

<b>School Corporation's Call to Action</b>
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## **HEROES - Learning History**

It is important to learn from our experiences, both the successful and not so successful ones. This is a way of assessing our effectiveness and sharing information. It is an important process for the growth of any organization or program. In doing so, we have recorded some of our learning process around the concept of a "learning history." In order to write this learning history we went to the source of the HEROES Program - the people who originated the program, those who developed the program and formed the body to oversee it, those who helped to implement and manage it, and even those who participated in it. We tried to capture and convey the experience and insights of these people.

The result of this new form of assessment, a learning history, is put forth on the pages that follow. We believe that what we have learned will help you to develop and implement a successful program for your community or organization.

The HEROES collaborating organizations are more than happy to answer any questions you may have regarding this process. Please feel free to call us.

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In 1993 the South Bend Community School Corporation's (SBCSC) Superintendent, Dr. Virginia Calvin, implemented a staff development plan called *Valuing Diversity in Schools*. The SBCSC's staff development plan, *Valuing Diversity in Schools*, was created in order to prepare SBCSC employees to effectively educate all students through the development of awareness, acceptance and affirmation of student diversity. The SBCSC

executed a corporation-wide plan, representative of present and future diversity in the schools, which focused on diversity of faculty, students and community, through staff development, student and community forums and curriculum.

The staff development program provided six, one-half days of release

<b>Social Services</b>
<b>Collaborative Response</b>

time for faculty during which they would be involved in various diversity training activities.

While staff was involved in training, students would also be released. Mary Pat Hatcher-Disler, one of the co-chairs of the Valuing Diversity in Schools Committee and SBCSC administrative staff, remembers that, “we asked ourselves, what can we do to keep the children occupied with something worthwhile during this time? So we decided to write letters to a diverse group of local organizations asking them to put together some programs that could be offered to the students during the release time.”

One of the first responses came from Dora Reynolds, Executive Director of the YWCA of St. Joseph County. She told Mary Pat Hatcher-Disler that the YWCA and the Girls Scouts were interested in providing programming for 100 girls. Ms. Hatcher-Disler recommended that she focus on both boys and girls. Ms. Hatcher-Disler suggested to Ms. Reynolds that, “it is those relationships that are often what cause domestic violence and violence on the streets. If you’re just talking to the girls you don’t have the other side of the story.” Ms. Reynolds agreed and they decided to get their agency counterparts involved.

Through the combined efforts of socially responsible organizations, including the YWCA of St. Joseph County, YMCA of Michiana, Boy Scouts of America - LaSalle Council, Girl Scouts of Singing Sands Council, Inc., and the South Bend Community School Corporation, a diversity program for students was born.

Each collaborative agency, by the nature of the people they serve, was familiar with negative attitudes and stereotypes and their effects on the community. Each coalition agency had already developed programs to confront and address these problems effectively.

The Girl Scouts of Singing Sands Council, Inc., as a part of the largest organization for girls in the world, was committed to providing the highest quality programs and opportunities for personal growth to girls ages 5 to 17. Service and leadership development, career exploration, understanding diversity and learning to cope with conflict and contemporary issues continue to be a large part of the Girl Scout agenda today.

The Boy Scouts of America - LaSalle Council has tried to instill values, build self-esteem, prepare youth to make ethical choices over their lifetime, and promote social development through resident summer camps. The primary focus of the Boy Scouts has been the positive development of

youth. The Scouts have always been sensitive to rising social problems relating to youth, and have successfully implemented programs which provide earnest attempts to educate and instill in youth a proper response to these problems.

The YMCA of Michiana has also been at the forefront of social change by providing programs and support to all those in need. The YMCA of Michiana has been providing programs and services that meet the health and social service needs of children and families for years. The YMCA continues to be dedicated to influencing the generations by exhibiting values and leadership which represent the principles that they hold in the highest regard.

The independent organizations that came together to form the diversity program for youth have all been successful in helping their respective populations. The collaborative organizations' combined expertise and common goals, to help youth become aware, accept and affirm diversity, were instrumental in the creation of an effective program.

The Executive Director of each agency agreed to meet to discuss ideas for developing a diversity program for students. They invited Mary Pat Hatcher-Disler from the South Bend Community School Corporation to attend the meeting as well.

The coalition developed a set of program objectives, they included the following:

Members of the coalition initially set out with three specific goals: plan the agenda and logistics for the first session, identify the students to participate, and find funding for the initiative. They not only set goals but seemed to become the implementors of the plan/program as well. This required staff time from each organization.

