter Parker's (1996) conceptions of civic education, which include: traditional, progressive, and advanced.

Traditional citizen education emphasizes, “an understanding of how government works...as well as commitments to core democratic values,” (p. 238-9). Traditionalists would most likely emphasize a personally responsible citizen. One who is responsible within his or her community, obeys laws, works hard, and is honest. A personally responsible citizen would donate food and other supplies to a local animal shelter.

However, there are distinct limitations that accompany developing a solely personally responsible citizen. Personal responsibility is an individual endeavor and does not highlight the importance of the collective. If students are concerned with their own actions and no one else’s, then one cannot expect students to cooperate and initiate change within the larger community. Promoting kindness and honesty are important but these should not be the only emphasis within a civic education curriculum. When promoting kindness and honesty, a teacher must also engage students with a collective effort, allowing each child to see the underlying issue in a developmentally appropriate way and placing the children in a position of decision-making and leadership. Also, citizenship cannot be seen as something that is innately passed from adult to youth. Adults and young people must collaborate with one another in order to help society as a whole. Youth today must participate and come to understand what civic engagement is to them in order to acquire the knowledge to be an active citizen within society (Youniss, et al., 2002).

Progressive citizen education “place a greater emphasis on civic participation,” (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004, p. 239) and align with producing participatory citizens. Participatory citizens are active members of their community and understand how different government agencies work in addition to knowing strategies to accomplish group goals. When educators focus on participatory citizenry the core assumption is that participatory citizens solve community problems by actively participating in society and assuming leadership roles within group structures (Westheimer and Kahne). To help a local animal shelter, participatory citizens would organize a fundraiser such as a walk to raise money to the shelter.

Lastly, advanced citizenship builds off of the progression citizen education, but places an additional focus on the larger societal issue underlying the community problem. Advanced citizenship aligns with the justice-oriented citizens (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). Justice-oriented citizens realize the problem in the community but analyze the larger underlying societal issue. These citizens analyze issues through various structures, such as economic, political and social. Once they have assessed the structure they seek out solutions to the overarching problem within society as a whole. Justice-oriented citizens have knowledge about societal justice movements and how to create change within a societal system. If a justice-oriented citizen wanted to help a local animal shelter, they would question why animal shelters exist and act to solve the root problem.

In Rogers, Meditratta, and Shah's (2012) article "Building Power, Learning Democracy: Youth Organizing as a Site of Civic Development" highlights the power of justice-oriented students through youth organization. The researchers suggest that youth organization encourages young people to collaborate and identify a common problem, create a plan of action, and cooperate with each other to reach shared goals. In addition, many of the arguments are grounded in analysis of historically unjust balances of power. Students involved in youth organizations practice social justice in an environment that is developmentally appropriate and meaningful. The students outlined in the article are high school age, so the youth organizations are student-led. Adults act as facilitators helping students find connections with community networks, however adults are not in charge allowing students to practice skills and take on more responsibility where appropriate. Students civically engage with their communities, while gaining civic knowledge necessary to practice democracy in their own lives and create their own civic identity. Students need to participate within a political community to "acquire knowledge, skills, and identities to interact effectively with their fellow community members," (p. 54)

Each of these frameworks is not exhaustive. Some educational programs can emphasize more than one type of citizenry, however, a curriculum or unit designed to promote one type of citizen will inherently look different from one promoting a different type.

Learning about civic and political engagement in schools helps students become civically engaged in their futures. Although civic engagement receives praise there has been a decline in civics classes and themes within schools. Students who have the opportunity to participate with civics are usually those who attend affluent school systems, this can lead into the democracy divide. The divide is the gap between those with high and low levels of education attainment participating within a democratic society. Research suggests that what happens within schools can ignite, stagnate, or lessen a person's potential to civically engage in their future (McLeod, Shah, Hess, & Lee, 2010).

### **Student Voice and Youth-Adult Partnerships**

Student voice is critical to the success of a service-learning project. If students are not behind the project, then they cannot be expected to civically engage outside of school. According to Mitra (2004) there is little empirical research about student voice and even less has been done on student voice in the elementary years. Researchers looked at a school in the San Francisco Bay Area focusing on two groups within the school: the Pupil School Collaborative (PSC) and the Student Forum. Both groups held the same goal to improve the education process by increasing direct student involvement in reform efforts. However, each group attained this goal through different means. PSC focused on first generation Latino students by helping them succeed in school through mentoring and tutoring services. Student Forum focused on increasing student participating to help with overall school reform for all students, instead of a target group.



Overall, youth-adult partnerships look to reduce tension and increase informality between teachers and students, in addition to helping teachers and students see each other as people and not as characters or stereotypes. The young people who participated in both of the groups (PSC and Student Forum) made gains in four different competencies that youth may acquire through youth-adult partnerships: “critiquing the environment, problem solving and facilitation skills, cooperation and negotiation, and speaking publicly” (p. 675-676).

Through youth-adult partnerships and engaging student voice, students learn to turn their frustration with their environment into reform action. Additionally, students learn necessary social skills to engage with each other and those in authority. The use of student voice requires an environment in which students feel safe to speak their opinions honestly and depends on the equitable relationship between youth and adult. The environment for student voice may need to be balanced between youth and adult leadership (Serriere, Mitra, & Reed, 2011). Learning is a social activity and “we learn and become who we are through interaction with others,” (Mitra, 2004, p. 654) youth-adult partnerships allow pairing of novice and expert. Through this pairing, students learn the necessary skills to successfully engage with their society.

Children need to practice democracy in the classroom and within their community. In addition students must practice using their voices within an adult-youth partnership. One context in which students may practice democracy and agency with their learning is through service-learning.

When considering service-learning, one must consider the balance between youth and adult leadership. According to Serriere, Mitra, and Reed (2011) youth-adult partnerships can be placed along a continuum. When there is a balance between youth and adult leadership, both the adults and students have “equal chance in utilizing skills, decision-making, and learning from one another” (p. 544). With young children, adults must scaffold children to learn about service-learning through observing then slowly gaining the needed expertise to lead. In addition, the

adult must create a student-friendly environment in which young children can feel comfortable discussing issues with adults and they need to understand that the adults will not be angry with them.

