

# Grade 1 with Grade 3: Working with Elders

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**The Purpose and Essential Questions:**

Grade 1 Social Studies curriculum includes a unit on family. Part of this unit is about how families change over time. One aspect of this change which is particularly evident in our school is how, geographically, families tend to be further apart than in prior generations. Many of our expatriate students are living evidence of this. Because children in our community tend to have limited contact with grandparents, our work in an elder home is relevant to give them exposure to another generation and give them a venue whereby they can interview an elder to investigate further how life and families have changed over time.

**The Story:**

This was my first attempt to build a service learning extension that reached outside our school community. Out of a common interest (and some need for handholding!), I partnered up with our grade 3 teacher and together, we planned how we could tie our curriculum to a service experience with elders. It was great working with another teacher and we both felt that this first venture was one that we can build upon. I never expected to perfect the service learning process on the first try and I do realize that effectively implementing service learning into my curriculum will be learning journey for me. Regardless, the experience was a powerful one for me, my students, and the elders whose lives were touched by our visits.

**Service-Learning Theme(s) and Community Need****Service-Learning Themes:**

Elders

**Community Need:**

We partnered with a local home for Elders who are homebound within the center where they live and have limited contact with persons outside the building.

**Community Partners:**

Our partners were the directors of the Elder home and the elders themselves.

**Place of Impact:**

School

## Local Community

School Setting, Grade Level and Duration

**School Setting:**

Urban

**Grade Level:**

K-3 (Early Elementary)

**Target Population:**

All Students

**Duration:**

5-9 weeks

Connection to Curriculum

**Academic Subjects:**

Art

English Language Arts

Life Skills

Music

Social Studies

**State Standards:**

CO

**Subject:**

Language Arts

**Definition:**

Students write and speak for a variety of purposes and audiences.

**Subject:**

Music

**Definition:**

Students will relate music to various historical and cultural traditions. Students sing or play on instruments a varied repertoire of music, alone or with others.

**Subject:**

History

**Definition:**

Students understand that societies are diverse and have changed over time. - Students understand the chronological organization of history and know how to organize events and people into major eras to identify and explain historical relationships.

**Content Areas of major themes of study:**

English, Croatian Culture, Music, Art

**Skills being introduced or developed:**

Interviewing/questioning skills Listening Following directions Sharing ideas

### **Books, Media, Websites, and other Resources:**

The Memory Box by Mary Bahr Grandpa's Teeth by Rod Clement What a Family! a Fresh Look at Family Trees by Rachel Isadora What Grandmas do Best, What Grandpas do Best by Laura Numeroff These are a few of the specific books but our bookshelf was full with books about elders which children could explore during reading time.

### **Career-Related Learning:**

none

### **Global Connections Made:**

How families move, the culture of Croatia.

### **Leadership Opportunities:**

We are an American International school in Zagreb, Croatia. This experience helped students, most who are from other parts in of the world, to be a part of their community and show they can take initiative and learn from and with others.

Five Stages of Service-Learning (Procedure)

### **Investigation:**

Our unit began with an exploration of "family." Because many of our students are guests here from other countries, they have limited contact with the elders from their own families. Initially we went to the home for the elders for the children to sing songs they had learned in Music and in Croatian Culture. This led to investigating through observation and experience.

### **Reflection:**

After going to the home for the elders, we recognized a real community need that we could fill. We left the three centers having sung our songs and the elders wished that we could have stayed and visited. At school we reflected on what had occurred and talked about the elders' desire for company and decided that we would like to go back. We decided that since there was a language barrier for many of the students that we could do a craft project all together.

### **Preparation and Planning:**

Before going back we read many age-appropriate books on elders. This gave the children a chance to experience the idea of aging and some of the 'hardships' that come with it in a familiar and engaging way. We also developed a list of questions that kids could ask an elder. I then printed out the same number of questions as there are students and randomly gave each child a question. The children then went around the room and said their question to another student. When students liked another's questions more than their own, they could trade. The purpose of this was to familiarize each child with at least 3 or 4 questions that they

could ask an elder. Another activity we did for preparation was "directors cut." For this, I had 3 kids dramatize a scenario in which kids were not interacting with an elder. The other kids got to shout, "Cut!" and re-direct the actions of the students to create a situation whereby the children were working cooperatively and respectfully with elders. Note from Cathryn Berger Kaye: These two activities, the exchange of the questions and the Director's Cut, were modeled during professional development workshops I led at American International School of Zagreb in spring 2010. Amy adapted these effective teaching strategies most successfully. The Director's Cut also proved helpful for Amy in guiding students to redo real interactions between classmates and assisted dramatically with their problem solving skills.

**Reflection:**

All of the actions were effective in preparing the students for partnering with elders. When the students were stuck not knowing what to say, we drew upon our experience with the questions. The dramatization exercise encouraged kids to think about appropriate interactions and how to include an elder in the craft. Students liked these dynamics and described a sense of being ready.

**Action:**

We went to the center for the elders and set up each table with a different craft. After a while, children interacted with the elders by asking them some of the questions that we discussed in the classroom. Children who spoke Croatian translated for those who did not.

**Reflection:**

Having a craft was a good way to 'break the ice' and give the students a sense of place at the center. At the time we did not do any formal reflection, however students' body language and expressions showed their level of comfort and that, for the most part, liked the situations.

**Reflection:**

When back at school, we talked about our experience and drew/wrote about our impressions. Children shared some of the dialogues that they had with the elders.

**Demonstration:**

This was the weakest piece of our service learning process. We drew pictures and wrote letters back to the elders. In the next step phase, I explain how I would do this part differently when we do build upon this year's service learning plan.

**Public Relations:**

Sharing with faculty was the best PR we could do at this time. We are building our service learning approach school-wide. Describing what we did for other faculty helped our teachers see the possibilities of interaction even with what is perceived as a language barrier.

**Assessment and Evaluation:**

Student participation was high. Their ability to communicate about this experience showed they had a meaningful time, and were able to express themselves and their role in the community.

### **Lessons Learned and Next Steps:**

This unit has a great potential in developing interview skills for a purpose. In the future, I would tailor questions to investigations of what life was like for the elders when they were 6 years old. If we partner with high school students, the first graders could ask questions and the high schoolers could transcribe the conversations, with translators involved. Back at school, the children can review what the elder had said and make and illustrate a book about that person and what life was like for them when they were little. Books could be presented to other grades so that kids can tell about what they learned. For the elder, this can be a keepsake.

### **About the Teacher:**

This is my tenth year teaching and my second year teaching first grade. The service learning endeavor I have written up here is my first attempt at service learning and I look forward to continuing the journey!

### **About the School:**

We are a pre-K to 12 international school in Zagreb, Croatia. We have a culturally diverse population of about 220 students.

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