

A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

L.B. Williams Elementary students in Mitchell know the importance of a good first impression after a year embedded in problem based learning focused on first impressions.

The idea started with two teachers from LBW—Cheryle Aslesen, multiage 1st and 2nd grade, and Stacy Morgan, 5th grade. They made a plan to address a real problem in their school—the lost and found box. At a South Dakota Innovation Lab summer professional development week, the teachers put together a plan around improving the appearance of their school for visitors, students, and staff.

Aslesen and Morgan never imagined how that project would grow once it got into the hands of the kids.

The teaching team collaborated together to create experiences that were tailored to the learning at their grade level in accordance with the standards, but they also rose above and beyond those expectations to immerse their students in group and individual tasks across grade levels that would challenge their thinking and require problem solving skills.

First, they worked around the idea of what someone's first impression of them is and the character traits that provide a good first impression.

The next step was to identify what the first impression of L.B. Williams School is. The kids found several things that they wanted to address, but decided to focus on the lost and found. They determined that based on the number of clothing items that are left behind every year, there had to be a better way to return lost items to their rightful owners. They started out by creating a brightly colored, much more presentable box to place the lost and found items in.

Then it was up to the youngest students to sort and organize those items and place them into containers labeled by the specific purpose they served—gloves and mittens in one box, shoes in another, shirts and sweatshirts in another, and the sort went on.

The older kids then took those items and determined the value of each item to report out to the families of the school and also photographed the items and sent them on to the school website designer to be posted on the LBW site for parents to view and identify.

Students kept records of the items and donated them to the Salvation Army after they had been displayed for one month. They also sent out reminders to parents to label their child's clothing so it would be easier to return and they made announcements to the school to remind kids to make sure they come inside with both mittens, their hats, scarves and other articles of clothing.

According to L.B. Williams Principal Becky Roth, the students were quite engaged with the process.

"I was amazed to see the students using their critical thinking skills to truly understand the different aspects of what all needed to be accomplished with this project," Roth said. "By connecting the hands-on learning experience with a 'real-world' problem to solve was a positive educational experience for our students."

Once this problem was tackled and a system was in place the kids decided to extend their efforts to the community.

They made presentations at businesses and to city officials



about the first impression of their community. Based on the students' plans and the importance of their message, the Mitchell 'Do Good' grant provided by Mitchell Telecom was awarded to the classes in the amount of \$1,500 to improve the first impression of Mitchell.

It was back to the design cycle for the kids to create a plan. Students decided to put all of their efforts into the Visitors Center just off of I-90 at exit 332.

They collaborated with local garden and landscape centers, a local curbing company and city officials to create a plan to landscape around the Mitchell welcome sign and add planters to the visitor's booth. The kids had to work out a budget, research plants that would be viable at that location and create a design for the area. All of these skills helped them meet their grade level standards while participating in real learning around solving a real problem.

The final presentation of their learning included a ribbon cutting event at which Mitchell Mayor Ken Tracy made a speech and there was a picnic at the Visitor's Center for the kids.

"Working on the Visitor Center project was my favorite," L. B. Williams 2nd Grade Student Cella Nath said. "I especially enjoyed brainstorming with the 5th grade students throughout the year."

The project was completed in the spring of 2014, but that didn't mean that it was over. The kids had to work out a schedule to maintain the area during the summer months and evaluate the effectiveness of their entire project.

LBW students also evaluated the effectiveness of the lost and found project at the end of the year. They discovered that over \$1,000 worth of clothing was given away from the lost and found at the end of the year. This meant that the problem would have to be addressed again in the 2014-15 school year, which is exactly what is happening.

Under Aslesen and Morgan's guidance, a new group of kids have evaluated their design and are working on modifying the project. The students at LB Williams continue to modify the project and their teachers are realizing that the greatest learning happens in the modification stage.

Looking at problems as an opportunity is a valuable skill these students will carry with them.

LEARNING FIRST HAND

• MCTEA OFFERS STUDENTS IN-DEPTH EDUCATION IN CAREER AREAS

The Mitchell School District, partnering with Mitchell Technical Institute, created the Mitchell Career and Technical Education Academy (MCTEA) in August 2012 to provide high school students from Mitchell and surrounding schools with rigorous, hands-on learning opportunities in many career areas.

MCTEA offers courses that range from introductory to highly skilled, and its mission is to provide educational experiences to prepare students for the high-tech, high-skill workplace of the 21st century. Day-to-day expenses of MCTEA are funded by the Mitchell School District and area districts. MCTEA also received a \$1.2 million grant from the Governor's Office for renovation, equipment purchases, and training of staff.

Offering three programs in 2012 – PLTW (Project Lead the Way) Biomedical Science, Welding and Culinary Arts & Nutrition – MCTEA has grown to eight program offerings in 2014-15, with the additions of Health Science, PLTW Pathway to Engineering, Architecture & Construction, Automotive Technology, and Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources.

More than 600 students, who can earn high school and post-secondary credits, are expected to enroll in the MCTEA courses this year, which is three times as many as enrolled in the program's first year.

In addition to learning technical skills, MCTEA courses provide students with the opportunities to apply the science and math skills they are learning in their academic courses.

"Having a current or former student excited to tell me that she or he is applying the concepts learned in math class in a CTE course emphasizes the important relationship between academics and CTE," MCTEA Director Denise Hoffman said.

Graduates who completed CTE courses during high school have been able to apply what is being taught in the CTE courses to their future endeavors.

"The CTE Welding classes I took in high school were very helpful in preparing me for my future," Michael Geidel, a former



welding student, said. "I entered my post-secondary program with a definite advantage over many of my classmates."

Numerous businesses and industries in Mitchell and eastern South Dakota also partner with the MCTEA, including Trail King Industries, Maguire Iron, Pirogues Catering, Avera, Vern Eide Automotive, Iverson Chrysler Center, Lakeview Veterinary Clinic, SDSU Extension and Patzer Woodworking.

The partnership that has been developed between secondary education, post-secondary education and industry is important to the success of MCTEA.

"The demand for technically trained workers in the United States has simply exploded," MTI President Greg VonWald said.

"The whole premise behind the Career and Technical Education Academy is to provide students with opportunities, through the use of applied educational methods, to learn and develop knowledge and skills that will directly apply to technical careers in the American workforce."

