

# Civic Engagement in Action: Boise Schools Bridge Program

## Service Information:

- ED-SPED 350: Teaching Students with Exceptional Needs at the Secondary Level, Spring 2012
- Michael Humphrey, Ed. D.
- Boise Schools Bridge Program

## **Community Partner Mission Statement:**

Synonymous with that of the Boise School District.

Mission: We educate students to be lifelong learners and contributing citizens.

Vision: We foster a love of learning... We empower a quality staff to... provide an exemplary education for every student.

## **Service Project Purpose:**

This community-based service learning project was intended to assist Boise State students to understand the implementation of individualized education for students with exceptional needs in coordination with the course content of Dr. Michael Humphrey's ED-SPED 350 course at Boise State University.

This was accomplished by assisting the Bridge program at Borah High School in increasing one-on-one student-teacher interaction for English learning students. This ratio increases differentiation in curriculum, or the ability to adhere to individually modified curriculum for each student. The purposes of the project relative to the English learning students are the same as the mission statement and vision of the Boise Schools Bridge Program.

## **Learning goals:**

The learning goal for the Boise State students was to gain deeper insight into students with exceptionalities and the resources and organizations that strive to enhance their post-secondary outcomes and educational services.

The learning goals of the Bridge students were to increase their comprehension and application of the English language to the extent that sufficient aptitude in English language skills be shown as assessed by federally mandated standardized tests, such as the Idaho Language Proficiency Assessment (IELA). Moreover, the students hoped to achieve competence in social and cultural customs to attain a more comprehensive English language assimilation.



## Reflection:

Bridge brings kids from around the world and places them together in classrooms right here in Boise, Idaho. These students are displaced from their homes by unfavorable circumstances,

including political unrest and war.

By meshing academic content and cultural awareness with English language development, the students in the Bridge program gain confidence in forming healthy and productive relationships that span from formal classroom acquaintances to enduring personal friendships.

In allowing volunteers to interact with this process through entities such as Boise State's Service-Learning Program, the Bridge program provides students another positive connection to the community.

Course content in ED-SPED 350 provided a foundation to accommodate for the exceptional needs of these students. Such course content included pragmatic evaluation techniques, which equipped me with the ability to provide students with forms of assessment that accurately reflected progress and fairly identified weaknesses in instruction. Among other useful course precepts, instruction on accommodations and modifications proved invaluable in making sure the specific needs of each student I worked with were being met, thus helping them achieve their purposes and goals.

This application of course content provided a hands-on experience in transforming challenging issues in the community's education system into exciting opportunities for personal growth and community unification.

Throughout the semester, I wrote reflective papers that documented the understanding I was gaining and the impact the service learning project was having on the Bridge students. I came to appreciate the impact that service learning can have on a community and the rich educational value of intertwining the classroom with the community. The Bridge students and I both walked away with testimonials of the power in connecting the world to learning and then putting that learning back out into the world.

## Service Activities:

The Bridge students produced many artifacts that evidenced the progress they were making toward meeting their goals. The Bridge students completed dialogue journals with native English speaking students from Boise State. This project provided the Bridge students with an authentic form of English language practice and offered the Boise State students a broadened perspective of the cultural and linguistic diversity existent in their community.

The Bridge students completed similar interview-based dialogue journals with English speaking students in their own school, helping them bridge the social gaps present between diverse groups of students within the school.

## **Other activities included:**

- ▣ Technology skills development through word processing and computer-based research
- ▣ Cultural competency exercises including body language, dress standards, and common idioms
- ▣ Classroom instruction and lecture
- ▣ Reading and writing development
- ▣ English language modeling

