

Stories from the Team Study Labs

Erich Schafer and Mike Gritman, 8th grade Social Studies teachers at North Jr High in St Cloud, have brought students to our annual conference for several years; but they had struggled with how to support students' desire to engage in further learning-and-action. The daily demands of teaching 150+ students, and expectations of meeting state standards, seemed to offer them little room for the more individualized, deeper work that were needed.



Students packaging food at Kids Against Hunger

Then they considered what could happen if they arranged for every student participating in the conference to be assigned to one of their study halls, and they then offered the students regular opportunities to focus that time on small-group learning-and-action.

They implemented the plan following the October, 2006, conference; and the results have been extraordinary. All thirty students that participated in the conference have done various projects in the months since then; and their peers in the study halls have also become involved.

Activities have included:

- **packaging food at Kids Against Hunger**
- **writing letters to their congressional representatives about the genocide in Darfur**
- **working on a recycling program at the school**
- **coordinating a “penny drive” (\$2,500 for local charities), and a coat drive (over 100 coats, along with hundreds of gloves and hats)**
- **peer tutoring with struggling students.**
- **power-point presentations on various issues (e.g. global poverty, racism, child soldiers, animal rights), which they have shown to 7th graders**

There have been significant effects on the students. too.

We take the food on the table in front of us for granted. In many parts of the world, people are happy to find scraps in a dump. This is an atrocity, especially when there is more than enough food in the world to feed everyone. I think it's an issue that can be solved, and that we should do something about it. (*John Reichl*)

It was awesome to be able to spread awareness in our school about animal rights. We knew that what we were telling people to do, and just to understand, could make a world of difference. A difference, however small, can mean a lot to the community, school, environment and world. (*Erin Mercurio*)

Although people may have not sided with my thesis, I felt as if I could actually make a difference in the world. (*Max Albrecht*)

The feeling of accomplishment was amazing. I was able to share what I knew, and maybe spark someone else's interest. I learned the impact that one person can make. Most importantly, I really realized that kids can make a difference. (*Laura Briese*)