Serriere, Mitra, and Reed (2011) observed three different typologies of teachers leading a group of students through service-learning. The three types were: “the commander, the catalyst, and the synthesizer,” (p. 549). The commander created a teacher-centered project, in which the students were not encouraged to give their input about the project. . The catalyst teacher maintained a “high level of leadership” (p. 552). but encouraged student input and participation. She noted that most of her students had not experienced service-learning before and therefore would not be able to think of meaningful ideas without first experiencing service for themselves, regardless if the service was adult- or student-led. The synthesizer set the expectation that being in a working group with a common goal, students will understand what it means to be part of a democracy and acquire skills necessary to participate within a democratic community. Regardless of age, the youth interacting and participating with adults on a more equal level is crucial to service-learning.

### **Service-learning**

Service-learning has shown to have many benefits but is often confused with community service in the primary grades. Students bring in canned food or pennies for a penny drive and there is no connection made between the service and the curriculum. Community service is important for students but service-learning makes valuable, deep connections between school and students’ lives. Students can feel “empowered by the experience,” (Serriere, McGarry, Fuentes, & Mitra, 2012, p. 6), especially when the projects are the students’ creation and do not come from the prodding of the teacher. Even young students can feel empowered by the process. They will

obtain social relationship skills, political skills, and can begin to develop critical thinking skills with regard to society (Boyle-Baise & Binford, 2002, p. 307).

Through service-learning, the school and its students become a part of the community. For example, Marilynne Boyle-Baise and Paul Binford's article "The Banneker History Project: Historic Investigation of a Once Segregated School" (2002) describes the efforts of a school, the students and teachers, local university professors, and other community members coming together to investigate the historical Benjamin Banneker School. The purpose of this initiative was to bring the school into the larger community to create partnerships. Students worked together and with university professors, along with people who attended the Benjamin Banneker School to accurately investigate the school's past and showcase their findings. In addition to creating partnerships between students and community members, the Banneker Project was developed as a social justice project to give students a chance to practice "personal agency and social responsibility," (p. 306) because they would be actively thinking from different perspectives and question the purpose segregation historically and presently.

Service-learning projects such as the Banneker Project connects history to the present and is made relevant for the students. Service-learning provides students with the chance to make connections between concepts learned in school and reality while also providing space for students to question that reality. But even in high school, students needed scaffolding to develop the base to begin this project. To begin the process, students had to learn about racism, specifically racism in their own town, a thought that did not occur to the students (Boyle-Baise & Binford, 2002). In addition to thinking critically about racism, students learned about segregation and racism in their own town through first-hand research, which can be considered a scaffold and "helped the students connect," (Boyle-Baise & Binford, 2002, p 310) to the project. However, the most important aspect about service-learning is the service and allowing the students to go off on their own and make a difference within their community applying what they have learned.

Most of the students with the Banneker Project found that going out into their community and righting the wrongs of racism was the most motivating factor for them (Boyle-Baise & Binford, 2002). When teachers utilize service-learning they are allowing their students to mature, to become autonomous, and to make a change within their communities.

Service-learning may seem daunting to a teacher. How can one be expected to create a service-learning unit that ties into the curriculum? According to the article “How Service-learning Can Ignite Thinking” by Serriere, McGarry, Fuentes, and Mitra (2012) teachers can create deeper, more meaningful connections to the curriculum through the use of service-learning. But, the teacher must look at the curriculum through “the lens of the students’ project,” (p. 7), then one can find many met standards. Instead of seeing the service-learning as an “add-on..[the teacher is] addressing academic standards more flexibly,” (p. 7) and creates engaging, thought-provoking, and relevant lessons for one’s students. Service-learning promotes students thinking across the curriculum and promotes connections being made across subjects. Service-learning allows primary-age students to practice thinking empathetically, a skill important to practice at this age (Serriere, McGarry et al., 2012).

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methods**

#### **Description**

To answer my main question, I wanted to collect a range of qualitative data from students, my mentor teacher, and parents. To establish baseline data I conducted student interviews, gave out surveys to students and parents, and gathered field notes. During the service-learning unit, I continued to gather field notes, but also used digital photography and video to capture student work. I provided vignettes to capture the scaffolding that happened in my placement classroom throughout the entire year that helped students throughout service-learning.

#### **Pre-Intervention Data Collection**

The purpose of collecting whole group systematic data was to identify the baseline level of students' interaction with meaningful service. I gave students and their parents surveys about their previous pet experience and proposed the question, "Do all pets have homes?" to students. Through these survey responses I could assess where I would need to start the project to help students find success with service-learning (*See Appendix A and B*).

Cube sticks were a way already in place within the classroom to track change in behavior over the course of the service-learning unit. The cube stick method relies on the students' self-monitoring ten cubes throughout the entire week. If they receive three redirections for the same misbehavior, the student loses a cube and the reason for the lost cube is documented on paper and

is shared with the student. The cube stick relies on students starting with ten cubes at the beginning of the week. All of the students begin with the same amount of cubes and start the week positively. We tell the students reasons they will lose cubes for the week such as rushing through work, using unkind words with friends, and being off-task. The behaviors focused on are based off of the pattern of misbehaviors we observed the previous week. The cube stick method works for most students, but for the students who lose all of their cubes prior to the end of the week there is no incentive to follow common classroom rules. We used the cube stick to monitor a change in behavior over the course of the service-learning unit, collecting the data sheets, comparing who lost cubes and the reason behind the loss of cube. We hope to see a change in the reason a child lost a cube or less children losing cubes altogether over the course of the service-learning unit. If service-learning is a way to practice democratic citizenry, we hope to see a stronger community within the classroom perhaps students community behaviors will increase and anti-social behaviors will decrease.

While this is an extrinsic motivator, which is not the ideal for collecting data on student empathy, we decided to include the cube sticks within the data collection because this system has been in place since the beginning of the year and provides us with data about student anti-social behavior. Collecting data about the anti-social behaviors in the class may provide insight into the changes that are occurring within the class community through the service-learning unit. We were concerned about incorporating more terms such as justice, equality, and empathy to the students because we did not want to overburden them with too many terms.

