

Bluebird Train

By Stephen Fletcher

Best Practice 1: What recognized community need was met by your project (e.g. health, education, environmental or public safety need)?

Students created a Bluebird Train and engaged in a landscaping workshop. We established a sense of pride in our schoolyard that if nurtured, could endure for years to come as well as improved the habitat for Bluebirds.

Best Practice 2: How was the project connected to school curriculum (e.g. what course outcomes were met and/or how did the project reinforce or enhance student academic learning)?

Students learned that in order to attract the Bluebirds, we would have to re-create an ecosystem that really no longer exists in our area. We needed to teach the students about Bluebird habitat, bird behavior and nesting tendencies. We also learned about what types of plant life they prefer. This ties directly into the 6th grade curriculum objectives on ecosystems, especially in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Best Practice 3: How did you reflect on your experience throughout the project?

Students reflected on their ability to follow directions, work with other students (some they had only met that day), and forge new friendships.

Best Practice 4: How did students take leadership roles and take responsibility for the success of the project?

Student responsibility was developed by appealing to their sense of taking part in a project that was very special. In education, it is not every day that you take part in an environmental project in conjunction with another school to attempt to bring back a native species to your community. Students took pride in their efforts.

Best Practice 5: What community partners did you work with on this project (e.g. non-profits, civic organizations, business that provided donations, etc.)?

We worked with the DNR to get the plants we needed, local businesses to donate planting materials, and received coverage from the local newspaper in order to document our work.

Best Practice 6: How did you prepare and plan ahead for the project?

The teacher from the other school and I communicated via e-mail, phone, and had one in-person site inspection prior to convening the students and getting to work. We probably communicated 4-5 times directly with several replies to one another arranging final details.

Best Practice 7: What knowledge and skills did students develop through this project?

I conducted instruction with my students about Bluebirds including their habitat, feeding habits and predatory animals that might obstruct our efforts. We completed several reading tasks about Bluebirds in class, watched a video, and discussed behavioral expectations for the workday as well. Students were also asked to bring specific tools needed for the project.

We also began planning for the Bluebird monitoring portion of the project before and after the actual work day. Students were tasked with a final reflection project on the experience with the choices being 1) a Bluebird Monitoring Guidebook, 2) door hangers highlighting the beauty of the Bluebirds and the efforts we had made to build the Bluebird trail, and 3) posters to post throughout the community highlighting our hard work. This project served several purposes in regards to community outreach and was differentiated for learning styles and abilities.