

Students Helping Students

Lesson Plans

Social Entrepreneurship Lesson #4: Communities Matter

*Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.
– Margaret Mead*

Overview

This lesson introduces young people to the idea of community and how to look at community as a resource and as something to nurture and grow. Students learn how to look at their classroom as a “community” by developing an *asset map*. Students will also learn about others who support, sustain, and work within communities while engaged in solving community problems, whether they live in the community or send support from afar.

Subjects: Social Studies

Grades: 4-12

Time: one 50-minute class period

Materials: A computer connected to the Internet, classroom set of copies of the student handout entitled “[Classroom Asset Interviews](#)”

Learning Goals

- Students will understand what communities include, and how they impact individuals, as well as how individuals impact communities
- Students will learn to make an asset map

Introduction

As people grow and settle down, they usually find themselves within a community of some kind, often defined by geography and proximity, but also by interest or relationship. We speak of ‘learning communities’ and ‘communities of practice’ – these communities exist (or are intentionally fostered) in order to support the individuals within, or, often more importantly, to develop a new addition to the community (like a school or playground). A classroom is also a kind of community, and when made the focus of a lesson, student understanding of the class-as-community will improve. Students will be helped to view their classroom as a community, and as a resource for change.

Additionally, people who want to make a difference in the world must work within existing communities with respect and understanding. For example, Room to Read is an organization that works with communities around the world, asking those in the community to be a partner in their efforts to build schools and libraries.

In this lesson, students will engage in a process called *asset mapping*. Asset mapping is a process through which members identify the potential resources within their community. This can be a surprising activity since it brings to light assets previously undocumented or unrecognized. It reveals untapped skills and strengths, and uncovers networks connected by relationships, (such as parents) including organizations, natural resources, and local businesses. By uncovering the resources right within their midst, the students will discover potential they can now tap into to make a difference.

In this lesson, students will learn to understand *community* in a new light.

Key Concepts and Vocabulary

- Community
- Asset
- Social capital, social profit
- Tangible and intangible
- Map, mapping

Additional Resources and Learning Connections

- More on Asset Mapping
 - <http://www.cete.org/acve/docgen.asp?tbl=tia&ID=170>
 - <http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html>
- Learn about a related asset mapping process called “Community Youth Mapping” <http://cyd.aed.org/cym/tensteps.html>
- Read about the results of asset mapping when implemented in a school community http://www.kaboom.org/About_KaBOOM/Library_and_Resources/Case_Studies.html

Instructional Procedures

1. Open the lesson with a key question: *What is a community?* Ask students to generate a list of components that are critical to a healthy community, coming up with a class definition for a “community.” (Resources above may provide some guidance and ideas if needed) Post the class description.

One sample definition is below. Though its focus is slightly different, its intent is the same. Students might review this definition as a starting point, and identify which qualities work (or don't) for a classroom community.

A human "community" is a group of people who live or interact often in a certain place or around a certain interest. A "sustainable community" maintains and improves the economic, environmental and social characteristics of a place so its members can continue to lead healthy, productive, enjoyable lives there.”

(From http://www.ruralaction.org/build_sustainability.html)

2. Introduce the idea that the classroom is also a community. Create another column by the first definition, and see if the students arrive at a different one when thinking of their *classroom* community. Document their thinking, noting where ideas overlap or diverge. Post.
3. Throughout the year, students typically do fundraising or design projects where resources will be needed, whether financial or another form of material support. Ask the students to choose an issue they believe in, something they could all support and work towards. This may take some discussion. Ideally the answer will benefit the entire school. This will form the basis for the next activities. The class may have already been thinking of a project to support, whether in the school or overseas – the next activities will enable that support to begin. Select a project the class agrees on, and identify the goals – what would success look like to the students? Post their final decision.
4. Introduce the concepts of assets, and other vocabulary words. Students should understand these ideas before moving on.
5. The next activity involves some choice – students need to begin to create a large “map” that will indicate the students and their relationships, and this can be done a number of ways. Any concept mapping software could be used here, or a large wall covered with paper would be a dramatic visual map illustrating the relationships and assets as they emerge over time. Decide on the media for the map, and prepare. Ensure students are familiar with the use of the software or participate in the process of creating the paper wall.
6. Imagine a bird's eye view of the classroom, and place all the students on the map based on where they sit. This is a simple starting point. Students can use icons or small items like tacks, toys, or pictures to represent themselves on the map.

