



Creating First-Class Experiences for Forgotten Schools: Why Not Us?

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Demographics

I teach at Pittsburgh Westinghouse. Our school has grades 6-12. The location of the campus is on the East End of Pittsburgh. It serves the communities of Homewood, Garfield, Lincoln-Larimer, Wilksburg, and East Hills. The label of our school is Title I school, and 100% percent of the school is economically disadvantaged (1).

Presently, our school is in school improvement. According to the district's website, the school's attendance rate currently stands with 68% of students labeled as chronically absent, and 32% have regular attendance. Of that, 18.4% of students are Promise Eligible, meaning they have a 2.5 or higher GPA and at least 90% attendance. The district average for Promise Ready students is 55.3% (2). The current enrollment at the school is 661 students. Regarding the Keystone Exam, our school's ranking in English and Algebra is one, meaning "significant evidence that the district or school did not meet the standard for PA Academic Growth (3).

Regarding the 2021-2022 PSSA testing for middle school students, Westinghouse scored a three in ELA, meaning there was "evidence that the district or school met the standard for PA Academic." The school's middle school math PSSA score was a four, indicating the students showed "moderate evidence that the district or school exceeded the standard for PA Academic Growth." Pittsburgh Public Schools has a suspension rate of 13.4% for the year 2022-2023, as determined by the number of students suspended divided by the total number of students at any point in the school year. Westinghouse's suspension percentage was 23.8% for the same school year (4). The graduation rate for the 2021-2022 school year shows 83% of students graduating, which mirrors the graduation rate of the district at 83.3% (5).

Our school has a student-to-teacher ratio of 11-1. Regarding student diversity, 93.2% percent of the students are African American, 1.6% identify as white, 2.8% of two or more races, 1.7% identify as Hispanic, and 0.7% identify as other (6).

Rationale

I believe Black children should expect to learn in grown and first-class schools. They should be able to experience exposure opportunities similar to the white children of the suburbs or the private schools such as Shadyside Academy, Winchester Thurston, Ellis, Central Catholic, and Oakland Catholic. Down the road from Westinghouse, you'll find Shadyside Academy has an international program where students visit several countries. (7) These opportunities are also available in neighboring public school districts. Upper St. Clair takes its students to Asia. (8) Mount Lebanon has an international travel opportunity, too. (9) Even in our district, you'll find magnet schools that, before COVID-19, took these trips routinely, and many have them restarted again.

We have students who do everything right and yet district policies support the school being seen as a dumping ground for students who don't meet the standards other places. This morally wrong and yet people have done very little amend hurtful policies. Every student should have the chance to explore the world, not just those who seem to have been born for a better life due to their parents, skin color, or resources that continue to be hoarded by conservative and liberal parents alike. If it sounds like I have a bone to pick, I do. I'm disappointed with the society and the city and feel that its liberal idealism comes to a complete stop when it comes to school integration, sharing of resources, and sacrificing of privilege. Too often "allies" disappear anytime the idea of their children sharing a classroom with mine is on the table.

It is for these reasons; I have lost trust in the current system. For one reason or another it seems privileged individuals won't associate themselves with us. They refuse to enroll their children in our community and keep their resources to themselves. This unit is for educators who believe that their students are worthy of a first-class experience and are willing to step out of their contractual obligations to deliver for their students. The unit should serve as a guide to teachers who want to provide their students with a classroom without borders but need financial means to make this happen.



(Sean Means-Standing in front of a Steve Irwin photo at the Australian Zoo)

Why Must Students Appreciate Nature and its Forest

For children who live in urban settings, their experience with animals is often limited to domestic dogs and cats or wild animals in zoos. To most students from the city, wild animals are only found in zoos or TikTok videos. Furthermore, the plants they've seen are usually in their local parks and Home Depot. By experiencing nature in its rawest form, students can gain respect for its power and begin to think about what could happen if it no longer exists. According to *National Geographic*, the Rainforest is Earth's longest-lasting ecosystem. According to Rainforest Concern, tropical forests contain over 30 million species and animals, which represents half of the earth's entire wildlife population and two-thirds of the plant species that exist on the planet (10). "These forests are extremely dense. Walking through a rainforest, one may encounter a 10-square-kilometer (four-square-mile) patch that can contain as many as 1,500 flowering plants, 750 species of trees, 400 species of birds, and 150 species of butterflies." (11)

Another reason children must understand and appreciate the rainforest is its ability to regulate the earth's temperature. In Paulo Artaxo's "Tropical Forests are Crucial in Regulating the Climate of the Earth," it states that "forests are responsible for much of the carbon removal by terrestrial ecosystems, removing about 29% of annual CO₂ emissions or 15.6 gigatons of CO₂ each year. Tropical forests have a critical role in supporting biodiversity, storing carbon, regulating the water cycle, influencing the radiation balance via albedo, and having an important role in human well-being." (12) In other words, the forest represents a filtration system to consume, filter and clean up the carbon in the atmosphere.

