



The Kindness Curriculum

Life-skills learning turns middle-school special education students into entrepreneurs

By David P. Dunn

Four years ago, I got the opportunity to take on three 12:1:1 special education classrooms from a neighboring middle school due to a shift in enrollment. I knew that the students would enhance the climate of the building, and I couldn't wait for the classes to start. An added bonus? I would be able to hire teachers for each of the three grade-level classes.

In the first year, it didn't take our sixth-grade teacher, Lindsey Forma, long to find out how she could

incorporate real-life skills into a curriculum that could benefit all of Martha Brown Middle School. Her students developed the Busy Bean Café as a beverage service for staff.

Two days a month after lunch, Forma's students set up the Busy Bean Café in the main foyer and serve staff for 30 minutes. We provided training; students interviewed for specific positions and were responsible for all aspects of running the cafe. They created promotional flyers, identified

the products staffers were interested in buying, purchased the supplies, and accounted for all monthly sales.

Within a few months, students received feedback that some staff would appreciate delivery service to their classrooms. In response to the staff's request, the Busy Bean Café designed a Google form to streamline cafe orders for the delivery cart.

Though Forma facilitates Busy Bean's operation, it was run completely by students in the class.



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“The Busy Bean Café was the result of wanting to establish an authentic learning opportunity for my students to practice skills they were learning in the classroom,” Forma says. “The Busy Bean Café provides students with an opportunity to practice money skills, social skills, and life skills and create relationships with customers.”

Students enjoyed real-world experiences involving reading, writing, and arithmetic. “Being part of the Busy Bean Café has been the best part of school in my life so far,” says Brandon, a seventh-grader.

Service Through Snacks

The following year, teacher Jodi O’Dell wanted to continue the work associated with the Busy Bean Café for 12:1:1 students moving into

seventh grade. Following students' interest in providing a service to peers who might not have access to healthy snacks, the class created the Kindness Corner.

Leveraging the success of the Busy Bean Café, O'Dell purchased food based on online student research and price comparisons from local grocery store flyers. Staff members donated inventory, and students collected donations and organized them in the classroom and nurse's office.

Aided by school counselors and word-of-mouth, students in need found out they had access to healthy snacks, as well as hygiene products. The Kindness Corner served approximately 25 students a day by the end of the year.

"We have created more than a safe place to get a snack or hygiene product," O'Dell says. "We have created a feeling of community and family. We are learning, and helping others; this is a win-win. Students also feel a great sense of pride in knowing they are helping others."

"I think it is special that we don't know who we help, but that we are helping," adds seventh-grader Jamie.

Continuing the Kindness

After seeing other grade levels create a sense of community through the Busy Bean Café and the Kindness Corner, eighth-grade special education teacher Lisa Juhasz met with her students to brainstorm ways to support both programs. As a result, the "Think PINK Boutique" was established.

Think PINK (People in Need of Kindness) is one of our major PBIS initiatives; during the month, staff wear Think PINK T-shirts, and the PBIS Committee sponsors a Kindness activity during homeroom. The role of the Think PINK Boutique is to create and sell products that support the theme of kindness.

Students learn the concept of a business plan, decide what products to make, and design them. They

determine the cost of each item, promote the products via video, and sell the products during Busy Bean Café hours. Behind-the-scenes work involves making products (developing fine motor skills), calculating costs, advertising, packaging, and ensuring quality control.

At the point of sale, students apply pragmatic skills to work the checkout, use their customer relationship skills, count money, make change, and track inventory. Products sold through the Think PINK Boutique include painted wooden heart magnets, chocolate roses, and pink necklaces for Valentine's Day.

Juhasz and her students say that the Think PINK Boutique offers a great service to Martha Brown students and helps spread the word about PINK with dedication and joy. The Think PINK message is heard loud and clear by everyone at the school. **P**

David P. Dunn is principal of Martha Brown Middle School in Fairport, N.Y.



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— Jodi O'Dell, seventh-grade special education teacher, Martha Brown Middle School