Through the use of the STAR program, I monitored the students' pro-social behaviors within and outside of the classroom. University Elementary is involved with a school-wide positive behavior plan called the STAR program. STAR is an acronym, which stands for Showing kindness, Taking responsibility, Acting safely, and Respecting everyone. The STAR program allowed documentation of where the student earned and ticket and why said student

earned a STAR, such as in art or music class in addition to my own classroom. However, I noticed a pattern from the students who earned STAR tickets from other classrooms. The students did not know or did not remember why they earned a STAR. When the child could not tell us why they earned a STAR this suggested that the STAR tickets did not provide any incentive for the student to continue a certain behavior or they were being rewarded for an already intrinsic behavior and did not think anything of the ticket. The purpose of collecting and monitoring the STAR tickets was to provide us with data about students displaying empathy before and during service-learning. Our hope was that during and succeeding the service-learning unit, students would be receiving more tickets as a result of being kind. However, the STAR tickets are not ideal and are extrinsically motivating for some students.

Neither of these behavior management strategies are ideal. Both are extrinsically motivating and may not reflect the whole class in terms of behavior before and after service-learning. As part of a unit, we decided to maintain these programs because we wanted to maintain consistency within the classroom behavior management. In the future, I would rather implement co-construction of rules and carpet time democratic talks (Serriere, 2010) to gauge community amongst a group of students, which may provide more authentic data collection in terms of behavior change because students will know they are part of the collective with their behavior affecting others around them.

### **During Service-learning Data**

Throughout the service-learning unit, I utilized multiple data collection methods trying to triangulate any findings. I used field notes, surveys, and interviews.

### **Field Notes**

Field notes provided me a way to write observations during or immediately after service-learning activities and discussions, which helped me understand student thought through quotes and description of observable behavior. I used a notebook and then transcribed my notes onto my laptop creating vignettes for specific activities. Through my field notes, I wanted to capture an authentic, albeit adult, view of the classroom before, during, and after service-learning. I focused on the process of service-learning, in addition to student quotes and observable behavior such as putting a head down or sighing during a discussion. By using my field notes, I hoped to make claims about the process of service-learning within kindergarten, in addition to any behavior changes.

### **Surveys and Interviews**

Surveys and interviews (*See Appendix A and B*) provided me with true student and parent thought about service-learning, in addition to giving me knowledge about how much I would need to scaffold the process of service-learning. I gave the student and parent surveys prior to introducing the service-learning unit. The student and parent surveys consisted with questions about students' prior experience with pets. I used the parent surveys to check student responses on their surveys. In addition I left an open space on the parent surveys to write in any additional information I needed to know about their child and animals. I plan on giving out another parent and student survey at the conclusion of the unit as a reflection piece for both myself and the students. I will want to know what went well and what I could have done better in terms of service-learning. The student responses will help me understand what they took from the unit and the parent responses will allow me to understand how the parents felt about the entire unit in addition to what the students were talking about at home.

We interviewed the whole class using open-ended pet scenarios to help me understand where the students' prior experience with different pet or homeless animal situations, in addition to giving me an emotional response that I might not see otherwise throughout the day. We



emphasized that I wanted their honest thoughts about the questions and that we would not be mad with how they respond. We tried to frame and introduce the interviews in a way that students would not feel like there was a “right” answer to the questions. If a child was stuck on the question or did not feel comfortable answering, we provided them the option of skipping and opting out of the interview. We plan on utilizing the same scenarios at the end of the service-learning unit to compare similarities and differences in answer. The comparison may or may not show a change in thought about pet care and homeless animals.

## Chapter 4

### Data and Analysis

Learning is an ongoing process and service-learning is no different. I had to meet my students where they were initially as a community, and as individuals, before I could give them additional responsibilities with service-learning. The group of students in this class is young and immature; most are developmentally closer to ages three and four rather than five and six. My students benefitted from the extra community practice through Friendship Fridays. The purpose of Friendship Friday is to help students learn how to be a part of a community.

My philosophy about children and civic development aligns with Serriere's (2010) article "Carpet-Time Democracy: Digital Photography and Social Consciousness in the Early Childhood Classroom" findings. I believe that young children are capable of analyzing their society and consider multiple perspectives constantly. During parent-teacher conferences, a parent described her child, "he is always concerned about what others' are thinking of him," she continued to explain that her child tries to think about every possible solution to a situation before he acts. If young children were not capable of considering multiple perspectives I do not think this child would have anxiety about what others' think about him and what he could do to alleviate certain situations. Children are capable of being justice-oriented if they are placed within a context that allows them to "disrupt the norm, for children to wonder what is best for everyone, and to reempower those with less voice in the classroom" (p. 66). I see service-learning as a means for children to deepen "their understanding of social justice" (p. 67). However, my philosophy and established routines and norms did not always mesh, which can be seen through the vignettes and is discussed further in Chapter Five.

The vignettes outlined below explain how service-learning was scaffolded from the beginning of the year until presently. The activities described helped the students become a community, something that is essential to a productive and positive service-learning experience in any grade, but particularly in kindergarten. However, these are isolated incidences and I do not rest any student success of the service-learning project on any one activity. I outline these specifically because these situations were the most exhaustive, although not entirely, in our classroom. Additionally, I do not believe that one specific event caused a radical change within the students. These were merely activities in which students were introduced and allowed time to explicitly practice these skills. For some vignettes, students came in already knowing the concept, for others students knew the concept but maybe did not know the terminology, and some may have provided a platform for students to learn and practice new community skills.

In the beginning of the year, we started with basic community building such as conflict resolution and recognizing differences, and then we added more layers such as trust within and responsibility to the community. The vignettes follow the students' growth from the beginning of the year until the whole group discussion about planning the family "Make a PAWS-itive Difference" event. The vignettes are portrayed chronologically.

### **Carpet Time "I-Messages"**

My mentor and I started our major community building lessons with I-messages and conflict resolution. We noticed in our class that students would grab, yell, tattle, and cry when faced with conflict, which led us to dedicate an entire afternoon to the three-part I-message and using kind words. Conflict resolution is an important aspect in kindergarten because most of our students did not come with prior experience with handling people with different views and actions.

Using conflict resolution as a scaffold to service-learning is important because conflict as a concept and problem solving is crucial to service-learning. If students do not have the skills to think of solutions to help each other, then trying to think of ways to help someone far from the students' immediate circle of friends and family will be difficult and frustrating.