Although the benefits of rainforests are well documented by scientists across the globe, these natural purification systems are under constant threat by developing nations and capitalistic economies. Paulo Aratox explains, "Protection, expansion, and improved management of the world's forests are important initiatives to keep global warming below 2 degrees. Tropical deforestation leads to strong net global warming because of CO₂ emissions and biophysical effects (albedo, evapotranspiration, and canopy roughness). Models show that completely deforesting the tropics could result in global warming equivalent to that caused by the burning of fossil fuels since 1850, with more warming and considerable drying in the tropics, with Amazonia responding more strongly than Southeast Asia or Central Africa. Besides the commitments of several countries to achieve zero deforestation, tropical forests are still cut down at a high rate, especially in Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Indonesia. According to the *Guardian*, Brazil is dealing with a crisis connected to the economic gains of foreign nations. In February of 2023, its Amazon rainforest had a record-high month in the number of trees cut down, as shown by government satellite evidence. According to the *Guardian*, this is an increase of 62% compared to last year. Much of Brazil's rainforest deregulation is a consequence of the nation's inability to maintain a strong central government. During his administration, Jair Bolsonaro, the nation's previous leader, did not prioritize rainforest conservation. A Greenpeace spokesman, Romulo Batista, explained that "addressing the crisis will require rebuilding of human resources of environmental agencies that were gutted by the far-right populist, a process which cannot happen overnight." (13) While Brazil's efforts for a new government that prioritizes its natural resources are in the works, the process needs to speed up before the nation loses its most valuable asset.

Another forest in Central America is that of the Dominican Republic, home to Los Haitises National Park. When

students visit the park, they will be surrounded by over 700 plant species, 17 endemic to this region alone. The park also is home to 110 species of birds, one-third of the entire bird population in the nation. (14) The rainforest has hundreds of rivers, streams, and cliffs for anyone willing to take on the journey. Students benefit from these types of experiences because it takes them out of their comfort zone. Their phones don't work, so GPS can no longer direct them, although there are modern accommodations in some town, many times students are faced with an opportunity to live on and off the land in ways they'd never experienced. Penny Whitehouse said, "Do not wait until your child's school understands how important green time is for their growing minds. Today, leave the homework untouched in favor of outdoor play and real-world learning"(14). As a teacher, this is the appropriate approach to learning both in and out of the classroom. We cannot wait for systems to create these experiences. Instead, we must do it ourselves.

Prior to the COVID years, our neighboring schools, both in and out of our district, have taken their students to other nations annually. I have spoken to these teachers, and they have taken their children to South America, Central America, China, Europe, and Canada. On the trips to South and Central America, the students could visit the rainforest and become one with nature. They have been able to make such a trip every single year. Our school has been less fortunate.

I am not a Spanish teacher. My proficiency in the language is limited to just a few words, such as "Hola" and "Mucho Gusto." However, I believe in the power of exposure and worked with my colleagues to create experiences for our children. At Pittsburgh Westinghouse, our school has organized one trip abroad, to Costa Rica since I've been there. I was one of two teachers on that trip, and I remember its impact on our students and how their appreciation for nature grew from that experience. I was not the main teacher when we took our kids to Costa Rica. Instead, I acted as a chaperone and documentary photographer, providing support in any way possible. The financial planning for the trip involved a lot of effort, such as winning a grant and fundraising locally. The parents could have contributed more financially. There were some delays due to district-level procedures, but finally, the students could board the plane. Some students felt anxious while flying above the clouds and sought comfort from us during a layover at the Houston airport. After arriving in Costa Rica, we quickly got into a van and drove for three hours until we reached a riverside with canoes, which would take us to our living arrangements in the rainforest.

The students entered a world untouched by humans as they boarded the canoes. They saw trees they had never encountered in their science books. The canoes had small motors for upstream progress, but the men with paddles were the main source of movement. These men didn't speak English, have access to GPS, but knew the water and the way. On our journey to the campsite, the group saw various animals, such as monkeys, snakes, frogs, turtles, and more. After arriving, the students didn't have cell phones to distract them (what a blessing) so they focused on the ecosystem and culture around them instead. During our stay we our students walked down different trails daily, and their tour guide told them that although the ground was hard under their feet now, it had been marshland thirty years ago. This was an eye-opening experience to the impact of global warming, a consequence of the combusting of fossil fuels, warming of oceans and the melting of glaciers. Seeing the direct impact of human actions outside their local area was a unique experience for students who'd only understood the theory found in their books.

