Case Study

Project title: York Festival of Ideas: What is a Villain? School Event

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Describe the project in your own words:
I was in a group of 6 students working alongside the Festival of Ideas team and Fulford School to create a day of workshops with the theme ‘What is a Villain?’ for a group of gifted and talented year 8 pupils from Fulford School. We focused on the idea of ‘perception’, and how villainy is subjective. Working with a creative brief, we were given free-reign to be as imaginative as possible and to make the day energetic and entertaining. We had plenty of support in the form of Teach First training sessions, team-work training, meetings with Careers staff, the school teacher, and the Festival of Ideas team.

During the event pupils had to recreate a fairy tale from the villain’s point of view in a drama workshop, and then we moved on to a balloon debate where the pupils had to persuade each other that their ‘Villain’ was innocent. To round off the day we worked with Judith Buchanan from the English department, who led a session focusing on Shakespeare and film.

Why did you apply for a team volunteering project?
I knew that in the summer term I would have more time free to dedicate to extra-curricular activities, and so I thought I could easily fit it in. I was not sure whether I wanted a career with children, but my previous experience teaching meant that I felt I could add something to this project. I wanted to do something different that would include getting involved with the community, and working alongside other members of a team. I wanted to meet like-minded people and achieve something really worthwhile. It is also a great thing to have on your CV, because it develops so many different transferrable skills.

What were the highlights of your project?
The day itself! It was exciting to see all our work and ideas come together in one place and create what looked like a really enjoyable and engaging day. The very beginning was really exciting, because the pupils seemed to be very enthusiastic and willing to listen to us. Leading a balloon debate workshop was a highlight for me, because the pupils seemed to really enjoy it, and they were firing ideas off one another without my help! Judith Buchanan’s ‘Voicing Villainy’ workshop was also a great success, and a brilliant way to end the day.

Were there any surprises?
For me, the only surprise was how smoothly the whole day ran! We had been very well prepared as a team, and in training we were always warned about last minute disasters and potential conflict areas. None of these seemed to affect our team, and we were sure to have a contingency plan in case anything went wrong- but it didn’t. It was an organised and well supported project from start to finish.

What did you gain from your project?
I feel that I have gained valuable skills from this project, particularly learning how to work as a team without conflict. This came from working to deadlines to meet a specific project brief, and thinking creatively about how to communicate ideas. I have also learnt how to organise a group, and allocate tasks to utilise everybody’s different skills and work around numerous timetables. Overall, I feel I am a much better team worker and I have gained confidence and I improved in public speaking.
Did the project influence any future career plans?
Whilst the project has not affected my career plans directly, as I want to go into publishing, it has definitely helped me improve my CV. The transferrable skills I have learnt are applicable to any working environment. Working alongside children and teachers has also made me think that I would like my career to have a focus on young people and education.

What advice would you give students considering taking part in a team volunteering project?
I would advise students to go for it. Bear in mind that the projects do require commitment right from the very beginning of term (not just the weeks after exams), and most of the planning has to happen alongside revision and other work. Having said this, do not let this put you off. The projects are well supported and you never feel like you have been thrown in the deep end. They are a great way to meet new people and have the opportunity to organise events that you have completely designed, planned and carried out. The projects are extremely rewarding and really give you confidence in interview situations later on.