

PSYCHOLOGICAL ISSUES OF VOLUNTEERING IN THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOL EDUCATION

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***Abstract:** This paper deals with issues of motivation and other personality aspects of volunteers. It emphasizes the importance of volunteer activities for positive personal development and the need for more pro-social education in schools today as well as the need for the introduction of new volunteering educational programmes in Czech primary and secondary schools.*

***Key words:** volunteering, volunteering motivation, personality characteristic of volunteers, pro-social and altruistic personality, pro-social classroom*

Introduction

The European Commission has declared 2011 the “**European Year of Volunteering**”. The main tasks of this extensive campaign which is to take place at European, national, regional and local levels include the creation of optimal conditions for further development of volunteerism and volunteering organizations, the promotion of attitudes and values associated with volunteering, improving the quality of volunteer activities and strengthening their social significance and evaluation.

From a historical perspective, volunteering as one of the noblest forms of pro-social or altruistic behaviour has always been an imminent part of human society. In principle, it reflected the profound responsibility of man for himself, for others and for this world, which was based on an effort to help, to be compassionate or to strengthen social cohesion through other means. In addition to substantial economic benefit, nowadays largely formalized volunteering is an invaluable significance for today’s society due to its emphasis on positive human values, which are a necessary counterweight to the prevailing materialist and consumerist orientation of contemporary mankind. T. G. Measham a B. B. Barnett (2007), simply state that volunteering can be considered one of the **indicators of a healthy society** and the heart of democracy.

The phenomenon of volunteering is now focus of several scientific disciplines, including especially philosophy, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, nursing, social work, economics. This paper is based on a psychological perspective and its purpose is to highlight some selected psychological aspects of volunteering and also underline the importance of volunteering for the education of children and youth in primary and secondary schools.

Volunteering as a term and its occurrence

Given the current specialised literature (see e.g. Omoto, Snyder, 1995, Penner 2002, etc.) volunteering can be defined as long-term, freely chosen and planned pro-social behaviour aimed at improving the welfare benefits of other persons, social groups or communities, which is performed based on non-material motives and in an organizational context.

In contrast with spontaneous help, volunteering requires planning, prioritization and coordination of personal possibilities and tasks of the given pro-social activity within certain organizations. Volunteering is a generally inhomogeneous phenomenon and contains a wide variety of activities, including for example the care of disabled persons, helping students with homework, visits of lonely old people in senior homes, collections for charity, work with children and youth, political, environmental and rescue activities, or free participation in medical research. Volunteering thus fulfils many important functions in society.

J.C. Mowen and H.Sujan (2005) report that in the U.S., where volunteering is the most extended, more than 55 % of the population are dedicated to this activity in the range of about 3.5 hours a week. At the same time volunteering in the U.S. is considered a very important source of gross domestic product. In 2001 its contribution was estimated at 75 billion dollars, which is an equivalent to earnings coming from the entertainment and recreation industry. According to the European Commission (Kolektiv, 2010) there is also a large number of volunteers in Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden and in Great Britain, where more than 40 % of the population are dedicated to volunteering. The lowest number of volunteers, less than 10 % of the population, exists in Bulgaria, Greece and Lithuania.

The Czech Republic together with Belgium, Ireland, Malta, Cyprus, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia and Spain belongs to countries where there is a relatively small number of volunteers, between 10-19 % of the adult population. It is estimated that, the number of volunteers in the Czech Republic ranges only between 10-14 %, but it has an upward growing trend. Among the volunteers in this country, there are significantly more women and young adults, students are the most active group. The number of volunteers among the elderly is a marginal. Most volunteers operate in the areas of sports and physical education. Due to historical, social and political reasons, community support of volunteering in the Czech Republic is still at a low level, contrary to the Western developed countries, and volunteering is still an underestimated phenomenon in the long-term.

Predictors and motivation for volunteering

The process of deciding to become a volunteer is affected by many factors. As illustrated by J. Wilson (2000), more people are becoming volunteers if their parents also have experience in the field of volunteer activities. These people have, unlike the control group of persons, generally higher levels of education, higher employment and socio-economic status and are far more religiously oriented. Men and women who are married are more inclined to volunteering than single persons. If one spouse spends time volunteering, there is a high probability that the other partner joins.

