



Hands-on learning or experiential education is a process that occurs between a teacher and student that infuses direct experience with the learning environment and content. The Association of Experiential Education regards experiential education “as a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values.” The examples below demonstrate how this approach applies to our hands-on learning focus.

Career Study

Each year, Hennepin Technical Community College hosts a “Scrubs Camp” where students learn about medical careers related to their studies. The goal is to help students apply their learning to real life careers. Extending this learning to a practical application is highly valuable and supported by SDEF. With the help of a SDEF grant, students attended the camp and worked with staff to share the information they learned across other classrooms and disciplinary areas.

After School Program

Middle school students participated in Community Education’s Youth Summit Leadership Day. Throughout the morning students examined leadership attributes and how they applied to them personally. They spent the remainder of the day wrestling with teen issues, armed with new insights gained from their leadership discussions. Upon returning to their regular school routine, several of the students decided they wanted to address the issue of youth-on-youth violence in our society. They worked with a teacher after school to develop ideas and decided to create posters to distribute in schools and the community. They also decided to host a public meeting to educate others about the topic. The group applied for a SDEF grant to pay for supplies, printing and promotion for the event.

Science/Engineering

Mrs. O'Leary's fifth grade students learned how to build and program Lego Robots in their classrooms. This pre-engineering lesson is part of the MN academic standards. Some students were incredibly enthused about the project and wanted to build more advanced programming into their robots to compete in competitions. The students worked with their teacher to write a SDEF grant to fund additional Lego kits. They continued to meet after school and further developed their knowledge and skills around the robots and entered competitions on weekends. They won the state competition. The triumphant students returned to school and worked with their class to share programming and applications skills. The students also went to several community events to demonstrate their robots and share their story.

Social Studies

Mr. Reading's class studied civil war history during their social studies curriculum at Cooper High School and decided to make a movie. The class wrote a screen play, rehearsed parts, and shot the movie. Their experience was both fun and educational. Mr. Reading wanted to take the project further to show his students they could help others understand civil war history. To do this he needed sophisticated editing software and wrote a SDEF grant to obtain funding. The students completed editing of the movie and hosted a showing at the public library on a Saturday night.

Music

Middle school band students were encouraged to audition for an honors band, All District Band. In addition to performing quality compositions from all periods and styles, students create a yearly CD recording and perform in RAS schools and the community.

The band director, Mrs. Good, wrote a SDEF grant and used the resources to support band growth, expand performance opportunities and commission an original composition from a renowned composer. The composer introduced his new work over several practice sessions and discussed how to approach composing music. The original composition was shared with the community through multiple community concerts.

Reading/Writing

Mrs. Watson introduced different poetry styles and structures to improve her students' reading and writing skills. The students' final writing assignment was to compose an original poem.

As an extension of the course content, the students decided to present their original poems through a poetry slam in the evening at their school for other students, parents and community members. Mrs. Watson applied for a SDEF grant to pay for additional teacher supervision outside of classroom time. The grant money also went toward poetry slam prizes, publicity for the event and food and beverages.

Art

Mr. Xiong's class studied Renaissance art as part of the Minnesota Academic standards. He felt a visit to the art museum would allow his students an important first hand learning experience. He also believed, if he structured it correctly, students would internalize the material by seeing paintings and getting additional information during their visit. Mr. Xiong wrote a SDEF grant to pay for the field trip bus. During the students' museum visit they were assigned to create their own artistic masterpiece in the frame of a Renaissance painter. The students hung their finished work in the hallway and invited other classes to view their paintings.

Technology-Early Childhood

Mr. Fajardo worked with preschool children from impoverished families. The children didn't have access to some of the technology many other students had. He felt with the right technology, he could accelerate learning and support their ability to use technology in a functional manner.

Mr. Fajardo applied for a SDEF grant and purchased a smart table. With the table, his students were able to experience math in a new way. He gave his students the answer of "15 fingerprints" and worked with them to come up with the answer: "Why would 5 children put 3 fingertips each on the table top." The teacher also incorporated learning and technology into his parent education. To disseminate the information, Mr. Fajardo taught the other preschool teachers how to use the smart table and let them use it in their classrooms.

Junior Achievement (JA) Biz Town

Mr. Smith at Robbinsdale Middle School worked with his students to understand economics and financial literacy. To extend and deepen that learning, he wrote a SDEF grant to help fund a day at the Junior Achievement's Biz Town. Biz Town provides lessons plans to incorporate during the school day to prepare students for their experience. Prior to their Biz Town trip students register for a checking account and are assigned an occupation. Once on site, students experience the Town through their job assignments and required tasks. They receive paychecks, open checking and savings accounts, register to vote, and work as a team in their assigned business. Students learn first hand about what it takes to balance their needs with their income and meet important job timelines.

Mr. Smith shared key financial literacy concepts and some of the tools he received that day with other staff to use in their classrooms. He also reinforced the benefits of the concepts with his students.