***Volunteerism Research Project***

Grades 6- 7 Career Education

**By Ellen Bornowsky**

**Overview/Rationale**

Students at this age are not eligible for paid employment, but there are numerous opportunities for them to gain valuable work experience and develop the skills they will need to be successful, educated, contributing members of their communities.

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| **Big Idea**  New experiences, both within and outside of school, expand our career skill set and options. | |
| **Curricular Competencies**   * Examine the importance of service learning and responsibility of individuals to contribute to the community and the world * Demonstrate leadership skills through collaborative activities in the school and community | **Content**   * Connections to Community: volunteer opportunities * Life and Career Plan: role of mentors, family, community, school, and personal network in decision making |

**Core Competencies**

**Social Responsibility:** building relationships and contributing to community and caring for the environment

**Communicating:** connect and engage with others to share and develop ideas

**The Learning Experience**

The teacher introduced the lesson using the following graphic organizer to help students understand the scope of the project:

Who volunteers in your community? (kids, adults, working people?)

What do volunteers do?

When do people volunteer?

Where do people volunteer?

Why do people volunteer?

**Identifying Opportunities**

The teacher lead students in an idea-generation exercise to identify a wide, diverse range of local, national and global organizations where volunteers are active. Causes included environmental protection, physical and mental health awareness, animal welfare, sporting and cultural organizations, visual and performing arts.

Students had access to iPads or used personal devices and were provided with a selection of local newspapers, magazines and a telephone directory to assist in the research process.

Students worked in small groups to share ideas about the clubs, organizations, local businesses and community groups where family members, friends, classmates or staff members have been or are currently active contributors. Each group was given a coloured marker and recorded their answers on a large sheet of chart paper, which was then posted around the classroom. Groups circulated around the room in a Gallery Walk to read, comment and add to each poster using the coloured marker provided, so each group’s feedback was identifiable for follow-up discussion.

**Understanding Why People Volunteer**

The teacher explained that in some communities, volunteerism does not play a role in society, because governments provide services to citizens, members of organizations pay for services provided by professionals or perhaps political circumstances make it impossible.

However, in Canada, there is a long history of citizens and residents contributing without financial or other compensation. Students were asked to think of the benefits and challenges of volunteerism: what skills might they gain, how working with others toward a common goal might help them develop a wide range of hard skills (technical skills required to perform specific tasks) and soft skills (people skills or emotional intelligence).

**Identifying Personal Strengths and Interests**

To assist students in identifying a meaningful and personally relevant volunteer opportunity, the teacher asked to students to do a Think/Pair/Share activity with a partner. Students were asked to identify their personal strengths (well-organized, outgoing, detail-oriented, able to interact with adults, calm under pressure, open-minded) and interests (ukulele ensemble, dance, hockey, volleyball, soccer, environment/nature, animals, visual arts).

**Identifying Roles for Volunteers**

The teacher used a series of photos from a recent figure skating competition hosted by the local club to help students identify all the possible roles and responsibilities involved in planning and executing the event:

1. Registration table for coaches, officials and competitors – collecting music for programs, providing accreditation, directions, schedules and programs
2. Fundraising booth selling stuffed animals and flowers to present to competitors
3. Ice patchers and flower collectors
4. Vendor area (local businesses selling skates, related equipment, costumes, artwork and decorations, photographer)
5. Ice captains, dressing room assistants, runners from judges stand to audit/accounting room, timer for warm ups and programs
6. Announcers and music players
7. Judges, technical specialists, data specialists, data input operator, video replay operator

**Choice**

Students were invited to choose a cause or organization (e.g. dance studio, soccer or hockey team, church group, school fundraising drive, beach or stream clean up, dog-walking at SPCA, girl guides/scouts) where they might volunteer their services under the guidance of others. Students also shared information about various events they’ve attended or initiatives they’ve been made aware of (fundraisers, display table in shopping centre, cookie or hot dog sale, car wash, bottle drive, performances at community centres, reading buddies at the library).

**Volunteer Job Interview Role Play**

The teacher provided a scripted list of potential interview questions for the role play and students were invited to add to the list. The class also discussed the ways in which formal communication in an interview situation with community members differs from informal communication with friends, family and classmates. Students volunteered the importance of making eye contact, shaking hands, addressing the interviewers as Mr. and Mrs. Representative, rather than by first name, dressing appropriately. Students were reminded that the representatives may have to ask follow-up questions to ensure candidates can provide as much information as possible about their desire to participate.

Students worked in small groups to practise the roles of volunteer candidate and representative for the organization seeking volunteers. Interviews were presented to the class to enable students to gain confidence in speaking in public and demonstrate their communication skills in front of their peers. Students provided constructive feedback to peers and those who chose to have a video recording made of their presentation were given time to view it in private.

**Potential Questions**

* Please tell us a little about yourself: name, age, school
* Why you are interested in volunteering with our organization?
* What special skills do you have to contribute to the project/event/cause?
* What are you hoping to learn by working with our group?
* Are there any personal limitations that we should consider when preparing the roster of volunteer assignments?
* When (how often) would you be available to volunteer your time in our club?
* Do you have any questions for us?

**Teacher Observation/Assessment**

The teacher used the following checklist and 3 Point Scale to assess each Interview participant

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Good** | **Fair** | **Poor** |
| First Impression (greeting, handshake, eye contact) |  |  |  |
| Verbal communication is clear & sustained with ease |  |  |  |
| Demonstrates interest & enthusiasm |  |  |  |
| Responds appropriately to questions/comments |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |