

## Chapter 5

### ***Link Learning with the Real World***

One of the best parts of teaching in a small learning community is that you don't have to do it alone. Some of the most effective small learning communities rely upon a supportive team-teaching approach. They also stretch beyond the confines of the classroom into the workplace to add depth and meaning to the learning process.

Forging effective partnerships with employers and community leaders isn't as hard as it might sound. After all, they share a vested interest in the eventual success of your students. Many employers would welcome the opportunity to be included in your efforts. It gives them a chance to introduce their industries, impact the future workforce, and impart good work habits and skills.

Adding employer involvement to your game plan involves mastering a few "elementary" essentials. It starts with the ABC's. In this case, an easy way to acquaint yourself with the diverse array of opportunities for linking learning with the real world.

#### **Dictionary of Employer Enrichment Options**

##### **A**pprenticeship

The ultimate on-the-job training experience, apprenticeships are based on a centuries-old model of novices learning from experts. This is a particularly useful option for learning specific trades such as carpentry and printing. It is an appealing option for students whose immediate after-graduation plans do not include college. For "official" information on how apprenticeships work visit the U.S. Department of Labor's apprenticeship website at [http://www.doleta.gov/atels\\_bat](http://www.doleta.gov/atels_bat).

##### **B**rown Bag Gab Sessions

Informal, and thus less intimidating, gab sessions provide opportunities to talk with professionals about their jobs. Held over lunch either at the school, or on special occasions at a worksite, these sessions give students a chance to ask questions and get beyond the "pat" answers of a more formal presentation.

##### **C**areer Day Events

This stalwart of career orientation activities comes in all shapes and sizes. Career day events generally involve a number of local employers, postsecondary education representatives, and lots of opportunities for students to explore ideas and learn about opportunities. For ideas and resources visit the National School to Work Clearinghouse website at <http://www.stw.ed.gov> and use the search function to locate career day resources.

##### **D**ay-in-the-Life Journaling

What does a banker do all day? How about a baker? Ever wondered how principals spend their day? Students find out by using interviews, job shadowing, and other research techniques to construct a day in the life of their favorite career. For some online samples visit <http://www.collegegradjbos.com/bliday.htm?rnk=rl&terms=career+day>.

## Externship

A supervised observation or training where teachers get out of the classroom and into the workplace for a birds-eye view of what it takes for on-the-job success. Once back in the classroom teacher's use this new found knowledge to add relevancy to the curriculum. See Tipsheets 5.1 and 5.2 for pointers on how to make the most of these types of experiences.

## Field Trips

It's the high school version of "show and tell." Instead of just telling students what a corporate office or manufacturing facility operates, show them. It's a great way to open new avenues of opportunity for students.

By the way, school buses are only one way to do the field trip thing. Thanks to computers, you can now take your students "virtually" anywhere in the world. For some ideas check out the virtual field trip website at <http://www.field-trips.org> or use a search engine to run a search for "virtual field trips" in a specific area of interest.

## Guest Speakers

Inviting interesting (emphasis on interesting) guests to talk about their work is one of the easiest ways to acquaint your students with a wide variety of career options. This strategy becomes even more effective when guests can link what they do on the job with what your students are learning in the classroom. This, of course, takes a little behind-the-scenes preparation on your part but it can make your job a lot easier in the long run as students learn to connect classroom learning with workplace learning!

## Hands-on Learning

It's one thing to talk about building a bridge and quite another to actually build one. That's why activities that require "doing" are highly valued in many types of small learning communities. Local employers with expertise in a wide variety of occupations can

help provide opportunities for these highly interactive and extremely effective learning activities. Applying this strategy simply requires looking at old ideas in new ways. Break out of the box and get creative with this one. Your students will thank you (someday) for making learning come alive. For ideas check out the online resources at <http://www.4teachers.org>.

## Internships

A supervised, practical work experience for the advanced student or recent graduate – sometimes paid, sometimes not. The ideal internship offers students firsthand experience and an up-close investigation of a career field of particular interest. The internship experience is as much a skill-building opportunity as it is a decision-making tool as students make choices about their future careers. Start with your own network of employer contacts to find internship positions for your students. You may also want to check out online resources such as <http://www.internjobs.com> and <http://www.studentjobs.gov> to look for additional opportunities.

## Job Shadowing

As its name implies, job shadowing involves having students tag along or "shadow" someone as they perform their job duties. Job shadowing may involve a couple hours or a couple days but it gives students a chance to see for themselves what the workplace and various occupations are really like.

A great way to get started is to participate in National Groundhog Job Shadowing Day, an annual event held in February on Groundhog Day. For more information and some great resources go online to <http://www.jobshadow.org>.

## Kudos

A little appreciation goes a long way. Make it a part of your dealings with employer partners. Thank you notes, awards

ceremonies, a "thanks for all you do" party – these types of gestures are the stuff that make for lasting relationships.