To teach conflict resolution and I-messages, my mentor and I used modeling and guided practice. Then, we allowed the students to practice independently. Students laughed and participated with the activity. Since I have heard students using I-Messages regularly with classmates. I hope that through voicing concerns with each other, students will be able to handle voicing their concerns within their community because they are practicing using their voice and seeing that they can make a change. However, I cannot prove this claim at this time. Through further research I hope to provide evidence to back this claim. In our own classroom, if students do not agree with the direction of the PAWS project, they can use I-messages to voice a concern with us, telling us how they are feeling and why they are feeling that way. So far, I have not had any students express concern, but I hope that in the future some of them do because I want to create an environment in which the students have agency within service-learning and understand that I will not be mad if they do not like something I am doing with the project.

### **We Are Alike, We Are Different**

The next Friendship Friday theme we breached was the importance of our differences and our likenesses. As with any grade from elementary throughout high school, our students have a tendency to want to be a part of the crowd even if that belonging means changing their own views on a topic. We have many students who say one thing, listen to their peers and change their statement to fit the majority. My mentor and I emphasized the importance of being unique and that each individual member of our community is critical to the success of our classroom, but the

students continued to engage in conforming behavior. For example when asking the students for suggestions about what to do during free time, one child suggested, “Reading green-dot (books that all of our students could read) books,” another students said, “play with the maps.” When we voted, the child who suggested reading books raised her hand for playing with maps. I observed that she hesitated and looked at her classmates’ hands before raising her own.

To help our students learn the importance of differences, as well as likenesses, we read We Are All Alike, We Are All Different by The Cheltenham Elementary School Kindergarteners. Using this particular book was important to the success of the lesson because a class of kindergarteners created the book. Seeing these students embraced likenesses and differences amongst each other made an impact on our students. Then, we paired students so they talked to different people within the classroom. The discussions varied between partnerships but they had to find topics that they had in common and ones in which they differed. Then, the students drew an illustration of their partner and wrote one sentence about how they are alike and another about how they are different.

The alike/different lesson is important to bring into kindergarten when considering implementing a service-learning unit. Children need prior experience thinking about how people are unique and the same. First, focusing on the classroom community is important because the students need the safety and comfort of talking with people close to them. As the year progresses, people further away from the child may be introduced. Then, children can begin to think about how their life experience is the same and different from others and how these differences affect the quality of one’s life in terms of social justice.

## **The Trust Walk**

We covered our five senses and we culminated that unit with a trust walk. First, my mentor modeled how to help the blindfolded person during a trust walk. She took a student volunteer and demonstrated how to speak while guiding the person through the classroom and hallway. Then, we paired students, blindfolded one and let them walk together. Once the pair was finished, the partners switched roles. Many pairs went to a piano in the hallway and helped the blindfolded person play a song.

The trust walk demonstrates the importance of tying the curriculum into an activity and shows students how trust is pertinent to success. If one student did not trust the other they would not be able to complete the trust walk; the blindfolded person would be afraid of being lead down the hall. Through community building, the students with our support, created a safe classroom environment for each other. While I do not know if all students felt completely safe participating in the activity, no one objected to being blindfolded and I observed students' excitement, one said, "I hope who leads me helps me play the piano!" Previously, my mentor had explained that children in the past took each other to the piano down the hall and helped the blindfolded person play.

A trust walk may not be successful in the beginning of the year because students may not feel safe within the classroom. No one should feel unsafe when completing a trust walk.

Showing trust with other students in the class is important to the success of service-learning because students must be able to rely on each other and people within the community to find success and empowerment. If there is no trust present, then students may not understand the relevancy between the project and themselves. If students cannot trust themselves and each other to make a difference in the community, the service-learning project will be nothing more than just another project they did during the year. While one trust walk does not create trust between the

students, this activity can show a mentor how much trust exists amongst the students currently. To continue to build upon current trust within a classroom, a teacher should be cognizant and create opportunities in which students need to rely on each other to complete a task or create an environment where students go to each other for help and see each other as aides to independent and collective success.

The trust walk was used as a springboard into pet care and responsibility. When discussing what is necessary when taking care of a pet, I will relate the idea of taking care of someone or something else to the trust walk. Students will be able to share how they felt when they were blindfolded and their obligations when leading their blindfolded partner. Then, we will be able to discuss who is responsible when a pet misbehaves, what we should do to teach a pet how to behave properly, and then reasons why pets are relinquished to animal shelters.

## **Surveys**

I gave students and their guardians a survey about pets (*See Appendix A and B*). The difference in parent and student answers gave me the knowledge of where I needed to start the service-learning unit. If there was a breadth of knowledge about animal shelters, I would have approached the project a different way. However, since there was an absence of knowledge and I uncovered students' misconceptions about animal shelters like all animals in shelters are lost or that all shelters utilize euthanasia.

The student survey provided me with knowledge about student's perceptions about what makes a pet. The student survey focused on previous and current family pets, in addition the five needs of living things. The main question I wanted the students to answer was, "Do you think all pets have homes?"

At the time of the survey, we had nineteen students. Since then we have had one student leave our classroom. Of the nineteen students surveyed, seven students believed all pets had homes and twelve did not think that all pets had homes. When taken into consideration the student that left, six out of eighteen students thought all pets had homes and twelve did not believe that all pets had homes. Five out of six students who believed that all pets had homes claimed to own pets: a dog, cat, fish, hamster, or other. Two out of the six students who reported that they thought all animals had homes owned pets that came from PAWS. In comparison, two out of the twelve who did not believe that all pets had homes owned pets from an animal shelter, however neither of these students knew that their pets came from an animal shelter. Nine out of the twelve students who did not believe that all pets have homes owned a pet; three out of the twelve did not own any pets.

I had to survey two students a second time because they were changing their answers to match each other, even though this was explained as a no-risk survey. First, the students answered that they believed all pets had homes. Then, they changed their answers to reflect that they did not think that all pets had homes. When surveyed again, separately the next day, they both answered that they did not think all pets had homes and when asked why they gave different responses. One stated that there are animals in shelters and the other said that some pets could be “lost in the woods someplace.”