7. Next, pair students in preparation for asset interviewing. Introduce the students to the questions on the handout "[Classroom Asset Interviews](#)". Hand each one out to the students.
8. Ask each partner in the pair to trade off interviewing each other. Complete the handouts. What should result is a list of each student's strengths, relationships, and skills.
9. Input the results of the interviews onto the Class Asset Map. There are many ways to represent these on a map, whether students use words, pictures, or the small items. Let students take the lead on getting the information from the interviews onto the class map – once they understand the process, they will continue to make additions and connections.

(For example, a student who can play the cello well would add a line from himself to the words “plays cello” on the map, somewhat close to his name. If someone else in the class plays cello, a longer line will link the two, showing a relationship. Or perhaps someone else in the class has a parent or friend who plays the violin, this would be indicated near that person's name, but linked to a new item in the middle, perhaps called “plays musical instruments.”)

An asset has now been revealed, and shows potential – a group of people the class knows who play instruments and might be able to give a small concert to raise money. You can begin to see the kinds of potential ideas for fundraising that will emerge. The goal is to uncover all the skills and connections related to the class in order to leverage them and generate common action for a good cause. For more about how this worked, read about one school's story:

[http://www.kaboom.org/About KaBOOM/Library and Resources/Case Studies.html](http://www.kaboom.org/About_KaBOOM/Library_and_Resources/Case_Studies.html)

Additionally, you can find a different kind of skills interview here, though it focuses on a larger community asset mapping project.

<http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd/abcdci.html>

More About Asset Mapping

The underpinnings for asset-based community building are the following: *engaging others, relationship building, and action*. Engaging others and building relationships actually helps groups move to *action*. Groups, whether a classroom, community group, or large regional action committee, need resources from which to draw – asset mapping reveals the potential to get important things done.

For example, in an elementary school in Vermont, the fundraising committee brainstormed the local talents and personal connections that might yield tangible results; they happened to know a children's singer who agreed to give a benefit concert, then they contacted an airline executive who donated tickets for a raffle. And so on...

10. In number 3 above, the students decided on a class action project they wish to undertake – a goal with valuable outcomes. Once the map has been completed and linked, spend time working out the possibilities for fundraising the map has uncovered. Encourage the students to be creative. There are infinite variations on the outcomes.

Extension learning activities might include letter writing, presenting to local groups or the entire school, building something, or working with other adults. Depending on students' age and class time, this set of lessons could generate a high-engagement learning project for the students. (See the previous lesson on how a small groups of students helped to generate \$200,000 for tsunami relief!)

(Also, as a note to the teacher, it doesn't have to be a fundraising idea, the map may uncover untapped resources for learning that can now be accessed.)

11. As a closing activity, spend time assessing the map – what does it reveal about the classroom? The community? Ask students to note how many connections they really have with each other. Remind them of the meaning of *community*. How many other ways has their classroom become a community?

Extensions

- **A Story About our Class – Oral Speaking**
The map eventually becomes a powerful visual for talking about the classroom. Students could choose to present their map to the entire school, or a partner class. The resulting map is an excellent storytelling prop for kids to present to the PTO or school... about their classroom community.
- **The School's Assets Next! – Building Leadership**
Map your school's assets, or select one block in your community, noting the physical characteristics and human capital. Your classroom could take the lead on generating a larger school map for bigger impact!
- **A Community Resource Map – Extending Resources**
Map all the places where people "connect" in your community – play spaces, coffeehouses, farmer's market, library, etc.
- **Share The Class's Newfound Expertise – Helping Others**
Present your map to a community group that is working on a particular issue (economic development, job bank, hunger relief, etc.). Explain what you've learned about the assets of your community. Are they tapping all available assets?

These teacher resources were developed by the [Learning Innovation and Technology Consortium \(LITC\)](#). LITC develops educational programs and materials in support of problem solving, innovation, and social entrepreneurship.