In addition, our students could enjoy the locally sourced food from the community. The chicken that roamed around in the morning was on our dinner plates. A local teacher would teach us about their customs each day, and although they struggled at times, our kids tried to understand. Our students made coffee from local plants. They used bows and arrows and screamed at night when spiders would enter the cabin to say hello. We also played a soccer game with the locals, most of whom had no shoes, but they crushed us. We were

winded and down ten to zero within just a few minutes. By the end of our time, our kids learned the different names of the plants along the people in the village and the plants along the trails. Students helped take rocks back and forth to help build a school and cut down trees for wood. Our cohort gained an appreciation for the community and its ecosystem that would not have been attainable if we had never made the trip.

The Impact of International Travel: Teachers and Students Testify

Westinghouse Students' Testimony

Thanks to the Spanish teacher at that time, our students were able to experience a experience that they still talk about today. Keyshawn, the valedictorian of his senior class, reflects on that experience, saying he remembers "living off the land and eating all of the healthy food." He continues, "The food was fresh and healthier than what we eat at home." Vanque, another student on the trip, repeated the same statement in her interview, explaining how the food's freshness was something they had yet to come across back home. Vanque reflects on the native cuisine, saying, "The food was amazing. The juice was so fresh. They had a new fruit on top of the juice daily, so we knew what we were drinking. We also made chocolate with cacao beans. They fed us so good, and we ate three times daily with snacks in between." (15) It's important to note how important the interest in food is and why. In Pittsburgh, the Homewood neighborhood where the students live is identified as a food desert. According to the Food Empowerment Project, food deserts are geographic areas where residents' access to affordable, healthy food options (especially fresh fruits and vegetables) is restricted or nonexistent due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient traveling distance." (16) Furthermore, the United States Department of Agriculture defines food deserts as areas of poverty with 20% of the median household income not exceeding 80% of the median household income statewide in non-suburban communities. Looking at the impact of these situations, Medical News Today explains the consequences of such a reality. Katherine Marengo, LDN, explains, "Without access to healthful foods, people living in food deserts may be at higher risk of diet-related conditions, such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease." (17) By having the experience of eating healthy food that is naturally grown, students begin to ask questions on how they can help to bring life-line resources back into their communities. Keyshawn explains how much he and his classmates enjoyed the plane ride. For most students, it was their first time being on a plane. Victoria Parker of Purdue University says, "Over the past decade, study abroad has experienced gradual growth in Black student involvement. During the 2018-2019 academic year, Black students studied abroad at their highest rate of 6.4%. However, white students make up 68.7% of study-abroad students." (18)

In a case study of a single university, the primary students who studied abroad were "White, affluent, middle- or upper-middle class female students, who study the humanities or social sciences [18]." However, "a significant proportion of the U.S. college population, including Blacks and lower socioeconomic status students, don't typically participate in study abroad programs [2, 16, 19-21]. For example, in 2004/5, among students at four-year institutions, while White students comprised 66% of the population, their representation in study abroad programs was 83% compared to a meager 3.5% Black student representation from a college population of 12.5%." (19)

Regarding societal norms and expectations, the Westinghouse students who went on the trip began to reflect on the differences in the village compared to what they had home. Both Westinghouse students said they noticed that the showers didn't have warm water. Vanque explains that the trip "took me out of my comfort

zone because I was a spoiled brat at home. So the living situation was new to me. We slept on bunk beds with nets. It made me appreciate the United States, my family, and my home more because people have it worse than I do." (20) Keyshawn further explains, "The natives were friendly and lived life like they had no worries, and it was hard to understand why when they had a few things we didn't back at home. It made you appreciate the things we have and realize we don't need them to live. We have it easy here in America."

Both students felt the trip was worth it and were happy they'd gone. Vanque explains that the trip gave her new experiences that she'd never thought she'd have and changed her perspective on life. "I loved the entire trip. I recommend everyone to go on a mission trip—a life-changing experience. Keyshawn provided a supportive statement of his reflection, saying that he can no longer eat the bananas back at home and that the time he spent with his classmates is something he'll cherish forever.

Challenge Charter High

Former First Lady Michelle Obama explains that the benefits of studying abroad are almost endless. "First of all, it's going to make you much more marketable here in the United States because more and more companies realize that they need people with experiences around the world, who can speak different languages, who can transition easily into other cultures and people who bring to their jobs a sensibility and a sensitivity for other people." (21)

International travel of any kind can be expensive. Hence, it is important that an educator prepares to provide examples of how the benefits justify the cost of such an experience. In Heather Cunningham's "Building Intercultural Citizenship with Urban Youth: Lessons from International Service Learning," she begins to speak about the importance of international travel as a means of service learning. "Participation in global service learning allows students to engage with role models in effective community action, potentially promoting the positive attitude about commitment to the common good that students need for intercultural citizenship. (22) In her study, Cunningham worked with students in the International service-learning program at Challenge Charter High School, located in Rivertown in the middle of the Atlantic Region of the United States. The high school is made up of 81% urban residents, 56% of the students are African American, 39% of the school is white, and 61% of all of their students receive free or reduced lunch. The program comprised 12th-grade students, nineteen total participants, sixteen of whom participated in the study. In the study, she asked two main questions: "Does the perspective gained through the service-learning experiences affect the students' view of the local community, especially regarding social issues?" Second "Do the students feel greater moral responsibility from social problems in Costa Rica, Latin America, and the world?" (23) Before the trip, the participants took a seven-week class, meeting once weekly to prepare for their trip to Costa Rica. Students participated in a dual elective social studies and Science course during these sessions. During this course, students studied Costa Rican culture, rainforest ecology, sustainable development practices, political topics, current events, Costa Rican history, and additional environmental topics (24).