The parent survey was used to compare answers between student and guardian to see if there was a correlation between adult and child responses. Some discrepancies were found between parent and student answers. Of the eighteen children surveyed only five student responses matched their parents’ answers to the questions about where they obtained their pet. Many students responded with “Store” or “Friend” from where they purchased their pets, but often the parents responded with “Shelter” or “Breeder.” Two students claimed to currently own pets, when their parents reported that they did not own any pets. The reasoning behind this



discrepancy is unknown. Knowing these students, I think that wanting to be like their friends could have played a role in their unexpected responses. Additionally, I found out that the one of the children was referring to a pet that their father owned, not her mother where she resides. The child's parents are divorced and the father does not live in-state.

### **Whole Group Discussions**

During our whole group discussions, I prompted the students and guided them through the service-learning process. Our first whole group discussion was framed around the questions, "What can we do to help PAWS?" Before I introduced the question, I read aloud two books: Before You Were Mine by Maribeth Boelts (2007) and Are You Ready for Me? By Claire Buchwald (2009).

Before You Were Mine outlines the thoughts of a child about his new dog that his family rescued from a shelter. He muses why his new dog came to be at an animal shelter and what could have happened to the dog prior to his rescue. I read this book to allow children time to think about the reasons why animals may be relinquished to an animal shelter, thinking this might spark some ideas as to how we can help animals currently residing at PAWS. Periodically throughout the book I asked the students how they thought the dog felt. At the end of the book I asked, "How do you think the dog felt once he was rescued?" which led to a discussion about what it means to be rescued. Many of my students had the misconception that rescued means that the dog was found instead of the dog being saved. So, we discussed reasons why a dog might be saved, or rescued, and decided that maybe the owners did not take care of the dog, hurt the dog, or the dog did not have an owner. Once we focused on the rescue aspect of animal shelters, we moved on to learn about basic pet care.

I read *Are You Ready for Me?* which discusses the necessities of pet care and the owner's responsibility to their pet. I hoped that this could give students more ideas about what we can do as a class to benefit PAWS. The book is from the perspective of an adopted dog and poses self-reflective questions about taking care of a pet like, "what will life be like if you decide to take me home?" (p. 2). The book outlines the amount of time and money needed to adequately care for a pet and sometimes even though we may want to adopt a pet, we are not ready.

Once I finished reading, I posed the question, "What are the five things all animals need to survive?" The students listed off the five we reviewed: air, sunlight, food, water, and shelter. Then, I asked, "What is our shelter?" and we discussed that our homes are our shelters. Also, we spoke about what our homes provide us. Students said that homes provide us with "everything we need to survive, a home is where we live and gives us protection." Then, I asked what the students thought about PAWS and being an animal shelter. We discussed that PAWS provides the animals with a temporary shelter like our own homes until someone adopts and provides a forever home to an animal.

Then I asked, "What can we do to help animals at PAWS?" I allowed the students time to think before I started taking suggestions. Students came up with suggestions in five broad categories of how to help PAWS: adopting a pet, reporting lost animals to PAWS, donating items, volunteering, and informing the public about PAWS. I wrote their suggestions on a brainstorming web, so we can refer back to our ideas throughout the project. Later, we wrote a letter (*See Appendix C*) to our PAWS contact, Deana Washell, and informed her of what we know about PAWS, and listed unanswered questions and asked for other ideas of how to help PAWS.

When I received Deana's response, I gathered the students in the hallway to review our brainstorming web, the letter, and their questions. We discussed the ways we could help PAWS and read our letter to Deana together. As we transitioned back to the classroom, I introduced the KLEW (Know, Learn, Evidence, Wonderings) (*See Appendix D*) chart to them. I asked my class,

“What do we know about PAWS?” and one student responded, “Mrs. Washell and the volunteers work hard,” while another added, “To help the animals there!” The final response was, “We can help the animals!”

Then, I shared a Youtube video from the Humane Society of the United States website, which showcased animals currently living in animal shelters across America. I observed the students staring at the projector screen, and some tearing up. After, I posed the question, “How did that video make you feel?” Of the students who responded, all of them said, “Sad at the beginning and happy at the end.” I asked, “Why did the beginning make you sad?” One student responded, “Looking at the animals’ faces and I didn’t think the dog was gonna (sic) be adopted,” of which all the students agreed. I asked the students why their feelings changed at the end and another student said, “I was surprised because I didn’t think the dog was gonna be adopted, but then a boy came and adopted him and that made me happy.”

After the students discussed how the video made them feel we read Deana’s response to our questions and her suggestions as to how we can help PAWS (*See Appendix C*). The students read the letter with me. One student was particularly interested about the treats the dogs and cats enjoy and mentioned that Deana wrote that the dogs get Kong dog toys, which are red, rubber toys with a hollow center, which are filled with dog food and either peanut butter or yogurt. Also, the dogs and cats get treats from the store. The student responded, “We can buy the treats from the store.” I asked the student if she thought we could make some treats too, and she thought that we could.

We pointed out many similarities that the animals at PAWS have with us. Deana mentioned that some animals have to eat special dog food because of their diet. We have a child in our class with a peanut allergy and he mentioned that he has a special diet and that he could relate to the animal with the wheat allergy. In the letter, Deana mentioned that some dogs like to run and play while others would rather sit on the couch. As a class, we discussed how we all like

to do different activities and have different personalities. The students raised their hands if they were more like the energetic dogs, then raised their hands if they were like the “couch potato” dogs. As a class, we discussed how animals, like humans, have different personalities and interests. After we finished reading the letter, I showed the students the Centre County PAWS website <http://www.centrecountypaws.org>.

The students were asked to look at the adoptable cats and dogs. They noticed that next to some animals’ names there was a purple-heart logo and wanted to know what that meant. I explained that the heart logo indicates that the animal is in the “Guardian Angels” sponsor program, which means that a sponsor previously paid for that animal’s adoption fees. I gave the students some wait time and thought out loud, “I wonder if that’s something we could do?” The students quickly nodded their heads and I asked, “How?” The students seemed perplexed because they did not raise their hands to respond. I reminded the students about one idea we brainstormed to help PAWS was telling our friends and family. There was still no response so I modeled my thought process out loud and suggested, “What if we could invite our friends and family to an event? Would there be something we can do so that we could raise money for PAWS?” The students ran with the idea and suggested we have a night event where we could tell our families and the rest of the school about PAWS to gather more donations.

