Case Study: Children’s University Chocolate Module

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Describe the project in your own words

Working with York’s Sweet Story and Westfield Primary School, we created and delivered 4 sessions to a group of 30 Year 5 pupils which led up to a ‘Golden Moment’ at the chocolate attraction, where they were given a tour and a demonstration by the head chocolatier there. In the sessions, we covered a variety of topics based on the attraction’s themes, such as how chocolate is made, and extended this to talk about related issues like Fair Trade.

Why did you apply for a team volunteering project?

The project brief interested me and, from its description, I could see that it would be fun whilst providing classroom experience with an age group I had not previously considered teaching. I also thought it would allow me to meet and make friends with people on my course who I hadn’t known well before taking part in the project.

What were the highlights of your project?

The enthusiastic reaction of the children to every task we presented them with was really rewarding and made the many hours of lesson planning worthwhile! The ‘Golden Moment’ at the chocolate attraction was a definite highlight, especially watching the head chocolatier create a unique chocolate showpiece especially for the children which he then put on display at the attraction. The chocolatier’s visit to the school was also an exciting experience for both the children and for us, especially for me as I had been the one to organise his visit.

Were there any surprises?

We were surprised by how quickly the children worked through tasks, especially when we found ourselves finishing a task at the time we had planned to start it! During the ‘Golden Moment’ many of the children astounded us by remembering obscure facts that we felt we’d barely talked about, and one child surprised us by demonstrating that he had done independent research and discovered the name of the fourth type of cocoa bean, which we hadn’t mentioned! We were also touched when the children presented us with hand-written thank you letters at the end.

What did you gain from your project?

Along with experience in a primary school classroom, I also benefitted from the free reign we were given, providing a more realistic experience of teaching from the usual work placements. Planning the sessions gave an insight into the amount of work teachers have to do behind the scenes and liaising with the manager of the chocolate attraction to organise the trip boosted my confidence and developed my interpersonal skills.

Did the project influence any future career plans?

Before taking part in the project, my preference was to teach secondary English; however, because of my experience in the Summer Term Challenge, I am now also considering primary teaching or possibly even a career as an Education Liaison at a museum or similar attraction.

What advice would you give students considering taking part in a team volunteering project?

Do it! Although at times it’s an exhausting, stressful experience and some of the more routine tasks are a bit boring, the buzz at the end of each session and the overall satisfaction with your achievement are exhilarating feelings and, by the end of your project, you’ll wish you could carry on!