

## A Children's Literature Service-Learning Project: Developing College Students' Empathy

I propose to discuss my experiences using service-learning curriculum to teach a children's literature course at Medaille College in Buffalo, New York. For three years, the students in "Children's Literature: From Ancient Myth to the Digital Age" have researched age-appropriate books to add to the materials used by the LEAP (Literacy Enrichment Afterschool Program) at the Buffalo City Mission Cornerstone Manor. The program serves a diverse group of youth ages 5-12, many of whom are shelter residents.

After researching the organization, students tour the shelter and the LEAP classroom so that they can better understand the needs of the youth (and their families) who use the book collection. They then research appropriate, multicultural children's books in order to create annotated bibliographies of texts that they recommend purchasing using a grant. The students return to the Mission to introduce the new books to the children.

This project develops college students' information literacy skills and knowledge of contemporary children's books. It also provides B-6 education students, for whom this course is a major requirement, the opportunity to consider the key roles of non-profit literacy programs in our communities. Moreover, working with a book collection serving a diverse population educates students about the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in children's literature. Finally, one of the outcomes of this course project, as documented in student reflection papers, is that students develop empathy for LEAP clients—we hope this empathy will lead to active engagement with non-profit literacy programs well beyond graduation.