## **Discussion**

My discussion is based off my reflections of where I currently am with the service-learning unit. My service-learning project is ongoing and will continue until the end of May. At this point, I do not have enough data to effectively analyze service-learning within kindergarten.

At the end of the unit, I hope to analyze service-learning and the success or not through student work and opinions.

Scaffolding the service-learning process was critical to our students' success. Many of our students had not experienced meaningful service, nor had they experienced community building outside of their immediate family. Taking the necessary steps with Friendship Friday provided these students with the foundation for success within a service-learning unit. The techniques we used, such as the line of questioning and KLEW chart, we previously introduced in the year so the students were familiar with these strategies and we did not have to create a mini lesson for the students to properly engage with the material.

Community building is important for service-learning in a kindergarten context because it provides a base off of which the students can relate to the service-learning process. For example, connecting the trust walk to taking care of a pet and the responsibility that is required of all pet owners. Accepting each other's differences helped the students to see the differences in personalities amongst animals. The difference between animals lead to a conversation about best fit forever homes, which we compared to the idea of a best-fit book. Not all books are for us but we can find books that fit perfectly to our interests and abilities. Like this, some pets might not fit with our family, but there is an animal that would fit seamlessly into our homes and lifestyles. Through the scaffolding process, I was able to help guide my students through building their own classroom community and applying that knowledge to the larger State College community focusing on what we can do to benefit PAWS with the help of our families and the larger school community.

Scaffolding can take long-term forms, like the community building activities, but may also appear in a short-term form, such as questioning. When I created lesson plans for this service-learning unit I had to consider all of my students and their prior experiences with pets and animal shelters, in addition to where they were developmentally. I aimed to include all of my

students during whole group discussions. I would start with concrete questions and access prior knowledge, then slowly based off of student response make my questioning more abstract to reach the learners who more animal shelter and pet experience. If I did not know my students I could easily alienate a majority of my class through these questioning strategies. As a result, I was able to include all learners to help the whole class take ownership with meaningful service.

Exposing children to meaningful service is important, however, one must consider what needs to happen in terms of community building within the classroom before implementing a service-learning unit. An educator cannot expect students to engage in meaningful service without the students previously being exposed to meaningful community and service. Creating activities that helped the students grow as a classroom community allowed me to guide them through the process of meaningful service. Community is an important aspect of service-learning, without community and addressing relevant community need there would be no service to attach to the learning. Some of the activities addressed acted as seeds, which grew through more student social interaction with each other and then was applied to the service-learning. The conflict resolution and alike/difference lesson allowed me to know that students did not have prior experience using I-messages, in addition to some students feeling uncomfortable expressing their opinions if their opinion was not the majority. I knew going into the service-learning unit that some children will assent with the majority opinion, even if they do not necessarily agree. I did not use this knowledge to my full advantage. Even though students know how to express concern through I-messages, I am not sure that they applied this concept to teachers. I fear that some of our students have brilliant ideas that do not align with mine but are silent because they do not feel comfortable sharing these contrasting views and they will continue to agree with our suggestions for the project.

Using the surveys to assess student prior experience with pets, I was able to create a unit that catered to this specific class' prior knowledge and experience. To introduce the PAWS

project, I needed to engage prior student experience about pets and then animal shelters. The student and parent surveys gave me pertinent information that I could use to create a project with meaningful learning experiences in which my students could relate. Gauging students' experience with meaningful service is a critical step to service-learning because this allows the teacher to know how much guidance the students need and how much leadership he or she will have to assume throughout the project.

Teacher leadership and engagement must also be scaffolded into service-learning. Based on the prior experience with service in my class, I realized that I would have to take a main leadership role for this unit because none of my students indicated that they had participated in any meaningful service. We chose the project because of our strong community contact and shared passion for animals. Also, we reached out to other staff to garner their support rather than allowing students to engage with these adults. Perhaps if we started the year utilizing co-constructed classroom rules and Friendship Fridays as a platform for democratic talks with our students, the students would have been prepared to take on more aspects of the project. In the future, I hope to begin the scaffolding process from the first day of school regardless of grade level, so students can take a bigger role within a service-learning unit.

Although not what we envisioned, we maintained a high level of control over the service-learning but allowed for student input and choice at key areas of the project. For example, what questions we wanted Deana Washell to answer and the kinds of items we would like to collect and donate to PAWS. While I had a basic idea about where I wanted students to go, I presented my ideas in a way that allowed students to disagree with me by explicitly saying, "Does anyone disagree?" and explaining that, "I will not be mad if someone does not like this idea or has a different one." Being open to compromise allowed the students to practice using their voice. Another example of high teacher leadership was with managing the process of the project. I had to hook them in to the idea of the project, and then guide them through the process of the unit.

When discussing the letter to Deana and the idea of the family event I allowed students to suggest other ideas. I knew where I wanted the students to go, but if they had other ideas of how to get there, I was flexible and granted their suggestions. I presented all of this information to the students so that they could take ownership over the project. However, to help students gain support from other faculty, my mentor and I did not allow for student choice.

There were trade-offs being made to meet the process of service-learning and mentoring my students through academic and civic learning. My mentor and I had a strong community partner, so we chose the project for the students rather than allowing students to choose the project themselves. Also, my mentor and I spoke with other members of staff to garner support rather than my students going and consulting these adults. Ideally, I would want our students to choose something collectively that they are passionate about and want to help make a difference. Also, I would want my students to have the practice talking with other adults and gaining confidence in approaching other people about changes that can be made within the community.

Allowing students to have opportunities to engage with other adults and express their concerns within their community is an important aspect of service-learning. My mentor and I got other departments and committees on board with the idea. My students were not able to converse with other adults within the school because of time constraints, not a lack of ability, an important skill young people acquire through youth-adult partnerships. I did not have the ability to support them through this process through modeling or mentoring. In the future, I want to be able to build in the time needed to model and mentor students through the process of speaking with other adults about issues they have and want to change. The art teacher only meets with our class for forty minutes on Tuesdays. The Literacy Committee meets after school on a random schedule and half of the committee are teachers at Lemont's sister school Houserville. Due to these timing issues my mentor and I found it appropriate to discuss this projects with these adults. Instead, my mentor and I presented their ideas to the art department and the Literacy Committee to gain their



support. It is planned that my students will compose flyers to go out in the Friday folders for the entire school. They will decide what information to put on the flyer. The flyers will allow them to practice expressing information through written word while persuading others to come to the family event that benefits PAWS.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusion**

Service-learning is a meaningful, relevant way to help children meet academic, social, and emotional standards. The processes of service-learning in kindergarten are different from service-learning completed at a higher level. The process of service-learning for our students required a lot of scaffolding and community building, in addition to a high level of teacher leadership. Service-learning can be a useful tool for teachers looking to create relevancy and meaning within the curriculum.