Volunteer activities tend to decline during the transition from adolescence to early adulthood, then the inclination grows up to a peak in middle age. In old age, the number of volunteers increases with increasing age and the manifestations of religious orientation. In North America, women are engaged in volunteer activities a little more than men, but in Europe there are no global gender differences in volunteering. Young women dedicate more hours to volunteering than men, with older persons it is the opposite. Volunteers tend to be more politically active than persons from the comparable control groups. J.C. Mowen and H.Sujan (1995) found that altruism is a significant predictor of volunteering, understood as a predisposition for selfless search to help others. They also identified other predictors of this pro-social behaviour, a higher level of learning needs and activities.

Given that volunteering has a long-term nature, theorists seek to resolve the problem, which factors contribute to its maintenance. A.M.Omoto and M. Snyder (1995, 2002) suggested a **procedural model of volunteering** in this context, according to which the experienced dynamic changes that occur between the original and current motives play an essential role in maintaining volunteer activities. According to the authors, these motives fall into five categories, which are 1) values, 2) understanding, 3) personal development, 4) interest in the community and 5) increase of self-esteem. The authors acknowledged that maintenance of volunteering has important influencing elements in not only pro-social disposition, but also volunteer experience, satisfaction with volunteer activities and many other variables related to the organizational framework of volunteering.

The **role identity model** by J. Piliavin and colleagues (Grube, Piliavin, 2000) is based on the assumption that the individual self is composed of many multiple identities based on social roles. The role identity, i.e. also the role of the volunteer, is based on the expectation of the individual, what judgments have the significant others been creating about the person and on their social interactions. The more other people associate an individual with a particular role, the more this role becomes an integral part of one's self-perception. The individual then tends to a behaviour that is congruent with one's role identity. Continuous strengthening of the volunteer's role identity maintains their activity. Adoption of a role identity of a volunteer is subject to a number of organizational variables (see Finkelstein Brannick, 2007).

L.A. Penner (2002) joined the procedural model of volunteering and the role identity model into a single **integrated volunteering model**. Motives form volunteering antecedents that may lead to a positive volunteer experience. These then create a volunteer role identity, which becomes an important part of their self-perception, and

maintains their volunteer activity. The L.A. Penner model also includes its concept of the so-called pro-social personality, characterized in the following text.

Volunteering is a phenomenon where a set of both altruistic and selfish motives are involved in maintaining it. There are considerations (Tietz, Bierhoff, 1996), that altruistic motives are most important in shaping the primary motivation of volunteers to begin their volunteer career, while egoistic motives are more relevant in maintaining the voluntary engagement in time.

H.W. Bierhoff (2002) quotes a representative German study (Gaskin, Smith, Paulwitz, 1996), in which the following reasons for volunteering were the most frequently identified.

- 1) I really enjoy it (65 %)
- 2) I meet people and find friends (40 %).
- 3) It helps me stay active and healthy (30 %).
- 4) It corresponds with my moral principles (30 %).
- 5) It is satisfying that I can achieve results (27 %).
- 6) It extends my life experience (27 %).
- 7) It offers me the opportunity to acquire new skills (20 %).

Similar reasons were also found in representative studies in the U.S. (see Clary, Snyder, 1991). These reasons and causes are at least partially compatible with the so-called **functional approach** to volunteering, which seeks to identify the functions or motives that lead people to volunteer activities. These functions may include a wide variety of motivational constructs such as attitudes, values, reasons, purposes, plans, etc. The functional approach, which is applied by a number of authors (see e.g. Smith, Bruner, White, 1956; Katz, 1960; Snyder, DeBono, 1989, quoted according to Bierhoff, 2002), found that volunteering is associated for an individual primarily with the following features.

- 1) **Knowledge function**, which refers to efforts to understand the outside world, social environment and personal experience.
- 2) **Socio-adjusting function**, which applies to normative situations in which individuals seek to act in accordance with social expectations and roles.
- 3) **Ego-defensive function**, which is related to internal conflicts and anxieties, which are caused by trying to protect people from endangering insight into the self.
- 4) **Value expressive function** refers to the values that people accept and believe in.

