

VOLUNTEERING AS A MEANS OF EDUCATION

Cristina Grama

Colegiul Economic “Transilvania” Târgu Mureș

Adriana Piștănilă

Colegiul Economic “Transilvania” Târgu Mureș

Abstract. What we consider an effective means of teaching values is volunteering. These values are to be thought to the children of all ages within their family and within the classes they attend in school. This is an extra-school activity that we use to reach specific educational objectives with our students. Since volunteering is based on performing various activities by one’s own choice and without expecting benefits, especially material ones, our students are shown how small gestures from their part can mean the world to the needy. Thus, they learn active social involvement, responsibility, empathy and humanity. Moreover, communication in all instances and decision- making are two very important transversal competences that the modern business world is looking for in an employee. According to Ms Davidescu, who developed a research on volunteering, it is highly important, and necessary, to prepare the youth for this activity on a multitude of levels/ plans, including information, development of competence and raising awareness in order to stimulate empathy. Thus, volunteering has become a domain in itself and an educational goal at the same time. It is required by the modern approaches to citizenship and personal development as a result/consequence of globalization. The aim is mutual understanding and support for everyone’s welfare and wellbeing.

Keywords: volunteering, extra-school activities, values in education

Education is a system of informative and formative actions conscientiously and systematically taken to influence a human subject in order to transform him/her according to the aimed educational finalities. These finalities express the tendencies and goals assumed at the level of the educational policy aiming at the development of the human personality according to specific values.

These values are to be thought to the children of all ages within their family and within the classes they attend in school. What we consider an effective means of teaching values is volunteering. This is an extra-school activity that we use to reach specific educational objectives with our students. Since volunteering is based on performing various activities by one’s own choice and without expecting benefits, especially material ones, our students are shown how small gestures from their part can mean the world to the needy. Thus, they learn active social involvement, responsibility, empathy and humanity. Moreover, communication in all instances

and decision- making are two very important transversal competences that the modern business world is looking for in an employee.

The values are established, on the one hand, by the society where we live and work, on the other hand, by the educational goal established at the level of specialists in the Sciences of Education. Students face these values both in school and in their extracurricular activities. That is why it is very important that they can understand the necessity of their existence and act consequently. In school, an important role is taken on by the class of Counseling (*Orientare si Consiliere*) as students are to learn to discover one another and cooperate for their own development. Becoming aware of this educational aim is important.

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Considered from the pedagogical perspective, volunteering is meant to form a young person's personality in order for the latter to act and react specifically within his/her immediate environment. Therefore, the accurate, up-to-date information on the field of social problems should be brought to the students for them to realize the truthfulness of the cause as much as the necessity of helping the needy. If depicted correctly, the information will also impact the students on the personal level as they will develop the competence of sympathizing with this category of people. Last but not least, the classes should focus on actions as well; it is better if the young interact with NGO's acting in the field of social help because tangible things have a stronger impact on personal beliefs.

The finality of the education, in our opinion, has to be elaborated by the authorities in such a way as to match the social realities of the epoch as well as the needs of the young population in relation to the society and the labour market. Including volunteering among the methods of reaching educational goals in formal education could be of help on long term as we, the society, will have an already trained individual to perform in a cooperative way without being pushed or forced to do it.

The result will be an approach of students to these activities in a more pleasant way for them, i.e. modern active-participative methods so that their interest and awareness on their own development should be risen and so that we should also reach the educational goals aimed at through the activities envisaged. Considering this aspect, we have been trying to involve more and more students into our volunteering activities which have become fruitful with the passing of time.

We have chosen the volunteering activities for various reasons. First, as the name states, the activity takes place only if the people are willing to get involved. Just like almost anything in this world, willingness can be taught by concrete, tangible examples and situations. By pointing to the outcome for all the parties involved, we

aim at making our students more responsible and at determining them to take on the responsibility for a specific situation and even for their own progress. Then, through volunteering, our students get in touch with real life situations of which they have not totally and fully been aware before; the immediate impact upon them is that we have them react to these specific context realities. This leads to a higher level of empathy within our students both towards the needy they get in touch with and to their family by acknowledging the effort and the support of the latter.

Interacting with this environment, they acquire information in a non-formal way, even though the situation was created by a public body of education, i.e. school. They are curious by nature and they ask a lot of questions, they inquire about many situations and try to identify solutions. They discuss with each other on these topics and learn about opinions and approaches to the situation. By asking them to share the experience with their mates, they develop the competence of speaking in public and revisit the former situation for a better approach, which are transversal competences so much aimed at in today's formal educational process.

What we think counts most in the mathematics of volunteering as a college student is the fact that this activity scores high in the personal CV when applying for a university course or a job in other European countries. In an article we have recently read, they mention the benefits of volunteering starting from a sensible, normal question: why volunteering.

“Why should college students volunteer? Volunteering has its advantages for any individual, yet there are specific benefits of community service for college students that can lead to positive outcomes for university volunteers and the communities they serve.”¹

The article goes on listing benefits, but we would like to underline two of them, beside the resume boost mentioned above: students can learn how to interact with people from various levels of life and adapt to the specific context, a skill that may help them in leading a more balanced life after they themselves experienced worse conditions. This is, in fact, what our students tell us after each such volunteering activity, that they have learnt something new.

Yet, is very hard to gather many students for a charitable purpose by their own will. The barriers are numerous, but the commonest are as well synthesized in the article we have mentioned²: 1. Not enough time; 2. Pressure because of many daily assignments; 3. “Lack of awareness”³ But, as long as the students are offered tangible results, they are at least willing to try. And, unfortunately, for most of them, the only context in which they are in contact with volunteering is in school. So, the article mentioned above concludes that:

“Colleges and universities are critical to building a culture of lifelong citizenship and service. Students are more likely to become engaged community members into

¹ <https://www.galaxydigital.com/blog/benefits-volunteering-college/>

² <https://www.galaxydigital.com/blog/benefits-volunteering-college/>

³ <https://www.galaxydigital.com/blog/benefits-volunteering-college/>

adulthood when they volunteer as students. Likewise, individuals who do not volunteer as children or young adults are much less likely to volunteer as adults. “

As a conclusion, we would like to point out experience with volunteering as we have been involving our students into several activities that somehow have become the symbol of Colegiul Economic “Transilvania” for the past seven years. When it comes to donating money, books, cloths, toys, etc, the young people do not hesitate a bit since the effort they make is not that big. Yet, if they are asked to spend some time with the needy, they deny arguing with the lack of time, mostly. The objectives aimed by this activity are: -to identify the problem-situations; -to cooperate to find a solution; -to acknowledge the responsibility of specific tasks for the solving of the situation; -to develop the competence of activity organization; -to develop the civic attitude; -to develop the communication competence.

The activities we have had our students involved in are varied. For example, for Christmas, our students participate into a charity, funds collection, to support the children from poor families. The funds are later used to buy the presents that they themselves hand to the children. The time they spend there is extremely valuable educationally speaking as they have to master a real life situation and adapt to this specific communication context. Another activity is spending time with the children in social care. This category lacks individual, personal attention and such children always enjoy some time playing and talking with our students. This type of interaction helps our students develop empathy and communication skills as the children in foster/ social care need much attention.

The emotional impact upon our students is, thus, huge. At the end of the day, after they have seen the full-of-joy faces of those little children when seeing the gifts, our students, which are at the age of adolescence, state their feeling of fulfilment and happiness. Moreover, every year, they themselves come up with their own ideas and suggestions. In this way, we know we have reached part of our educational goals and we have participated into developing their active citizenship attitude.

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