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## **COLLABORATING ACROSS CULTURES**

### **Grand Blanc City Schools**

#### **Grand Blanc, Michigan**

Collaborating with the Perry Center community is one of the things that upper grade students at City School do best! The students learn in one of two elementary classrooms in a building that houses fourteen different programs. This unique setting allows the students to experience a variety of ages and activities throughout the school year. These third, fourth, and fifth grade students have worked with the three all-day kindergarten classes, assisted with youngsters on the loop buses, helped to create a true Children's Garden, and met with the adult English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. These collaborations have given the children a distinct view that learning is life-long and occurs at all ages and stages of development.

The collaboration between the adult ESL students and the elementary students encouraged both groups to talk with each other, thus extending their understanding and appreciation of each other. In the winter, the groups met initially to interview each other and later wrote about what they had learned. Both groups eagerly looked forward to their first meeting...unsure of what to expect. The adults actually arrived about a half hour early to class that day!

The elementary students had prepared a few interview questions in advance for the quite informal meeting. The exchange was fabulous! Two to three students grouped with each adult; they sat close to each other and talked for about 45 minutes. The new acquaintances enjoyed refreshments, and then the elementary students observed a "formal" English lesson taught to the adult students.

The next meeting was similar; although there was a definite comfort level with the recognition of familiar faces. All were very excited to see each other.

Following that meeting, the elementary students wrote their "interviews" describing what they had learned about their new friend and her or his culture. They delivered a copy to their new friends. The children later received wonderful thank-you letters from the ESL students.

Both the children and the adults were extremely pleased with the results of their meetings. The elementary students gained tremendous understanding about an individual and her/his motivation for coming to the United States and working so hard to learn English. They also felt very proud of what their “friend” had been able to accomplish during her/his studies. The students reevaluated their ideas of what these people were able to do and the skills they brought with them to the U.S. The adults were very fond of the children and anxious to share much information about life in their previous country and their dreams for their life in the United States. They seemed to find such willing listeners and were not afraid to test their English with these students. Although the results were not formally measured, the children’s parents all commented on how much their children enjoyed the collaboration and how much they had gained.

Collaborating with the community has enriched everyone involved with both of these school programs.

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