After months of meticulous planning, the students took off for their twelve-day trip. They met with several Costa Rican officials during their journey and had an exchange day at a local high school. They worked on their service-learning project and visited a volcano. One of the culminating ventures was a five-day excursion into the Bosque Alto rainforest (25). Students participating in the study were required to keep daily journals throughout their twelve days. Upon their return, the educators compiled the evidence presented by the students and found some recurring themes. Amy explains: The people we met so far were kind and willing to talk about their history and troubles....although we were strangers to them. If it was a North American, yes, some people are willing to share their life stories, but only a few are eager to be asked many questions and

answer them with a smile. (26).

Another student, Megan, explains the difference between gender roles compared to the United States. She states, "The only women working were the eleven of us [Americans]. The rest were men...Once we went to play...soccer, there were...four of us Challenge Charter kids playing that were female, and only one woman on the Tica [Costa Rican] side...Gender...plays a large part" (27).

Other students, such as Jacey and Rachelle, began to look at the Costa Rican citizens' social and economic situation in Costa Rica and compared that to the lives of the people back home. Both students had grown up in impoverished areas at home but noticed some differences and similarities to what they'd know poverty to look like back at home. Rachell explains, "Even though the people [in El Tigre] had nothing, they still were grateful and happy. Growing up with little and watching my mom struggle to keep a decent roof over my and my sister's heads and going without food, I know what the kids were going through...[But] instead of being sad or angered, they were happy." (28)

Personally witnessing their experience, Rachel grapples with the idea of one's expectations of what makes a decent standard of living, how perspective plays a real part in what we think we deserve, what we get, and what type of life makes us happy, "Racial critical awareness emerges from recognizing inequalities within and between the countries, contextualizing her own experience with poverty in a wider frame." (29) When we compare this to Jacey's testimonial, we see similar ideas and feelings. For example, "Back home, I am at the lower end of the economic scale...However...I probably live like a queen compared to most of El Tigre... Everyone always says to be grateful for what you have. However, seeing for yourself is an entirely different experience." (30)

Jacey continues as she says, "When you are poor in America...you are miserable. It's like, "I'm poor, so how am I gonna make ends meet"....But down here they... go on living life with what they have rather than focusing on what they don't have.....when we talked to the people in El Tigre, it was like, "God will provide " ..they are not going to worry themselves to death about what they don't have." (31)

One of the open-ended ideas that every child faces through this experience is the concept of attitude, how their attitudes at home differ from what they are currently experiencing. Jacey concludes that the poverty in Costa Rica differs from that of the United States. It's viewed as a huge problem because the people living within it seem more content with their lives. Such a reality pushes students, parents, and educators to think about what they expect from their lives. The trip challenged students to think critically about their expectations: social media, parental standards, and peer pressure. For instance, according to Business Insider, the United States has the highest number of antidepressant users worldwide, followed by Iceland, Australia, Canada, Denmark, and Sweden. Each of these has origins in the Western world, and all have taken part in the colonization of other nations, which has helped them lead lives connected to egomaniacs that are better on the surface.

The Challenge Charter High School students concluded that even though the people of Costa Rica were poor according to American standards, they were, in fact, happier. Everything is relative. This lesson would not have been possible with merely a book or video. The students had to be immersed in the environment for the most authentic study. The memories from that experience will help to create an appreciation for what they have at home and how they can help others at home and throughout the globe.

William Penn High School

Mike Doody is a high school science teacher at William Penn High School in New Castle County. The school's demographics comprise 48% African American students, 22% Hispanic, and 24% Caucasian. Mr. Doody believes in the importance of exposure opportunities for his students. He has taken it upon himself to create meaningful international travel experiences for the students under his care. During a trip to Costa Rica, he and his students had a chance to bond outside the classroom and in nature.

They spent three days on the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica, in Playa Palo, a beach community. While there, Michael and his students worked at a mangrove nursery, where they learned to harvest mangrove seeds. Working in a swamp, they transplanted the roots from the nursery to a forest restoration site. As he reflects on that time, it's easy to see his pride in his students. He explains, "They were sweaty and thirsty and hungry, but they did it all with a smile. They were giving back to a community they knew nothing about just a week before." Next, the trip continued to La Fortuna in the central volcanic islands. This particular stop encouraged more activity. Students could kayak, hike to a waterfall, and zip-line. Mr. Doody thinks this is an important component of any trip because students need to relax and have a good time.

