

Making Kindness Count

"Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see."—Mark Twain

In this bustling, fast-paced, competitive world, how can we make time for kindness? Students are expected to learn the big picture, be physically fit, read at or above grade level, and write creatively and "informationally." They also need to be proficient on standardized tests, which requires memorizing, understanding, and excelling at test-taking skills.

In my (Angela's) first year as an LMS, I found myself teaching at a school where not just some, but all students are identified as academically gifted and/or gifted in performing or visual arts. In a school where students are busy with city and state curriculum and then challenged with extension activities, gifted strategies, and problem-based learning, how is there any time to practice the golden rule?

Inspiration

Over the summer before starting my new job, I found myself searching for inspiration to bring to my new school. With 15 years of experience in middle and high school, working with "standard level," special needs, and "at risk" students, what could I bring to these gifted elementary students? A teacher trainer in our city's Center for Teaching and Learning had started a challenge to use social media as a tool to spread joy, and that appealed to me. I followed this thread regularly, which got me thinking, "how can we transfer this to our school?"

I was reminded of one of my sons' favorite lessons based on the popular children's book, *Have You Filled Your Bucket Today?* by Carol McCloud. As preschoolers, my boys read this story and brought the idea home, happily mentioning ways we could "fill" each other's "buckets." I pondered the idea of starting a related movement at our school, much like the burgeoning hashtag in Virginia Beach: #VBhasJoy. Two more books lent motivation: *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio and *House Rules* by Jodi Picoult. From Picoult, I employed the idea of creating "House Rules." Along with "cleaning up your mess" and "telling the truth," for our family (and later for our school library) I added, "when given the choice between being right or being kind, always choose kind" from Palacio.

Planning

I wondered, how can we interest and engage our students in kindness, and how can we make that last? Perplexed, I applied my search to the ever-popular Makerspace challenges, which are readily discussed on social media and much easier to find than kindness topics. In planning Maker Challenges for the upcoming year, my teaching partner Tammy and I discussed the idea of adding a "Kindness Station" as a way to "make someone's day."

Kindness Station

For signage, we played on the idea of kindness being a superpower, since we had just changed our Dewey Signage to ALA superhero signs. We selected an area in the middle of the library where it was sure to get the most attention. We made it accessible to both the middle and elementary sides of the Grades 2-8 library. Written directions explained the purpose (spreading joy and "filling buckets") and ideas for writing letters, making cards, etc. We filled the table with stamps, craft scissors, recycled paper, cards, envelopes, and scrapbook supplies.

Outcomes

As we observed students' first experiences at this station, we took another idea from our Makerspace and refocused it into a "Kindness Challenge." The momentum slowly increased, and students now regularly come to the library looking for the Kindness Challenge. This does not take away the focus from selecting "good fit" books, learning information skills, or problem-solving. It actually provides another outlet, which students can tailor to their own skills, interests, and abilities. In addition to reading and writing, students do things their teachers aren't always able to squeeze in: drawing, crafting, reflecting, and of course, making someone's day.

Kindness Challenge

Implementing the "Four Ps" Will Make Your Kindness Station a Success:

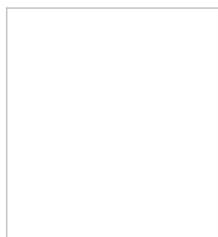
- **Plan:** We created a calendar on a Google Doc to collaborate. This helps with organization and prevents repetition. Consider working with your school counselors on how to connect to their programs like diversity, acceptance, etc.
- **Personalize:** What matters at your school or in your community? You know your school best! Collaborate with school partners to tailor the challenges to your curriculum and school community.
- **Promote:** Share pictures by whatever means possible and acceptable at your school (Twitter, Facebook, Edmodo, PTA meetings, school newsletter, etc.).
- **Repurpose:** Use whatever you can find to keep it interesting, sustainable, and eco-friendly. We made use of everything from paper, stickers, markers, and even old "due date" card holders that we repurposed into envelopes. Our Bookkeeper offered donations from our community Partners

in Education, where we gathered tape, index cards, and a stapler. We reached out to our PTA and raided their supply room, where we scored things like tissue paper, pipe cleaners, and beads.

Sample Planning Calendar: A Year of Kindness Challenges

Month	Potential Kindness Challenges
September	"Fall" into Kindness cards Wishing a successful school year note Make someone's day!
October	Happy Halloween "Boo Grams"
November	Thank you cards Cornucopias of gratitude
December	Holiday Greeting cards "Presents" of kindness
January (Be kind to yourself)	New Year's Resolutions Goal Statements Vision Boards
February	Valentine Cards What you "love" about someone
March	Good luck notes "Shamrock on"
April (Be kind to the Earth)	Earth Day signs Spring Break
May	"Mother's Day" cards (mother figures have many faces) Memorial Day Notes and Cards thanking a service member
June	"Father's Day" cards Summer wishes

What We Learned



- Teaching students to clean up after themselves is an ongoing lesson.
- Library Orientations are a good time to share the "House Rules."
- It is helpful to offer students, especially the little ones, a variety of sentence starters.
- Students enjoy spreading kindness, and cool crafts make it more fun!
- Everyone enjoys being the recipient of kindness.
- Students like sharing joy with peers, family members, coaches, and especially their teachers.
- Benefits outweigh the minimal costs entailed.
- The effect of making someone's day far outweighs the mess.
- Spreading kindness is infectious!

Personal Challenge

Hopefully our reflections have provided some inspiration for making kindness challenges part of your school library. The concept will support any age, ability, interest, or curriculum need. This is an opportunity for students to grow their social-emotional skills and to practice "Habits of Mind" (Costa 2008) like "listening and understanding with empathy" and "creating and innovating." These "soft" skills are crucial for finding success in school and life and extend learning beyond curriculum standards. Though space, time, and supplies are a consideration, the rewards of a Kindness Station are certainly worth the effort in building and maintaining a culture of kindness in your school.

Works Cited

- Costa, Arthur. *Leading and Learning with Habits of Mind*. Association for Curriculum and Development, 2008.
- McCloud, Carol. *Have You Filled Your Bucket Today?* Ferne Press, 2006.
- Palacio, R. J. *Wonder*. Random House, 2012.
- Picoult, Jodi. *House Rules*. Atria Books, 2010.

About the Authors

Angela Ramsey German, MA, is the library media specialist at Old Donation School in Virginia Beach, VA. She earned her masters of arts in literature at Old Dominion University, along with her Library Science endorsement. She is a proud citywide teacher of the year for Virginia Beach City Public Schools (2013). She has experience with high school, middle school, and

currently elementary/middle at ODS. She loves the surf, sand, and Kyle, Hayden, and Wyatt. Twitter @abgerman

Tammy L Henderson, MSEd, is a library media specialist at Old Donation School in Virginia Beach, VA. She received her master's from Old Dominion University in Norfolk. Her writing has been published in *School Library Monthly*.

COPYRIGHT 2020 ABC-CLIO, LLC

MLA Citation

German, Angela Ramsey, and Tammy L. Henderson. "Making Kindness Count." *School Library Connection*, August 2017, schoollibraryconnection.com/Home/Display/2120930.

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Home/Display/2120930?topicCenterId=1945913>

Entry ID: 2120930