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AUTHOR Bolton, Merle  
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ABSTRACT

The author examines the roles volunteers can assume in the school and the potential for conflicts with teachers before offering guidelines for the selection and orientation of volunteers. It is hoped that these general guidelines will apply to a volunteer program that uses older adults. (IRT)

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36 PRESENTER: Merle Bolton, State Commissioner of Education, Topeka, KS

ED137955 TOPIC: Involving Older Citizens in Schools

TIME: Friday, February 25, 2:00 p.m.

PLACE: Room D-1, Convention Center

PROGRAM: Page 30

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It is indeed a pleasure for me to have this opportunity to visit with friends and colleagues about a very important talent resource for our educational institutions. The tremendous talent bank of older citizens is now being looked upon as a resource far beyond dollars and cents alone. Educators and other community leaders are seeking the services of older citizens to serve as volunteers in many capacities. It is my contention that a new "breath of life" comes into our schools through contributions of volunteers with varying skills and a wealth of knowledge.

The "Joint Working Agreement between the Office of Education and the Administration on Aging" points out that the older citizens of the United States represent a large and growing group. Approximately 32,000,000 are age 60 or over with approximately 23,000,000 being 65 or over. A large number of this group of citizens is willing and able to contribute their services to our schools and community. Their active involvement in school affairs will strengthen support of education in our various states and school systems. I challenge you to ignite their desires to be of service to our educational communities.

The context of my remarks will be directed to the utilization of volunteers in a school setting. Perhaps these principles can be applicable to involving older citizens in a volunteer capacity.

Much value can come to a school or school system if we are willing to find ways of involving volunteers by imaginative devices for working hand in hand with a school system school, a class, or with a teacher. If we are to accept this premise, educators must find ways to work most effectively with volunteers in order that teachers, school boards, and administrators can find more time to work with individuals.

I cannot give you a clear-cut recipe to insure success in utilizing volunteer services; however, I believe we can explore together some guiding principles to follow in this relatively new area. I say new because we as school people have not taken on the responsibility for formally conducting a volunteer program to enhance educational opportunities for children. We have always had volunteers, but we have had them on a rather loosely organized basis.

It has been said that there's a time for great things, and a time for small things. For teachers the great thing is teaching, and time should be allotted in full measure to the practice of this skill. A teacher has spent

years in preparation and is paid to teach a given time a certain class or even classes; however, some of this precious time is taken up with innumerable small tasks. It has been estimated that a teacher may spend from 20 to 50 percent of his time with activities which, though necessary to the educational process as a whole, are peripheral to actual teaching.

In comparison to the important overall job of teaching, a school volunteer may directly or indirectly enhance the teacher's skills. But the teacher who is relieved of some tasks will discover that time will quickly accrue for the larger more important tasks.

One potential problem in a volunteer program may lie in the relationship between professionals and volunteers. Many professionals are reluctant to accept the idea of volunteer participation. They are uncertain of the volunteer's competence, they resent the extra effort involved in supervision -- effort they believe can better be channeled in direct work with children. This feeling is certainly understandable. Let us now visit about dispelling some of these doubts.

In my judgment, the one qualification most necessary for a volunteer in school work is a dedication to the welfare of children and a willingness to commit time and energy in their behalf. Those who work directly with children should enjoy this association, take pleasure in working with them, and listening to them and be willing to learn more about fostering the processes of growth and development. On the other hand, one may find volunteers with a willingness and a commitment to the ideals of a school or class but unable to work directly with children in a class setting. Their skills can be utilized in work which does not bring them into immediate contact with children.

- a. Resource persons
- b. Special Task Forces
- c. Advisory Councils
- d. Work is not performance of "chores".

Now let us focus our thinking on recruiting and orienting volunteers who will work most effectively with us in a school system or in a class.

The person responsible for the services of volunteers should establish orientation programs to meet the needs of different groups or individuals who want to work as volunteers. However, there are certain basic principles which may apply to all.

Each volunteer should be interviewed by the person or persons in a school system responsible for this function before he or she is accepted for any assignment. In the initial interview this person should be able to gauge the individual's motivations, assess his or her potential contributions, and decide the kind of responsibility the person may effectively assume. From such an interview the volunteer learns clearly the goals of the school or class and something of its leadership, and thus becomes better able to decide if he or she wishes to serve. After the volunteer or volunteers are accepted, formal orientation sessions should be held. As many more formal or informal sessions as possible should be held during the working period.

Full and part-time volunteers, particularly those not professionally trained, should be introduced to some basic principles before they begin to work. They must understand the goals of the school or class and their concerns with the total physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development of the children. They must absorb the general approach to children created by the professional staff. In particular, staff members should stress that the job is not to entertain children nor to interfere with constructive activity nor to expect children to act more mature than they really are.

Volunteers should know the broad nature of their duties and responsibilities. They must realize that they have undertaken a serious service, one with a fixed schedule, specific demands, and some supervision of activity.

From the very beginning, volunteers must know lines of authority within a school or school system and where they stand in the day to day operation of the school. They must understand to whom they turn in a conflict, or when rules and responsibilities need clarification. They should be encouraged also to express their concerns regarding their specific assignment.

Professional staff members cannot spell out in advance all rules concerning the children, or for the operation of the class, but basic regulations pertaining particularly to the safety of the children should be explained. New volunteers may appreciate advice on such matters as what kind of clothing to wear, what activities are most popular, and the like.

Although there are many volunteer jobs in any school, the number of adults in a specific classroom must be kept in balance. It is possible to oversupervise children so they do not take initiative or complete work for themselves -- pupil-adult ratio.

The needs of the teacher must be considered. The right number of adult volunteer helpers can enrich a program; too many may create confusion in organization and administration. Too many adults with little to do can be distracting.

Volunteers may be scheduled to come regularly for a full days work or they might come on a fixed part-time schedule, or they could serve for specific jobs when necessary. The important thing is for us to insure ourselves that definite schedules are worked out and understood by all concerned.

It is also important to be sure that volunteers are placed in a position where they feel most comfortable. To perform effectively, volunteers must know clearly what they are to do. The job must be within their capacity and they must see the significance of what they are doing in relation to the total program. Volunteers who are kept from contributing their full services will lose interest. The problem may arise in the motivation of some volunteers. Status seekers may volunteer for prestige of volunteering but will probably resign when they become aware of the commitment required.

Another problem concerns the involvement of parents or relatives who volunteer to serve in a class. It may be hard for a parent or relative to remain neutral if his or her child is involved in a dispute, and children often have trouble sharing their parents with other children and accepting them in a new role as helper to all the children. Both potential difficulties can be averted by separating parents or relatives from their own children whenever possible. However, they should be encouraged to serve

even if this separation is impractical. The value of parent participation warrants the risks involved.

Other points for consideration:

- Meaningful Jobs to do before recruiting numbers of volunteers.
- Designation of Coordinator
- Development of Board Policy
- Role of School Principal
- Talent Bank
- Recognition for older citizens -- VIP - Job satisfaction
- Role of PTA

Conclusion.