E.G. Clary and her colleagues (Clary et al., 1998) developed a useful and often cited theory that is based on the premise that the volunteers satisfy a complex of major motives which are important for them with their activity. Concurrently, the theory assumes that the same volunteer activities can be supported by a different configuration of motives, and vice versa, that different volunteer activities can be supported by similar motives. These are motives that relate to the following six categories.

- 1) **Values** - volunteering gives individuals the possibility to express the values associated with a pro-social or altruistic concern for others.
- 2) **Understanding** - Volunteering provides opportunities to acquire new opportunities for learning and development of specific skills and abilities.
- 3) **Social functions** - volunteering reflects motivation focused on relationships with others, provides an opportunity to be with them and engage with them in favourite activities.
- 4) **Career** - volunteering is a means to improve the prospects for future employment and develop skills necessary for professional development.
- 5) **Protective functions** - volunteering is a tool to protect the ego, to escape from negative feelings or reduce guilt, that the volunteer is blessed with more happiness than the persons he is helping.
- 6) **Strengthening** - volunteering is used as a tool for personal development, gaining self-esteem or as a means to achieve a sense of personal importance.

In H.W. Bierhoff's functional approach, along with W. Tietze (Tietze, Bierhoff, 1996, Bierhoff, 2001) they identified with the help of the Inventory of Motive Structure of Volunteers, a total of nine different factors, which are:

- 1) social bond,
- 2) self-experience,
- 3) social responsibility,
- 4) self-esteem and recognition,
- 5) identification with the organization,
- 6) compensation for work-related stress,
- 7) promotion,
- 8) political responsibility,
- 9) personal experience.

The above-mentioned authors used a second-order factor analysis and came to the existence of two fundamental dimensions that were labelled **altruistic** and **egoistic orientation**. Altruistic orientation was fed by factors of political and social responsibility, with the remainder related to egoistic orientation. This finding is an indirect confirmation of C.D. Batson's (1991) distinction between egoistic and altruistic-oriented pro-social behaviour.

Personal correlates of volunteering

Application of the personal approach to volunteering means the study of personality features or characteristics that lead individuals to become a volunteer.

The willingness to become a volunteer, with its length and number of hours worked is linked to **pro-social personality** features. According to L.A. Penner and his associates (Penner et al., 1995, Penner 2002) it includes particularly **other oriented empathy**, which relates to cognitive and emotional aspects of pro-social personality and willingness to help (helpfulness), reflecting rather the behavioural aspect. Volunteering,

however, is also related to other aspects of personality including pro-social attitudes, social responsibility. Volunteering is also associated with an **altruistic personality** (see Rushton 1981, Batson, 1991), which is characterized by a tendency to selflessly help others. Such personality characteristics include a high rate of acceptance of moral values, social responsibility and a higher level of emotional and cognitive empathy. It shows consistently that altruism is the most important predictor of volunteering (see e.g. Penner, Finkelstein, 1998; Mowen & Sujan, 2005).

Some researchers of the personal approach to volunteering assume that the pro-social characteristics are significantly linked to **leadership style**. Under the so-called contingency theory of F.E. Fiedler (1976, quot. DeChant, 2001) we can distinguish between task-structured management style, and a style considering human relations. Researchers believe that a leadership style focused on human relationships positively correlates with pro-social personality features.

Personality characteristics of volunteers working in the field of mental hygiene were researched by N.J. Allen and J.P. Rushton (1983). According to these authors one can, even despite certain methodological doubts, research and show that volunteers have, in contrast to comparable sets of people who are not engaged in volunteering, different personality characteristics.

- 1) They have several internalized moral standards, generally stronger superego and greater conscientiousness.
- 2) They are also inclined to more intrinsic religious orientation.
- 3) They accept their own personality more, are able to show more trust, they can be more open in front of others and discuss their thoughts and feelings.
- 4) They are more carefree, emotionally stable, more satisfied with their lives, they are convinced that they have greater control over their lives.
- 5) They are more able-bodied (self-efficacy), more flexible, more oriented on independent performance and more tolerant.

