Montgomery Ultimate Story Exchange (MUSE)

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MUSE is a mentoring program that allows elementary students at Pine Crest Elementary School to send pieces of creative writing via email to their high school mentors at Montgomery Blair High School. The mentors offer suggestions, critiques, and compliments.

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project? This mentoring program addresses the need for technology education for elementary school students. The need to improve creative writing skills was another motivating force for this program. Technology is an increasingly important aspect of society that should be taught in elementary school. Such an early education prepares students for future encounters with technology. We also noticed that in the school system there was a much greater emphasis on making writing a formal tool rather than a form of expression and passion. We wanted young students to be taught that writing can be fun, not just a chore. The elementary school students, who have received help with their writing , have benefited not only from the technology and writing aspects of this program, but also from their interaction with caring and attentive high school mentors. In addition, the high school students have received a chance to be role models, leaders, and examples for the younger students.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to the school curriculum and curricular objectives? Our program connects directly with a required writing course taught at the elementary school. MUSE gives elementary students a chance to improve their creative writing abilities and to receive tutelage from a high school mentor. It also gives high school students a chance to improve their writing and editing skills. They also learn the importance of community service.

Best Practice 3: How did participants reflect on their experiences throughout the project? As leaders of this program, it has been extraordinary experience to watch our dream grow from an idea into a successful reality. It has also been incredible to see how the elementary students' skills have grown and how the relationships between the younger and older students have developed and strengthened over the course of the program's duration.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project? The original idea for the MUSE project was formulated and implemented by Annie Peirce, Matthew Yalowitz, and Sarah Thibadeau in our sophomore year. We are presently juniors at Montgomery Blair High School and part of the Communication Arts Program (CAP). The project grew out of a CAP assignment that required us to attempt to make a change in our community. But the MUSE program has become much more than just a school project. With little adult assistance in the planning and in the actual achievement of the program, we built MUSE from scratch. We are the decision-makers and leaders in not only leadership and organizational skills, but also the ability to work successfully together to achieve a goal. In addition, the high school student mentors play important leadership roles within the program, as they are responsible for sending insightful comments to their elementary school students.

Best Practice 5: What community partners were worked with on this project? We worked with the teachers an principal at Pine Crest Elementary School. In addition, we worked with the mentoring program coordinator of Montgomery County Public Schools, Leslie Lass.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project? We planned for our project by writing a list of objectives that we wanted to achieve as part of the project. We then set up interviews with Leslie Lass and the principal of Pine Crest Elementary, Pam Sobel. During these interviews we improved and developed the MUSE program and we began the MUSE program as an after-school club at Pine Crest Elementary School.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project? High school students learn about responsibility, the value of community service and how to work with young children. They also develop their own writing and editing skills. Elementary students benefit from the personal attention of their mentor and learn important writing skills from a positive high school role model. Younger students also receive technology training and learn new computer skills.