The program development coalition decided that it would be best to target sixth grade students for a three year program. They believed that sixth grade students are often confronted with diversity issues right before they enter the Middle School level. This program might offer the last, best intervention before they moved on to the next level. Since this would be a pilot program with limited funds they needed to chose only two schools to

1. *To create a model to be replicated working with a pilot group of students who have potential for influencing their peers in the area of prejudice reduction.*

2. *To enhance the appreciation of each individual's worth through an understanding that diversity is a strength and exclusion of any person or group is a weakness.*

3. *To provide a format for discussing prejudice through active, thoughtful participation.*

4. *To establish a network to provide necessary support enabling the participants to feel comfortable making right choices.*

5. *To reduce the perpetuating of stereotyping and myths related to equity, gender, economic class, religious differences, age, and differing abilities through the dissemination of accurate information.*

6. *To sensitize students to others' needs and feelings.*

7. *To contribute to a documentable reduction of incidence of racial and sexual harassment and abuse.*

8. *To form a coalition of youth serving agencies committed to valuing diversity in the Bend community.*

9. *To enhance leadership skills and provide opportunities to demonstrate those skills.*

work with initially. They hoped that once the program was proven successful and obtained increased funding, other schools and more students would be added. They asked SBCSC's Superintendent, Dr. Virginia Calvin, to help decide which schools to target. She recommended Harrison and Kennedy Schools because of their diverse student

populations. According to Mary Pat Hatcher-Disler, "Both of these schools have a large numbers of high risk students; they may be economically disadvantaged and have other barriers to address that make them needy."

The coalition took their ideas for a leadership training and diversity awareness program to the principals, teachers and counselors at the schools to get their buy-in and cooperation. Twenty-five students from each of the two schools were chosen by teachers to make up the first group. The coalition specified the students selected should be "natural" leaders, not solely academic achievers. They should be students whom others followed, whose leadership could be channeled toward achieving the elimination or reduction of prejudice among their peers. The teachers assured the coalition that they could identify the appropriate students and promised their support. The first group chosen to participate had gender balance, racial balance and was made up of natural and potential leaders.

Letters were sent to the prospective participants and to their parents requesting their permission to participate in these activities. No parents refused. No student refused the offer to participate, even though it meant giving up a treasured free day. Arrangements were made for students to be picked up by a school bus near their home and delivered to the meeting sites.

The YMCA sponsored a session for other community agency leaders focusing on prejudice reduction. They brought a two person team - a young woman who has cerebral palsy and an African-American - who had done work in Fort Wayne schools and at the YMCA, to lead community agency representatives through prejudice reduction activities in the hopes they might decide to learn to become facilitators of prejudice reduction workshops. This same team was used to "kick-off" the first presentation to the fifty students. Kirby Falkenberg, Executive Director of the YMCA of Michiana remembers, "Angie and Spencer were really great facilitators. Angie is Caucasian and handicapped and she was raised in Washington D.C. by an African American family; and Spencer is African American. So they themselves brought a lot of diversity to the group. They were an excellent starting place for the program."

The first session, entitled "Celebrating Diversity" was upbeat and positive. The presenting team kept the students' attention and attempted to involve every student. Teachers from the school accompanied the students to the first session and continued to do so throughout the school year. The principals and guidance counselors attended portions of the sessions, as well. All five (5) agencies were represented at the sessions. Students were energized and were building diversity awareness.

A short follow-up session was held (during school hours) with those students from the two (2) schools. (All five (5) agencies participated). Through some interactive group activities students identified the values

they believed were most important for them; they moved forward in their mission to provide positive, peer leadership toward reducing prejudice and developing tolerance for an appreciation of diversity.

At the second session, entitled "I Know I'm Somebody," students identified values they consider important: respect, honesty, responsibility, cooperation, control, fairness, hope, self discipline, diversity, and faith. The identified values were the driving force behind the students selecting a name for their group and a pledge (mission) for membership. The group had become known as HEROES: Honest, Educated, Responsible, Obedient, Energetic, Students. Their pledge:

I promise that I will respect, love and cherish all people, especially HEROES, throughout the world. I will also respect our environment. I shall try to my utmost ability to uphold these ten values at school and in any community.

Some middle school and high school Girl Scouts students served as facilitators for small group discussions and as helpers to lead presenters of the day's program at the second workshop. They were excellent role models and were close enough in age to "talk the students' language." It was beneficial for the adolescent helpers to assume leadership and responsibility in guiding their younger peers toward acceptance of diversity.

The third session/workshop, entitled "I Want to Be a Mirror...A Reflection of YOU," was held at the YMCA in the spring of 1994. This workshop featured adult role models, most of whom were parents, who shared with students the problems of growing up as a minority community member and the hopes and dreams they have for today's youth.

In the late spring of 1994, an evaluation meeting was held with all stakeholders represented. Students, teachers, principals, counselors, and all five (5) community agencies were in attendance. Students expressed great pride in being selected to be a member of the HEROES and they were pleased to learn the program would be continued next school year.