Mr. Doody says that he believes "traveling changes who you are. It opens students' minds to new cultures, traditions, and foods and can inspire students to think differently about their own culture. It also challenges students to be problem solvers and critical thinkers. Group travel also forces students to interact with peers outside their normal friend group." (31)

During their time with the local people, the students were completely immersed in the culture. Mr. Doody explains, "Students had a chance to work with several different groups of Costa Ricans. In Palo Seco, we worked with local mangrove experts and the hotel staff. In Arenal, we interacted with many tour guides, hotel staff, and restaurant workers." (33) By speaking with several different groups, Micheal's students could engage with others from various backgrounds, social groups, and perspectives. To have his students work with students their age, they visited a rural school and had the chance to converse one-on-one. Although some of his students were already fluent in Spanish, this helped create an authentic space for learning through dialogue, in addition to the conversations they had each day with their guide.

Michael feels the trip helped his students learn more about nature, Costa Rican culture, and themselves. In a nostalgic moment, he remembers "playing card games with students when they unexpectedly went out. I had to teach several students how to play the game while others already knew how. Seeing those students help others and not judge them for not knowing something was awesome. It was also great to show students they didn't need to be glued to their cell phones." This testimony shows how separating oneself from what they've learned can benefit themselves and the relational energy shared by the entire group. Although trips like these are a significant investment in the teachers' time and energy, he says, "Taking the trip: being on 24/7 is mentally and physically exhausting. You have to be available to your students at all times. You are their parent for the trip, solving problems from losing a water bottle to having a stomach ache or an allergic reaction. It is not a vacation in any sense of the word - but it is still an incredible experience!" (34)

He believes that experiences like this are worth the effort as "I think it helps students see that they can change things, even if only on a small level. They broadened their food interests, trying new things that aren't readily available in Delaware. They forged bonds with peers they likely wouldn't have back home." (35)

So many professional developments start with how important it is for educators to care. Mike is one of those. Taking the time to book flights and get organized, and Mr. Doody seems happy when he reflects on his time

with the students.

John Dickinson School

Holly Brky teaches at the John Dickson School in Wilmington, Delaware. The Dickson School has a 57.8 percent minority enrollment. In June 2023, she took her students (6th-10th graders) on a trip to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands. Ms. Bryk, a middle school Spanish teacher, believes that "international travel provides my students the opportunities to use what they have learned in the classroom and use it in the real world. The use of the language has a purpose outside of the classroom. Many of my students return to class the next fall not only more confident with their language skills and abilities but also more confident people. Many students who have traveled with me over the past 14 years have gone on to minor or major in Spanish." (36).

Similar to Mr. Doody, Ms. Bryk took her students on several excursions that placed them in natural settings they would have never experienced without effort and organization. On their trip, they visited wild Tortoises in Santa Cruz, a pink flamingo habitat, a tortoise breeding center, the Twin Craters, and a boat excursion to Tintoreras Lava Islet. Having middle school students, Ms. Bryk saw a need to keep her students active. Surveying that they snorkel, the more active part of the experience was at Loberia Beach, there she explains that they took long walks on San Cristobal Island, and hiked through the rainforest as they came upon Cotacachi Waterfall. (37) Although most of her students still needed to become fluent in Spanish, she believed they all benefited from being immersed in the culture. "International travel allows my students to use what they have learned in the classroom and use it in the real world. The use of the language has a purpose outside of the school." (38) By providing a real-world experience, Ms. Bryk believes that her students return to their schools more enthusiastic about learning the language because they've had the chance to apply what they've learned in real-world situations. She explains, "Many of my students return to class the next fall not only more confident with their language skills and abilities but also a more confident person. Many students who have traveled with me over the past 14 years have gone on to minor or major in Spanish." (39)

Ms. Bryk is committed to creating international experiences for her children because she sees the investment as worthwhile. This wasn't Ms. Bryk's first time taking her students to another country. She has been on over ten trips with students, and on her last trip, she even had a surprise: "I discovered that one of the adults on my trip was a student in my Spanish 1 class 30 years ago. I did not make the connection initially because of her married name but then made the connection through her sister, another adult traveling with us. It was wonderful to come full circle, to have a former student share the travel experience with us as an adult." (40) Teachers like Ms. Bryk sacrifice their summers to create opportunities for children that wouldn't be possible without her efforts. With the proper funding, these experiences are possible.

Philanthropic Dollars Make Dreams Realities

"Philanthropy is not about the money. It's about using whatever resources you have at your fingertips and applying them to improving the world."-Melinda Gates.