Our students have been introduced to meaningful service, and I hope future teachers build off this experience allowing our students to take ownership over their learning while engaging with the community. I had to take a lead role within my classroom as a result of student prior experience with service and the maturity of my class. In the future I believe that these students will be able to complete meaningful service and can become justice-oriented citizens.

The place we found the most success was on the carpet. The students discussed how they felt about the project and were given the platform to engage with us on a more equal level. Meaning that the expectation was set that the students could disagree with us at any time they felt the project was not going where they wanted it to go. I hope that by explicitly telling the students they are encouraged to voice their opinions helped them feel comfortable doing so, even if we did not hear any dissent. I hope that students were not maintaining silence because they thought they had to. Additionally, these data show that some Friendship Friday activities were helpful for students' morale in the classroom if nothing else because the activities were seen as a fun way to practice community building; students were allowed to engage with one another and have fun

connecting with each other and us as the teachers. I wish I did not have to take such a major role in terms of decision-making for the collective class, and in the future I want to create a classroom climate in which students are seeing issues within the community and asking, “What can we do to help?” rather than me suggesting and implementing a project. I wonder how this project would be similar or different if I had implemented co-constructed classroom rules or engaged in more carpet time democratic talks with the students?

I wonder if different teaching styles, classroom management strategies, and child philosophies encourage different types of citizens? Could the right environment give cues to children how to behave? Westheimer and Kahne (2004) suggest that educators looking to “prepare justice oriented citizens” (p. 243) teach students to “consider collective strategies for change that challenge injustice” (p. 243). Perhaps to encourage justice-oriented citizens, teachers need to mentor students to point out injustice in their own lives while the teacher and students both consider breaking social norms within the classroom. Also, maybe allowing students to reframe or reenact certain scenarios that happen within the classroom and asking for alternative endings may further help students realize multiple perspectives (Serriere, 2010).

However, this study’s findings are specific to this group of students’ needs and prior experiences. Different classes and schools will have different needs and prior experiences that need to be addressed. Service-learning can work at any level, with any group of students; however, the teacher’s approach and balance within the youth-adult partnership, along with the amount of student voice and choice will change accordingly.

### **Implication for Future Research**

Our service-learning unit is ongoing and will not be completed until the culminating event occurring the third week of May. While I am continuing to collect data, I am connecting

my project to the Common Core writing standards to show that service-learning is a plausible means to meet the new Common Core standards, to which the State College Area School District is currently transitioning. Additionally, the students will continue to plan and advertise the “Make a PAWS-itive Difference” night by making flyers and persuading family and other school members to come to the event and donate to PAWS. The culminating event encourages students because they will be taking a lead role in the planning process.

Students will be creating advertisements of the event to post around the school and will be informing other students and teachers about PAWS and what they can do to help. During the event, students will be able to share what they have learned about PAWS and ways our class has helped the shelter. They will be sharing in front of different people, allowing them to share their project with the public while also persuading the people as to why PAWS is an important piece in our community. Inviting the community outside of our classroom will show the public that kindergarteners are capable of meaningful service, empathizing, and critical thinking. I will be presenting my additional findings about the Common Core standards, behavior changes, and the “Make a PAWS-itive Difference” night preparation at the Professional Development School Inquiry Conference.

I had to adjust research done at the middle and high school levels to be appropriate for kindergarten. Empirical longitudinal studies should be completed to understand the long-term effects of service-learning and engaging civically at a young age. Can the mentor adult in the service-learning project fade into the background with primary aged students and allow them to control the main aspects of the project? Many studies have shown the benefits of service-learning; however, some struggle to see these benefits and continue to misinterpret service-learning as community service. How can educators systematically prove the effectiveness of service-learning? While there are still unanswered questions, I found that service-learning within this kindergarten context needed scaffolding, a major teacher-leader role, and trade-offs that

needed to occur to promote academic and civic learning. Service-learning can happen in kindergarten but requires patience and a strong leader, whether adult or child with prior experience, to help others find success.

**Appendix A**  
**Student Survey and Interview**

**Survey**

1. Does your family have any pets? Yes No
2. If no, has your family ever had any pets? Yes No
3. What kind of pets have you owned? Cat Dog Fish Hamster Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. How did you get your pets? Farm Friend Store Shelter Breeder
5. Do you think all pets have homes? Yes No
6. What does a pet need? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Draw a picture of your favorite kind of pet and where it lives.

**Interview**

When you open your door to go outside to play, you see a box of very young-looking orange-tabby kittens sitting on your doorstep. (One is so small, its eyes are just starting to open.) You do not know who they belong to or how they got there. What could you and your family do?

Your neighbors are moving to a new home and told your family that they can't take their 5-year old dog, Sassy, with them. They are giving her to a farmer, who wants Sassy to be an outside dog. She has always been an inside dog. Do you think Sassy will like her new home? Why or Why Not? What else could they do for Sassy?

Two weeks ago you saw a neighborhood family pack up a moving van with all of their belongings and leave town. You know that they had three wiener dogs. Everyday when you pass

by the house to go to the park, you hear dogs barking from inside the house. What do you think happened? What can you and your family do?

You are at the mall. It is a hot summer day. You see a car with all the windows rolled up. There is a tiny, white dog barking in the front seat. What could you do? Why would he be barking (think about what living things need to survive)? Do you think she is okay? What could you and your family do?

While you are outside shooting hoops, you see a big, pit bull-like dog running on the street. It is alone and does not have a collar or tags. What do you think happened? What could you do?

Your friend got a 6-week old, red-colored puppy that looked like Clifford. She named him, Justin, after her favorite singer. Justin chewed toys and had "accidents" in the house. Your friend says that her family can't take care of Justin anymore, that he is too much work. What could they do? What could you do?