All three (3) workshops were held at sites that promote and serve as educationally diverse centers, such as, churches, synagogues, universities, etc. and, that some HEROES participants had not previously experienced, enhancing their view of appreciating diversity and keeping students with high expectations and hopes for their future.

A picnic was held in early August, prior to the start of school in an effort to keep in touch with the HEROES. Participants and their families attended the picnic and were very supportive of the HEROES initiative and its purpose. Group A HEROES participants were anxious to begin Year Two (8th Grade).

The coalition members worked hard to ensure continued growth and

development of the HEROES program throughout the first year. Ed Smitana, Boy Scouts Executive Director, recalls that, "The Executive Directors of each agency really came together to form the program. We were each able to provide input specific to our own knowledge and experience working with children." This knowledge and experience helped the coalition plan for Year 2 and Year 3 of the HEROES program.

HEROES Year Two (7th Graders) focused on acceptance of diversity and peaceful schools, and included workshops with discussions about such topics as: privilege and power, gender equity, dealing with violence and anger, sexuality, family structure, and discrimination. Year Two introduced participants to a community service project, job shadowing and HEROES retreat.

Year Three (8th Graders) focused on affirmation of diversity, and involved workshops that included skills training on such topics as: leadership skills, listening skills, communication skills, organizational skills, and assertiveness training. During Year Three the coalition wanted students to involve themselves in a community service projects, however, that did not come to fruition. According to Kirby Falkenberg, "the students, at this point in their development, were just too focused on themselves. They could not initiate a community service involvement - we may have been unrealistic to think that this would happen."

The HEROES program has had two groups of approximately fifty (50) students completed the program (Group A in 1996 and Group B in 1997). In the fall of 1997 the coalition started its third group of fifty (50) sixth grade students (they will complete the program in the spring of 1999). The Coalition was unable to start Group C in the fall of 1996 because of their own individual organization work load. Kirby Falkenberg recalls, "We were all so busy with organizational demands that we were not able to start a group of sixth graders in the fall of 1996. We were able to get things back on track this fall however."

Organizers did not want to skip the 1996 group and would like to be able to add more schools and students to the program. Because of other agency-related demands on staff and the lack of funding, organizers have been unable to bring this about. According to Connie Moore, YMCA staff member and HEROES program implementor, "If we had a staff position dedicated to the HEROES program we probably wouldn't have had to skip the HEROES programming in the fall of 1996. We really need to find funding for a dedicated staff person."

With limited funds the HEROES program has been unable to grow as was initially anticipated. Since the program began the SBCSC has helped financially by providing substitute teachers and transportation. The HEROES organizers applied for funding and received a \$5,000.00 grant from the Bowsher-Booher Foundation in 1994. These funds were used to

pay for facilitators and other programmatic expenses and has helped keep the program running. Several other community organizations, including Indiana University South Bend and Temple Bethel donated meeting places. The HEROES Initiative has truly been a collaborative effort.

In order for the HEROES program to grow, organizers want to hire a full-time staff person to: act as a program coordinator; provide student follow-up; create and implement an evaluation component; and maintain records. The evaluation component is a critical element that has yet to be developed. It will measure the level of success of the HEROES program and determine if performance standards have been met. The staff person will also develop and administer pre and post surveys. The surveys will provide both qualitative and quantitative analysis. South Bend Community School Corporation teachers, who identified student participants, will also be surveyed to determine the effect that the HEROES Initiative has on classroom interaction and student behavior.

According to coalition members, the potential numbers of students affected is

expected to increase substantially as the HEROES Initiative is further developed and administered throughout the South Bend Community School Corporation. The HEROES Initiative is expected to affect a larger number of students each year as it moves into other elementary and middle schools within the SBCSC.

The program has been deemed successful by those who have participated in it as student HEROES, teachers, guidance counselors, and agency administrators and staff.

According to Vernell Thompson, Girls Scout staff member, "It has been evident, from the students' feedback, that the program has had an impact. During a celebration ceremony at the Marriott Hotel, HEROES Group A gave testimonials about the program that filled us all with pride