Volunteering is significantly associated with the dimensions of the five-factor personality model. G. Carlo and colleagues discovered (2005), that volunteering is related to all dimensions of the five-factor personality model, except neuroticism. Volunteering was most strongly associated with **friendliness** and **extraversion**. This link has been shown consistently in many further studies. A.M. Omoto and M. Snyder (1995) consider the combination of extraversion and friendliness as a **general helping disposition**. G. Carlo and colleagues believe (Carlo et al. 2005) that the influence of these personality dispositions on the volunteer activity may be direct, but also mediated by other motives (i.e., attitudes, values, goals, etc.).

L.A. Penner and colleagues (2005) give an overview of empirical studies concerning the impact of volunteering on the personality. These studies generally show a **positive developmental impact on the volunteers psyche**. In adolescents, it leads to the development of pro-social attitudes, values and personal identity and to a greater likelihood that they will consider volunteering in adulthood. Volunteering enhances their self-esteem, confidence and their academic success. Volunteering adolescents also show a positive effect on the incidence of unsafe or antisocial behaviour. Adolescents who

are engaged in volunteer activities are also less likely to use drugs, have worse grades in school, get pregnant, commit offenses or be arrested. Volunteering of adults positively affects their **mental and physical health**. It is linked with a lower incidence of depression among people over 65 years and it improves their psychological well-being. Adult volunteers are generally healthier and live longer than control group. It can be assumed that adult volunteers manifest improved social integration and lower levels of alienation.

Volunteering and current czech school

There is no doubt that the current state of school education raises the need for the development of **moral and pro-social skills** of pupils and students and a creation of schools and classes with an optimal level of **pro-social climate** (the so-called pro-social classrooms), which benefit teachers (it reduces their stress levels, prevent burnout syndrome, increases their professional satisfaction, etc.), as well as the pupils and students (reduces level of aggression, bullying and other adverse phenomena, strengthens their cooperation skills, etc.) and also their parents (less educational problems).

P. Jennings and M.T. Greenberg proposed in this context (2009) a **pro-social class model**, which is shown in Figure 1.

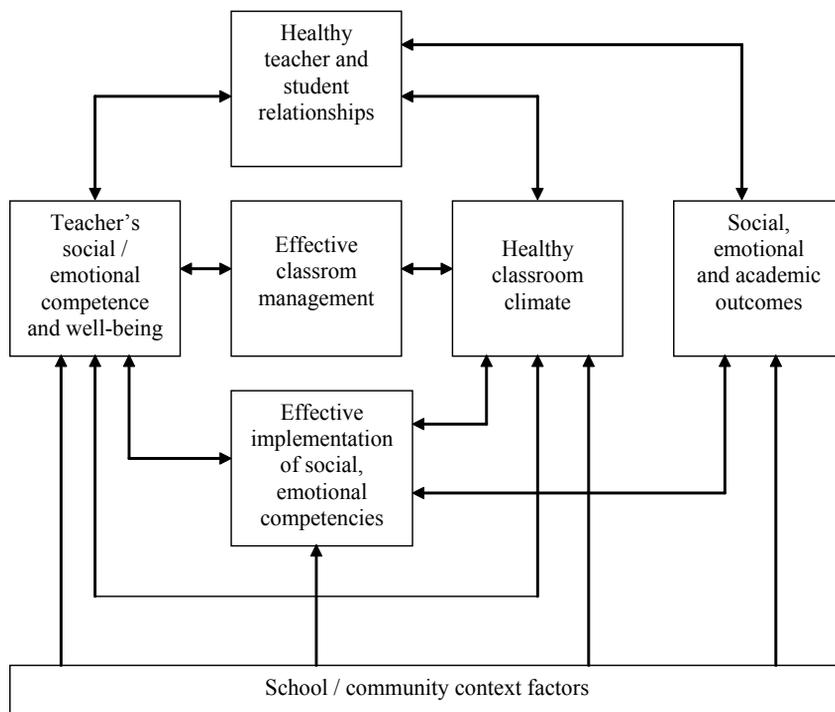


Fig. no. 1 Pro-social class model (Jennings, Greenberg, 2009, p. 494, adjusted by ZM)

A crucial prerequisite for the existence and functioning of pro-social class in this model is a **socially and emotionally competent teacher**. The authors of this model are of the opinion that the basic social and emotional competences of teachers are formed by high levels of the five sub-competencies, namely:

- 1) self-awareness,
- 2) social awareness,
- 3) responsible decision making,
- 4) self-management,
- 5) relationship management.