When writing this unit, I wanted to be honest with myself and the audience of teachers. How often have you sat around a professional development, committee meeting, or student conference and heard many fantastic ideas to provide students, teachers, and the community with a great idea or experience? If you're like me, this

has happened hundreds of times in your teaching career. More often than not, I've found that many of these ideas stay at the table and need to be revisited due to politics and capital resources. This leads to inefficiency and overall bad business. You must do this alone or with a small group of like-minded teachers and community leaders to get this done. While this is not how it should be, it is the reality.

Once we've understood that there will need to be some capital invested into your project, the first place to start is the philanthropic world. While car washes and bake sales are a great lesson in hard work, they rarely yield the return on investment necessary to take children worldwide. According to the Harvard Business Review, "Foundations now hold over \$330 billion in assets and contribute over \$20 billion annually to educational, humanitarian and cultural organizations." (41)

According to the review, foundations are, in theory, supposed to be created by the generosity of a company or an individual. Big businesses strongly prefer giving to foundations because of tax incentives. This puts a certain level of moral accountability on the backs of foundations properly investing those funds because they would have been taxpayer dollars. For instance, when an individual contributes \$100 to a charity, the nation loses about \$40 in tax revenue, but the charity gets \$100, which it uses to provide services to society. The immediate social benefit is 250% of the lost tax revenue. But the immediate social benefit is only the \$5.50 per year that the foundation gives away—less than 14% of the forgone tax revenue. (42) Hence, foundations must act responsibly and strategically when they're giving. Furthermore, recipients of philanthropic dollars should appreciate the gift and ensure the allocated resources to create a greater society. Its purpose is to make life better more people throughout the world, hence, dollars must be allocated strategically to insure resources make it to those most in need.

Schools that have some combination of high poverty, high minority, Title-1, or are at a lower social and economic status are often prime candidates to take advantage of strategic grants provided by local and national foundations. Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, explains, "We have learned that improving education is incredibly difficult and complex," he writes. "We also know that schools in the United States and ones in low- and lower-middle-income countries face fundamentally different challenges that require unique solutions. We set out to learn more and determine how to make a meaningful difference globally. (43)

According to the 2022 Annual Report, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation approved an annual budget of \$8.3 billion in giving, which was the largest single-year budget in philanthropic history. (44) Out of that \$8.3 billion, The Gates Foundation has committed "five percent of its endowment on programs and advocacy concerning education, health, poverty, climate change, and clean energy." (45)

Furthermore, the foundation has partnered with the United States government to work towards present and future collaborations in education. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Arny Duncan explains, "The Department of Education is now taking its cue from these foundations and investing \$650 million in innovation, which the foundations will leverage through their \$500 million commitment. This historic coordinated effort between the Department of Education and philanthropy will provide more than \$1 billion for innovation in education in 2010. (46) Another philanthropist group would be Michael and Susan of Dell Computers, who have been steady educational donors. They open doors for five million students, with \$117 million in active commitments. The Rockefeller Foundation has made its mark by supporting schools to provide food for children in and out of school. The foundation helps provide "325,000 children and seeks to reach more than 110 million schoolchildren through food fortification and communication campaigns encouraging healthier eating." (47)

Steve Irwin: A Man of Passion, A Martyr for Nature and its Creatures

Coming out of college, I wanted to change the world but wasn't sure how, I just knew I wanted "to do it big." The thrill of adventure and thirst for the unknown took me to Oceania. I had the chance to intern for New Zealand's Olympic Association for free by day and Burger Fuel to live by night. While there, I worked in Public Relations for their men's basketball team, "The Tall Blacks," tasked with everything no one else wanted. I could work in several parts: process, practice, tickets, accommodations, catering, media, and meal preparation. For the team to qualify for the Olympic games, they had to beat Australia in the Oceania Qualifier, taking two out of three games. Unfortunately, the team went down 0-2 in Sydney, and the bid was over. Although I was disappointed that the chapter had ended, I was excited about the opportunity to make the most of my current location in the world.

For the next few weeks, I toured Australia with a single pair of jeans, two pairs of shorts, and a couple of shirts. The greyhound and random hostels became a routine fixture in my everyday accommodation. During this time, I stopped in Queensland, where I came across the Australian Zoo, Home of the Crocodile Hunter.

Steve Irwin was born in Queensland. His parents were animal lovers and worked at the "Beerwah Reptile Park" home to magpie geese, kangaroos, crocodiles, snakes, and tigers. That park was only two acres but provided a safe place for neglected animals. Bob, Steve's father, was a dedicated wildlife conservationist. Steve's mother, Lyn, was a caregiver to her family and the animals within the park. She specialized in giving nursing aid to orphaned animals, and once their injuries healed, she helped to rehabilitate them (48).

