

Lesson 1

Something Special



Objective:

You will identify personal skills and strengths, and how you apply those assets in everyday activities and relationships.

Materials:

- ✦ Pen and paper for each participant
- ✦ Blackboard and chalk or large piece of paper and markers
- ✦ Art supplies

Directions:

1. Each participant writes down on a sheet of paper a skill or strength they are particularly proud of. Strengths of any type are valid, from “good soccer player” to “I remember to call every friend on their birthday”, and from “very organized” to “great with numbers”. They do not write their name on the paper.
2. Participants fold their papers and throw them into a box in the center of the room. Variation: they can throw them across the room for others to pick up.
3. Participants pick a folded paper and one at a time read it for the group to guess whom it describes. The facilitator writes down assets and names on the board.
4. Participants review the assets listed and discuss what it means to have a group with those strengths.
Possible questions for discussion:
 - a) What do these assets tell us about our group?
 - b) How have participants used these skills in the past?
 - c) What did we learn about our group that we didn't know before?
 - d) What makes us proud about our group?

Reflection:

- ✦ Create a design that represents the group's strengths and put up in a public place like a school hallway or youth center lobby. (See also “Coat of Arms” ice-breaker in the Appendix).
- ✦ Pair up and conduct interviews with your partner about each other's strengths
- ✦ Write a newspaper-style article with the results of your interview and submit it to the school or community paper.

Adapting the activity for young children:

Have the children call out the talents and skills they are proud of while you write them up on the board. These can include anything from “drawing” and “singing”, to “caring for pets” and “jumping rope”. Review what the children have listed as their strengths and facilitate a discussion as indicated above. The activity will help children identify their individual contributions and appreciate the richness of the group as a whole.



For The Reflection Period:

Have the children create their own pictures to represent the skills of which they are most proud. Put up the pictures in a public area.

SERVICE-LEARNING IN ACTION

Students in a Home Horticulture Class at Fort Hays University in Hays, Kansas put their agriculture skills to use by helping to restore the weed-laden landscape of a local Humane Society. They learned how to improve soil through the use of compost, install a drip irrigation system, fertilize, and properly plant shrubs. Because the Humane Society is a non-profit organization, their budget does not allow for costly maintenance like the jobs the 12 Fort Hays students performed.

Prior to the event, students were asked to evaluate the site and explain why renovations were needed and what recommendations they would make to improve the site. Before the semester ended, the students also made a return trip to the area so that they could see the results and discuss what did and did not work.

On the day of the project, City of Hays Mayor Wayne Billinger and Kansas State Senator Janis Lee were on-hand to thank the students during a brief ceremony. In addition, the president of the Humane Society's Board of Directors wrote a thank-you letter that was published in the local paper. Many of the students discussed the possibility of performing similar projects in their own hometowns.

“Everyone wants to do something that matters. When I was in high school, everyone talked about “the real world” and how we would get active in the “real world” after high school. Service-learning got us involved in the real world while we were still in high school. It let us do things that were important and let us see that what we were learning was important to solving real world problems.”

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