## **L**ife-Long Learning

This is it – the ultimate goal of all that you are doing in your classroom – preparing students to be life-long learners. Learning how to learn – that's what it's all about. The workplace provides an ideal way to reinforce this important lesson. Ask some of your employer partners to include your students in some on-the-job training programs. This could include anything from sitting in on a gender sensitivity workshop to observing workers in a corporate training center. The idea is to help students understand that learning never ends and to appreciate that real learning is a life-changing, door-opening, dream achieving process (as opposed to the mind-numbing, stifling process they may have previously encountered).

## **M**entoring

The dictionary defines a mentor as a "wise and trusted counselor or teacher." In this case, you are looking for employer "coaches," knowledgeable and trustworthy, who are willing to work with individuals or small groups of students to prepare them for the realities of the work world. It's a chance for students to "learn the ropes" from someone they respect and admire. Advice, professional guidance, and introductions to others that can help shape a student's future are hallmarks of a successful mentoring relationship.

## **N**etworking

Find out if your local Chamber of Commerce hosts any after-hours networking events. Use your own networking skills to arrange for your students to get a firsthand glimpse of the old "it's not what you know but who you know" maxim in action. Make sure to prepare students with some of the social niceties that

such an occasion warrants. Practice making introductions, the steady, firm handshake, and the fine art of mingling.

## **O**n-the-Job Training

More in-depth than job shadowing or a simple workplace observation, this strategy puts a student in the workplace to learn particular skills related to specific jobs.

## **P**art-time Jobs

Part-time jobs — isn't that what summers and senior years were made for? Maybe not, but they provide ideal timing for students to get out there and find out what it's like to have a real job. This is where the SCANS skills in particular are put to the test.

## **Q**uestion and Answer Sessions

Similar to having a guest speaker, but different. This time, instead of having someone stand in front of the class and give a presentation, ask them to participate in roundtable Q&A discussion with students. Students come prepared to interview the guest with pertinent questions about his or her career path. A double whammy!

## **R**ole Models

Here's your chance to motivate even the most reluctant student to reach for the stars. Seek out those "made it against all odds" stories among your business partners to inspire your students with their tales of success (and their lessons from failure). Biographies and other types of media can also be valuable resources in encouraging students to be all that they can be.

## **S**ervice Learning

Learning and doing good – what a great combination! That's exactly what service learning is all about. Getting students out into their communities, helping others, making the world a better place – and learning a whole lot about themselves and their place in it

while they're at it. Service learning provides some wonderful opportunities to link learning with the real world. For more information contact the National Service Learning Clearinghouse at <http://www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu>.

## **T**eacher Training

Teachers teach what they know. Ask your business partners to let you in on some of their professional development opportunities – and vice versa. Invite key business partners to attend applicable in-service sessions and conferences that will better equip them to help prepare students for the workplace.

## **U**niversities, Colleges, and Other Postsecondary Options

Take advantage of every opportunity to acquaint your students with future education and training options. You'll find that many institutions of higher learning are more than willing to provide materials and sometimes even a recruiter to talk with your students. Bring back some of your star "alums" who have successfully made the transition from high school to college and beyond for some particularly relevant connections.

## **V**ideos

If seeing is believing, than watching real people at work is learning what real jobs are all about. There is any number of informative career video series out there. Check with your school media specialist to find out about accessing some of these resources. However, don't overlook all the free opportunities to see careers in action in the news, on television shows such as *Joan Lunden's Behind Closed Doors* (on the A&E cable station) and the Discovery Channel, and online at news websites such as <http://www.usatoday.com>, <http://www.time.com>, and <http://www.discover.com>.

## **W**ork-based Learning

There's no place like the workplace to learn about work. Whether it's augmenting a particular unit of study or introducing a specific type of career, work-based learning can achieve more than a standard lecture ever could. It's authentic, it's hands-on, it's challenging and it's been known to help break through the "learning to pass a test" mentality so commonly found at the high school level. For ideas and resources related to work-based learning, visit <http://www.wa-wbl.com>.

## **eX**plorer Clubs

A highly effective worksite-based program that provides opportunities for students to explore the dynamics of various careers, these clubs are one segment of a national network of Learning for Life organizations. To find out more and to locate a chapter near you, go online to <http://www.learning-for-life.org>.

## **Y**outh Job Corps.

The Youth Job Corps. is the nations largest and most comprehensive job training program for at-risk youth. The program is directed at disadvantaged young people, ages 16 through 24, and provides a variety of academic, vocational, and social skills training opportunity that foster independence and long-term self-sufficiency. To find out more about this program visit the U.S. Department of Labor website at <http://www.jobcorps.org>.

## **Z**zzzzz...

Something you'll not hear, when your class is enriched with the types of activities described above!

**Use Toolkit Portfolio Assignment 5.1 to plan strategies for using your program goals and your community's resources to plan your strategies for using each of the employer involvement options.**