



FAST FACTS

Project: Writing with
Impact: Making a Difference!

Teacher: Cameron Shinn

School: Preston Middle
School

Website:
prestonmiddleschool.org

Location: Fort Collins, CO

Start date: 01/23/2012

End date: 05/20/2012

Unique requests of participating mentors:
Students learning about how to help the community and world. Mentors assist students in developing their research and project management skills.

Challenge: How to create a project plan from beginning to end

Solution: Assistance of and interaction with mentors

Results: A well-developed plan that can be put into action

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Students Find Strength in Writing

Focusing on real needs within their community, these middle school students are writing with purpose and passion.



Making a Difference. *Writing, next to speaking, is a powerful communication form, one with even more permanence and for that reason—it's powerful. Cameron Shinn guides his students through a life-changing academic project along with help from mentors matched to each of his students and provided through the International Telementor Program.*

When English teacher Cameron Shinn implemented the International Telementor Program in his sixth grade class, he expected to expose his students to meaningful skill-building activities through the help of professionals. While true, he was surprised to find that it was not only that but much more. Shinn had heard about the International Telementor Program from one of his colleagues at Preston

Middle School, where he teaches in Fort Collins, Colorado. This colleague had such a positive experience with the program that she strongly encouraged him to use it as well. The class where Shinn chose to begin using this program? The Civil Discourse Symposium where students are encouraged to engage in conversations about controversial topics and the importance of listening to differing viewpoints and opinions. The implementation of the program was intended to bring about the research of civil topics of interest for each student but also to be guided every step of the way by mentors who would also serve as an authentic audience.

Meeting Goals Together. "I love that students have the opportunity to learn about something that they were passionate about, but also have the opportunity

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The International Telementor Program ■ David Neils, Founder/Director



“This program changes students. I see students empowered in a way I’ve never seen before. I can’t wait to see where this leads and what it will do.”

—Cameron Shinn, English teacher, Preston Middle School - Fort Collins, Colorado



Powerful Writers. In John Trumbull’s 12-x18 oil-on-canvas hanging in the US Capitol Rotunda, the founding fathers draft the Declaration of Independence. Members of the five-man drafting committee depicted above are not signing it, they are presenting their work a month before the July 4, 1776 signing ceremony. Likewise, students in Cameron Shinn’s class work with their mentors to ensure they go through an iterative process to produce writing that will have a lasting and positive impact on their community and beyond.

to do some real world problem solving,” says Shinn. “Those opportunities are so rare, and I thought it would be great.”

His students were instructed to pick a topic of something in their community or beyond that they would like to see changed, work with a mentor to create meaningful questions about the topic, research it, conduct interviews with those who are knowledgeable of the topic, extrapolate findings, write a research paper, and finally present findings in a professional manner. When venturing into this new experience, Shinn had three primary skills to build in mind while students worked on their projects: problem solving, collaboration, and creative thinking.

Shinn knew that the International Telementor Program would provide an ideal experience for building these skills. What Shinn was surprised to see as students participated in the program was how they reacted to the process.

“I am seeing a new energy from my students, one that is more focused and intense,” says Shinn. “I think that because my students are allowed to focus on what they are passionate about, they don’t see it as work and that has made a huge difference.”

The topics that Shinn’s students chose to investigate are intended to be real needs within the local community and world. Some of the topics they chose included figuring out how to get computers into the hands of schools in third world and developing countries, how to put an end to animal abuse, and how to start programs for students with special needs. Throughout the process, Shinn was highly impressed with his students and the program.

“I want to figure out how I can do this with all of my students,” says Shinn. “This program changes students. I see students empowered in a way I’ve never seen before. I can’t wait to see where this leads and what it will do.”

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Students in the Writing with Impact: Making a Difference project at Preston Middle School work with their mentors to:

- ☑ maintain a notebook with all their correspondence and products
- ☑ share the journey of this project with their mentors, additional local experts and the community of people impacted by their work
- ☑ go through multiple iterations of draft, feedback, and draft - with help from mentors

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