

Service-Learning at the American School of Bombay

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At the American School of Bombay in Mumbai, India we are in the third year of our Community and Social Responsibility (CSR) program. I have been the Coordinator for this program since it began, and have gone from two years of part-time work to being promoted to a full-time CSR Coordinator. This promotion from part-time to full-time is a reflection of the reverence that ASB pays to the value of service-learning and to how we believe it enhances the development our students both academically and personally. Our Mission Statement at ASB maintains that we encourage our students to “enhance the lives of others” and one way in which we aim to implement our mission is through the CSR program.

We ensure that every student in the school, pre-kindergarten through grade 10 is involved in experiences in which they exhibit social responsibility within the community (grades 11 and 12 are involved in the CAS program involving service-related experiences as a requirement of the International Baccalaureate). This takes place in many different ways, depending on age-appropriateness and which division they are in, and with various parts of the internal, local, or global communities.

In all divisions of the school, elementary, middle, and high school, we use the following framework for our CSR Program: educational awareness, action, reflection, and demonstration (this framework is courtesy of Cathryn Berger Kaye in her book, *The Complete Guide to Service Learning*). Some pieces are developed more than others, depending on the CSR experience and the age of the children, however, this framework is used throughout the school. In elementary school, the CSR Program is thriving as an example of service-learning in action. Every grade from Early Childhood 3 through grade 5 is partnered with a non-governmental organization (NGO) for the entire school year. The process of finding an appropriate partner for the grade is one that is borne through conversations between with the teachers and me about the students’ academic units for the year. Based on the subjects that the children will be studying, I recommend an NGO that would be a natural fit with the subjects that will be studied. In this way, the teachers are already prepared to teach their regular units of study, and the work of the NGO and the subsequent activities and reflections are seamlessly interwoven into the fabric of the coursework.

The 5th grade is a perfect example of service-learning in action. They have two units in which they study solid waste management and economies. I partnered them with an organization called the ACORN Foundation (www.dharaviproject.org), which works towards the improvement of the living conditions of waste collectors in Mumbai and runs a waste matters project that supports environmentally-friendly activities throughout the city. The waste collectors in Dharavi (one of Asia’s largest slums) are responsible for the city’s recycling efforts, and without their work, the city would be in a dire state. The waste collectors gather and segregate reusable materials throughout the city, and then they sell it to other industries in need of those materials. Due to the nature of their work, and the work of ACORN that supports the waste collectors, it seemed that this was a perfect partnership for grade 5 as it incorporated both issues of solid waste management and economies within the work that they do.

Within the two units, waste management and economics, ACORN is brought into the classroom at the beginning of the year to talk about what they do and to show a film that documents the lives of some of the waste collectors. The teachers prepare the students before the visit by discussing what the 5th grade has done in the past with ACORN and how they will be resuming the partnership in the current year. The students do units on economics and solid waste management within the class (teachers bring in examples from their work with ACORN, in the past, they have written letters to ACORN and to the school Superintendent supporting the work with ACORN within our school). Interspersed throughout their academic study of these topics are field trips that put an experiential piece to the learning. They go to explore the community of the waste collectors in Dharavi, where they are shown how waste is collected, segregated, stored, and transformed into new products, and then finally sold. They also join the waste collectors in a garbage clean-up around our school where they learn the value of certain items and how to segregate the waste before it is cleaned and resold. Towards the end of the school year, the 5th graders celebrate Earth Day by compiling a collection of creative writing pieces (from poetry to articles) about their work with ACORN and their recycling efforts. These pieces are put together in a class newsletter that will eventually be published in a local children's magazine throughout Mumbai.

Another way in which the 5 grade class has engaged in service-learning is through the creation and implementation of a weekly recycling program that involves the entire school. They decided that they wanted to go beyond studying about solid waste management and actually do something to help both the earth and ACORN by setting up a recycling program at ASB. They invited ACORN to do a waste survey of our school in order to examine what we throw away, how much of it is recyclable or reusable, and what waste they could collect and resell. ACORN determined that they could take our used paper to recycle and resell, as long as our students could collect it, segregate it, and pass it on to ACORN on a regular basis. The 5th grade students go around to every classroom in the elementary school and collect paper which has been kept in baskets for this purpose. They then segregate the paper, put it in large garbage bags, and label it for ACORN's use. The students' dedication to this project inspired other students in our school, and by the end of the first year, the middle school and high school started their own weekly recycling programs in which they collected, sorted, and handed over the paper to ACORN. It is the second year of the program and the students are coming up with new ways to enhance it and implement more environmentally-friendly practices in our school. This effort has spread awareness throughout our school, and not just among students, but to administrators as well! The school has now decided that 'greening' the school is going to be part of our strategic plan for ASB and will become one of the 'Core Values' that the institution maintains. That is service-learning in action!