### **Recommendations from Community Agency Organizers & School Administrators**

1. Collaborate with multiple agencies. They all bring something diverse to the table. Make sure to everyone involved and informed!
2. Include your beneficiaries (the youth) on the planning team - their voices should be heard. Let students drive the program!
3. Make sure that those who will implement the program are also included on the planning team. a clear line of communication between the planners and implementors.
4. Try to maintain a clear focus and develop a plan - from the start!
5. Keep in contact with the youth. There needs to be someone who will follow-up on the students keep them connected to the program during the quiet times.
6. Keep in contact with the schools. Inform the school guidance counselors and administrators of standards and expectations of the HEROES program.
7. Create an evaluation tool and structure before you start the programming!
8. Be consistent with the commitment to programming from year to year. Each HEROES Group offers the same opportunities. But be flexible - each HEROES Group will be different and have different to offer.
9. Use high energy, diverse, and engaging facilitators!
10. Provide a certificate of achievement for each student and/or organize a celebration/graduation at end of the three year period. This gives students the opportunity to reflect on their experience and share impressions with others.
11. Invite parents, teachers, school administrators, funders and others to the graduation so that they can hear about the impact of the program!
12. Commit to following-up with each and every student after they graduate from the program. Find out how HEROES has impacted their Middle & High School experiences.
13. Invite HEROES graduates back to share their experience with the current HEROES participants.
14. Keep the school system, administrators and teachers involved! This could help the program move into other schools and school systems.
15. Get support from school system administrators, principals and the Superintendent. This requires a financial commitment as well.
16. Use agencies as a stage for students to act out what they learn during their HEROES experience. Students will get more involved in their community because of their connection to the participating agencies.
17. Don't expect the schools to take this on as a school based program. That is not the point. It's important for the community to work directly with students - it helps students to understand that they are part of the community and that the community cares about them!

and a sense of accomplishment."

The students who were chosen to participate in the HEROES program were not necessarily considered “successful” students. They did not get straight “A”s or excel in any particular way that would cause them to stand out from others in their grade or school. In fact, several students had low self-esteem and wondered why they were chosen to become HEROES. Ramona Parks, now a LaSalle High School sophomore remembers that, “ I didn’t really understand what was going on. When I learned that it

***I think of a hero as someone who understands the degree of responsibility that comes with his freedom.***  
- Bob Dylan -

**Students Become HEROES**

positive qualities.” Its important that teachers choose students who are not necessarily the typical leaders, “A” student or popular. Ramona Parks suggested that, “Teachers should put their heart into choosing the participants. They need to choose the students who will benefit the most from the HEROES program. They may not be obvious.”

The first session facilitated by the Fort Wayne duo was very well received by the students. The facilitators’ presentation and style was very “down-to-earth,” according to Ramona Parks. She recounts that, “They got inside of you to let you know that what you are special. That you don’t have to be ashamed of yourself because what happens to you happens to other people. It helped me to focus on a positive attitude. I felt that I was special too.”

***Nurture your mind with great thoughts, to believe in the heroic makes heroes.***  
- Benjamin Disraeli -

Another important aspect of the success of the program were the facilitators who were chosen to lead the groups. Many were dynamic and interesting to the students. They set the stage for students to feel comfortable and relaxed, and in turn, they were able to open up and share with each other. Danny Marshall, a Group A HEROES participant and LaSalle High School sophomore, remembers that, “They made us sit next to someone we didn’t know. It took some

***Heroism is not only in the man, but in the occasion.***  
- Calvin Coolidge -

time but we started to talk to people who we didn’t know from school. We ended up with friends from other schools. That was cool.”

The program truly focused on the participants. One successful aspect the HEROES appreciated was the input and influence they had on the programming. “It was about us!” remarked Danny Marshall. “If something went wrong during one of the sessions, we were asked about how to improve it for the next session. We really felt like we were being listened to,” recalls Ramona Parks.

Several HEROES participants suggested that past HEROES

graduates return to share their experiences with younger students. Both Ramona Parks and Danny Marshall have returned to HEROES Group C to talk about themselves and their own personal experiences. "I think it's important to have other young adults or teenagers present especially at the first meeting of any HEROES group, it will help students to see their peers - they will feel more comfortable," advised Ramona Parks.

The graduation celebration at the Marriott Hotel was very special to the administrators and the students as well. It was a great opportunity to hear first hand about the accomplishments, attitude changes and feelings of those who participated in the program. Ramona Parks recalls, "We organized and planned what we wanted to do. We played games that we played during the sessions and spent some time remembering what each session held for us. Our parents were also there so we introduced them and others. My favorite part, the most important part, the part that made me cry, was when we turned the lights out and lit a candle. The candle was passed around the circle of HEROES and whoever had the candle told what HEROES meant to them or what they had learned."

The HEROES program has been very

important to not only the youth who have participated in it but to their parents, teachers, administrators and others who will interact with these future leaders throughout their lives. Both the youth and administrators who

***The world's battlefields have been in the heart chiefly; more heroism has been displayed in the household and the closet, than on the most memorable battlefields in history.***

**- Henry Ward Beecher -**

have been involved in the development of this program believe that HEROES is critical to the success of the community and society in general. They believe that it is an effort to ensure a future that is void of bigotry and hatred. Ramona Parks reminds us all that, "People should never tire from doing what's right."

***In our world of big names, curiously, our true heroes tend to be anonymous. In this life of illusion and quasi-illusion, the person of solid virtues who can be admired for something more substantial than his well-knownness often proves to be the unsung hero: the teacher, the nurse, the mother, the honest cop, the hard worker at lonely, underpaid unglamorous, unpublicized jobs.***

**-Daniel J. Boorstin -**