Socially and emotionally competent teachers are, in other words, able to recognize and appropriately influence their own emotions and emotions of others. They can identify and promote cooperative social relationships and effectively resolve conflicts. They can respect others and show pro-social values. They are able to make compromises and be responsible for their decisions. They have good stress tolerance, are able to effectively prevent burnout and show signs of overall subjective well-being.

As it is evident from this model, personalities of socially and emotionally competent teachers cultivate healthy relationships with their pupils or students through their behaviour, significantly contribute to effective classroom management and substantially constitute a healthy classroom climate. All this leads to a favourable and desirable social, emotional and educational attainment on the part of the students. The model also demonstrates the potential of mutual feedback between the factors which it includes (for details see Jennings, Greenberg, 2009).

A detailed explanation of the pro-social and altruistic behaviour issues can be found in the publication by H. Zášková and Z. Mlčák (2009), while possibilities of promoting pro-social behaviour in the current primary schools were outlined in a paper by the author (Mlčák, 2007).

Given the above facts which demonstrate the positive impact of volunteering for the personality development of pupils and student, time has come to think about the systematic implementation of adequate and well-designed **volunteering programmes** in all types of Czech schools.

The ideal solution would be a gradual introduction of sophisticated volunteer programmes that are designed with regard to age and mental specifics of children and youth. As shown by international experience, well-organized school volunteer programmes at all levels of education can have a substantially positive and cultivating influence on the personality. In general, they may, for example:

- 1) increase personal and social responsibility,
- 2) improve communication and social skills,
- 3) promote the internalization of positive values and attitudes
- 4) increase sense of self, confidence and personal ability,
- 5) reduce the incidence of failure and risk behaviours (e.g. bullying, drugs)
- 6) promote better social integration and reduce feelings of alienation,
- 7) develop self-control and self-discipline,

- 8) to stimulate interest in other people, groups and communities
- 9) develop empathy, pro-social and altruistic behaviour
- 10) increase the acceptance of others, including their social and cultural differences,
- 11) increase the motivation to cognition and learning
- 12) develop career guidance,
- 13) support the development of future employment skills.

Conclusion

There are economic, but also important social reasons why Czech schools should systematically introduce broadly conceived ethical and pro-social education, including the necessary practical applications. Volunteer programmes whose efficacy has been sufficiently proven in developed Western countries present an optimum opportunity for Czech schools to anchor the practical education which will ensure that pupils and students develop a broad range of ethical and social skills that can function as barriers to socially undesirable behaviour.

The necessary implementation of systematic volunteer programmes requires a concept of specific training for teachers concerning their educational qualification to work with volunteers from among their students, but also to work with adult volunteers, for whom the Czech schools have largely been closed. Teacher training, advice on school volunteer programmes, their organization and evaluation of effectiveness are also a great challenge for the active involvement of the Czech psychological community.

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PSYCHOLOGICKÁ PROBLEMATIKA DOBROVOLNICTVÍ V KONTEXTU ŠKOLNÍ VÝCHOVY

Abstrakt: Příspěvek pojednává o problematice motivace a dalších osobnostních aspektech dobrovolníků. Zdůrazňuje význam dobrovolnických aktivit pro pozitivní rozvoj osobnosti a potřebu širší prosociální výchovy v současných školách a potřebnost zavádění nových dobrovolnických vzdělávacích programů do českých základních a středních škol.

Klíčová slova: dobrovolnictví, motivace k dobrovolnictví, osobnostní aspekty dobrovolníků, prosociální a altruistická osobnost, prosociální třída