Steve took to the family business quickly under his parent's tutelage. He became an omnipresent fixture at the park, which led to a purpose-driven life focused on animal awareness and habit conservation. According to the Australian Zoo, the park expanded, the Queensland government helped with their crocodile population by dealing with crocs walking in newly formed residential areas that had previously been their habitat. Steve successfully captured over 100 crocodiles. With his wife, Terri, at his side, these crocodile rescue missions were documented, and "The Crocodile Hunter" was born. In a short time, the Irwin family had a franchise of their taping over 300 episodes and creating spinoffs such as "Croc Diaries," "Croc Files," "New Breed Vets," "Ghost of War and Bindi: The Jungle"(48). Although the Crocodile Hunter was gaining worldwide fame, he didn't use that popularity to benefit himself. On one of his episodes of The Crocodile Hunter, he said

I believe that education is all about being excited about something.... The main aim in our lives is to promote education about wildlife and wilderness areas, save habitats, save endangered species, etc. So, if we can get people excited about animals, then by crikey, it makes it a heck of a lot easier to save them" (49).

He used his popularity to save animals and their habitats. Irwin could gain desperately needed animal resources through his TV deals, merchandise, talk show circuit, and public speeches. In a 2004 "60 Minutes" interview with host Charles Wooley, which turned out to be one of his final interviews before his sudden passing, Irwin explained his purpose and how it connects to economics, saying, "I've been put on this planet to protect wildlife and wilderness areas... I wanna have the purest oceans. I want to be able to drink water straight out of that creek. I want to stop the ozone layer. I wanna save the world." Irwin continued, "Money is great. I can't get enough money. And you know what I'm going to do with it? I'm going to buy wilderness areas with it. Every single cent I earn goes straight into conservation. And guess what, Charles? I don't give a rip whose money it is, mate. I'll use it, and I'll spend it on buying land (50). With this approach Steve would travel throughout the world gaining allies in government, Hollywood, and the private sector, many of who were eager to push legislation for animal conservation and donate money to his conservation pursuit.

In 2006, while filming in The Great Barrier Reef, northern Queensland, Steve Irwin was attacked by a stingray which speared him through the chest. His cameraman, Justin Lyons, said, "I had the camera and thought this would be a great shot. But all of a sudden, the stingray propped on its front and started stabbing Steve with its tail." It happened quickly, he says. The stingray's tentacle went through Irwin's chest "like butter." (51)

Irwin, a man who made the world fall in love with nature again, passed away at the prime age of 44. A small group of friends and family attended his funeral at his beloved Australian Zoo, which is now over 700 acres. Celebrities from around the world paid their respects. Oscar-winning actor Russell Crowe, wearing a black suit and tie, choked back tears as he thanked his "mate" for every minute they spent together.

"Your passing has suspended reality for all of us," the Gladiator star said. Recording artist Justin Timberlake said, "Every kid was in love with the idea of being able to be him." Timberlake, in turn, thanked the Crocodile Hunter for the short time they could spend together. Larry King said he loved having Mr. Irwin on his show, with his antics making for "terrific" television. "I've interviewed presidents, kings, and Oscar-winning movie stars," King said. "But once I talked to the real-life world-famous Croc Hunter, well, that made me a hero" (52). The most touching of the reflections came from the words provided by his daughter Bingi. She says,

My Daddy was my hero – always there for me when I needed him. He listened to me and taught me so many things, but most of all, he was fun. I know that Daddy had an important job. He was working to change the world so everyone would love wildlife like he did. He built a hospital to help animals, and he bought lots of land to give animals a safe place to live. We filmed together, caught crocodiles together and loved being in the bush together. I don't want Daddy's passion to ever end. I want to help endangered wildlife just like he did. I have the best Daddy in the world, and I will miss him daily. When I see a crocodile, I will always think of him, and I know that Daddy made this zoo so everyone could come and learn to love all the animals. Daddy made this place his whole life, and now it's our turn to help Daddy (53).

During his funeral, "Five thousand people watched it in person, and an estimated 300 million worldwide tuned into live television coverage of the emotional farewell to the crocodile hunter" (54). Everyone who has seen his shows or interviews has a greater appreciation for nature and its wonders than they did five minutes beforehand.

Before his death, Steve said, "I have no fear of losing my life – if I have to save a koala or a crocodile or a kangaroo or a snake, mate, I will save it" (55). Steve gave his life to nature's animals. It was a life of purpose and passion, and although he passed away earlier in terms of days, he had lived in a way that most were too terrified to participate in.

"Some people are so afraid to die that they never begin to live." - **Henry van Dyke**

Justice Scholars: University Collaboration

This project aims to give students the chance to achieve a fundamental level of fluency in a second language before graduating from high school by providing them with an introductory course in the 8th grade and moving up yearly. I am part of Pittsburgh Westinghouse's College in High School, connected to the Justice Scholars program. This program was created by Esohe Osai, Assistant Professor in Applied Developmental Psychology in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. "I saw a need to bring college-level courses to the children of Homewood. A place that had yet to be chosen to provide such exposure opportunities. After years of struggling, strategizing, and collaboration, the Justice Scholars serves not only the students of Homewood but also U-Prep and Westinghouse." (56)

This phase of the work will utilize the Justice Scholars, College in High School course, and Pittsburgh Public School teachers to create a more robust language curriculum where children leave their schools fluent in a foreign language in their junior and senior years. If implemented correctly, a student should expect to be exposed to a foreign nation, leave high school with few college foreign language credits, and, most importantly, speak a second language fluently. Teachers in other districts nationwide should look to their local universities for assistance in making this a reality.