How did these questions/situations make you feel? Why?

**Appendix B**  
**Parent/Guardian Survey**

1. Do you own any pets? Yes No
2. What pets do you own? Dog Cat Fish Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where did you find your pet(s)? Friend Breeder Shelter  
If shelter, which one? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Did your child go with you when picking out your pet(s)? Yes No
5. Have you talked with your child about animal shelters? Yes No

Additional Comments:



## Appendix C

### PAWS Letters

Letter to Deana Washell from the class:

**March 14, 2013**

**Dear Mrs. Washell,**

**We have been talking a lot about PAWS! We want to help PAWS. We were wondering if you could help us by answering some of our questions about PAWS.**

- 1. What kind of animals are at PAWS? Are there other animals besides cats and dogs?**
- 2. How do the volunteers care for the animals?**
- 3. What do the dogs and cats eat?**
- 4. What toys do the animals like to play with? What do the animals like to play? Do the animals like to play with people?**
- 5. What treats do the animals like?**
- 6. How long have the animals been at PAWS?**
- 7. If you work there can you adopt animals? Who can adopt animals?**
- 8. Can you send us some pictures?**

**What other ways can we help PAWS? We are excited to hear back from you!**

**Sincerely,**

**The Lemont Blue Dot Kindergarten Class  
2012-2013**

Response from Deana Washell:

**March 18, 2013**

**Dear Boys and Girls,**

Thank you for your interest in PAWS! I am always happy to answer questions people have about the animal shelter. I typed the answers up right after your questions.

- 1. What kind of animals are at PAWS? Are there other animals besides cats and**

**dogs?** PAWS only cares for dogs and cats.

## **2. How do the volunteers care for the animals?**

There are many ways that volunteers help out the animals. Some people come in first thing in the morning to take the dogs for walks, feed them, and clean their kennels. The same goes for the cats. They even stay at PAWS to keep them company until lunchtime then another group of volunteers comes in around dinnertime to do the same exact thing. At night, we also play music so the dogs can stay calm around bedtime. Other volunteers come in to show people around who are interested in adopting a dog or cat and try to find the perfect match. Still others help by taking dogs or cats to the vet or to special events like Wild About Animals that took place this past weekend. There are so many ways volunteers help!

## **3. What do the dogs and cats eat?**

The dogs eat dog food, typically Royal Canine, and the cats eat cat food. We keep them all on the same food unless they have a special diet. We have had some dogs who need to eat dog food that doesn't have any wheat in it because they are allergic. We also will give them special treats at times.

## **4. What toys do the animals like to play with? What do the animals like to play?**

### **Do the animals like to play with people?**

Some of the dogs and cats like to play with soft stuffed animals but some dogs cannot because they eat them. Some dogs like to play catch with tennis balls. We have a dog pen where they can run around in outside and play with a volunteer. The cats like to watch birds out of the window where the bird feeders are. The animals love spending time with people. Some like to play; others just like to have someone sit with them on a sofa and keep them company.

## **5. What treats do the animals like?**

We have store bought dog biscuits we can give the dogs and cats. At night, we also give each dog a kong which is a toy that is filled with dog food then stuffed with peanut butter or vanilla yogurt. The kongs are put in the freezer then given to the dogs. It keeps the dogs busy for a little while before bed when everyone leaves.

## **6. How long have the animals been at PAWS?**

Another great question! Some animals are only at PAWS for a few hours then adopted while others can be there for a year or two. We will keep the animals until we find the right person for them all. Some of the animals live with a foster family, which is another way people can volunteer. They keep the dog or cat in their home and treat the animal like their own pet until he or she is adopted.

## **7. If you work there can you adopt animals? Who can adopt animals?**

You can adopt animals if you volunteer! I am a volunteer and adopted Sophie who is a blue tick coonhound. (I'll make sure to include a picture of her!) She came into PAWS two years ago and was at PAWS for two months before my family decided to adopt her.

She is wonderful! To adopt a dog or cat, you need to fill out an application and talk to an adoption counselor then you are approved for a pet. We try to match each family up with a dog or cat that is the perfect fit. For instance, we wouldn't want a dog to go home with a cat if we knew the dog didn't like cats.

**You also asked what could you do to help PAWS and I do have a lot of ideas for you to think about! Here is the list:**

1. We decorate each season by putting up a craft/picture for each dog or cat. For instance, my class made paper snowglobes for winter and hearts for Valentine's Day. You would need to make 100 of them so each cat and dog get one!
2. We also make thank you things for adopters. You could make thank you cards or popsicle stick picture frames for the people adopting a dog or a cat but we would need about 50 of them.

3. PAWS always needs plastic bags like those you get at Walmart or Target and paper towels. Some schools or groups have done paper towel drives.

4. We can always use bird feeders too because our cats love watching birds. You can roll pine cones in peanut butter or try something sticky like that with bird seed.

**Sincerely, Mrs. Washell**

**Appendix D**  
**Classroom Profile**

Student	Gender	<u>Academic Level</u>			Behavior Patterns	Social Behavior
		Reading	Writing	Math		
1	F	++	++	+	*	+
2	M	++	+	+	*	+
3	M	*	*	+	+	*
4	F	+	+	+	*	+
5	M	+	*	+	*	/
6	M	+	+	+	+	+
7	F	+	+	+	+	+
8	F	+	+	+	+	+
9	M	+	+	++	+	+
10	F	+	+	+	*	+
11	M	*	+	+	*	+
12	F	/	*	/	/	/
13	F	*	+	+	+	+
14	M	+	+	++	+	*
15	M	*	*	+	/	*
16	M	+	+	+	*	*
17	M	/	*	+	*	*
18	F	/	/	/	+	+
19	F	/	/	/	/	/

Key for Academic Level

++ Above Grade Level

+ At Grade Level

\* At risk

/ Below Grade Level

Key for Behavior Patterns and Social Behavior

+ Appropriate

\* Mostly Appropriate

/ Regular occurrence of Inappropriate Behavior

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## ACADEMIC VITA

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- National Council of Mathematics Teachers
- National Council of Science Teachers
- Student Pennsylvania State Education Association

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Lemont Elementary School
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