JSI Resources: Blueprint and Proof of Concept

- College in High School-Intro video
- Justice Scholars Video- Trailer 1
- Justice Scholars Video-Trailer 2
- Justice Scholars Research and Data

Activities

Fundraising/Grant Writing

Teachers should write grants to help supplement the cost of their chosen trip. To not burden the educator entirely, teachers should look to internal and external organizations to help them curate a well-thought-out proposal and submit it to multiple funders and foundations. It would help if you didn't aim for a single opportunity. Spread it out and plan a year.

Sample Itinerary -- Ecuador

Day 1: Students will travel to Ecuador and meet at the local hotel.

Day 2: The students will stop in Mitad and visit the Solar Museum. During that time, they'll have a guided tour that will be in Spanish, a chance to learn about astronomy in the native language. That evening, they'll travel to Los Bancos and have dinner together. Everyone will eat each meal together to build community while at the same time speaking as much Spanish as possible to continue to build their vocabularies.

Day 3: Travel to San Miguel del Laos Bancos. While there, they'll take a walking tour and begin a service

project. This project can be at school, senior citizens home, church etc. The idea is that students begin to build of sense of empathy, purpose and selfless. At the end of the day, they'll have time for self-reflection on what they've learned. Every day will have a reflection time to review what they'd learned and be transparent on ways to make the next day even better.

Day 4: Next, they'll take a guided tour of Nido de Vida. While there they'll learn how to make sugar and how the ecosystem provides the necessary vegetation for this ingredient.

Day 5: Student will travel to Mirador Lojano for a service-learning project. Like the project before this will be based on what the local people need at the time. Hence, the type of learning project is subject to change based on their current need.

Day 6: Students will wake up and travel to the waterfall at "El Amor." They'll then participate in another service-learning project before settling in Nido de Vida. Dinner will be served and they'll eat with the locals who they worked on the project with earlier in the day.

Day 7: This day will start with a visit to The Tschila Museum followed by the last service-learning project. Students will then have a Farewell dinner where they'll be able to reflect on their experience, talk about what they've learned and positive friendships/memories they've made. After dinner they depart for San Miguel de los Bancos to pack up.

Day 8: Finally, students depart for Quito and participate in a cultural activity with the native people. They then have dinner and depart for airport. (57)

Animals and Irwin

Day One-The teacher will create a handout with questions they feel are appropriate for their students' grade level and reading level with questions that students research and find answers to. These questions should be open ended and allow for diversity in their answers. This should be timed. Once time has expired and everyone has completed the assignment, students should close their technology and begin to chat with their elbow partner about their findings. Next, the class should share-out.

Day Two- The teacher should show a few clips from Irwin, A: Biography B: montage with him with animals in the wilderness. C; an appearance on a late night/morning talk show d; a new real of the day he died E; clip from speakers giving words of respect during his funeral. Next, students should be able to tell what they've learned from the clips and his life.

Day Three- Students should use technology to write a the answer to three discussion questions: A- How did Irwin organize his efforts to change the world B- If I could compare Irwin's impact and life to one person in history, who would it be and why? C- What can I apply from Irwin's life to create change in the community/world I live in?

Dinner and a Movie

Students and their teacher will pick a day after school to watch "Gorilla's in the Mist." This is an opportunity to build relationships and relax a bit while continuing the learning process. Once the film ends there should be quick share-out about the movie and how it applies to what students have already learned.

Where in the World is “Carmen Sandiego?”

Teachers should present students with a short research project. The objective is to learn about a place in a foreign nation that has not yet been covered in class. Students will use technology to look up questions regarding A: Native Culture B: it’s local ecosystem and nature C: language and customs historical people, places and history D: social justice issues in the area; E: three things they’d like they’re classmates to know about this area of the world. F: Students should be able to point out this location on the map

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

Standard - 12.1.1.S1.B Speak and write common vocabulary, phrases and structures during activities with the teacher, classmates, and family.

Standard - 12.3.1.S1.C Model life skills and social interactions in the target language culture and one’s own culture.

Standard - 12.3.1.S2.B Write and perform simple role-plays reflecting daily life in a culturally competent manner.

Standard - 12.3.S1.C Describe similarities and differences of life skills and social structures in personal interactions between cultures.

Standard - 12.3.S4.C Analyze perspectives, beliefs, and assumptions are evident in the target and other cultures.

Standard - 12.5.1.S3. Use speaking, writing, and reading to compare and connect local, national, and global employment opportunities for those who speak English and those who speak English and a target language.

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