

Enviroworks

Introduction

As a business teacher at Queen Elizabeth College and Vocational Institute in Kingston, Ontario, Mike Zanibbi was becoming bored with the traditional, 'hypothetical' approach to teaching business. In fact, many of his students were bored as well. Students complained that they were getting tired of simulation exercises in which they 'pretended' to operate their own company.

Enviroworks was created by Mike Zanibbi and the Limestone District School Board as an alternative method of teaching common business courses such as Marketing, Accounting, Computers and Entrepreneurial Studies. Students are given the opportunity to run an enterprise and benefit from practical business experience.

The challenges

The world of work is undergoing major transformation. The globalization of production, the growth of the service sector, corporate downsizing and outsourcing, and technological change pose significant challenges to both students and the school system. Young people must face the reality that fewer of them will have the security

of a full-time job that lasts a lifetime - part-time and short-term employment opportunities are much more common. Students should be taught, not just how to 'get' a job, but also how to 'make' a job. Schools need to create programs that will help young people develop technical skills as well as the ability to identify creative opportunities.

Unfortunately, increased expectations for the school system in Ontario have coincided with substantial provincial cuts to education. School boards have to 'do more with less' and must become more innovative and entrepreneurial in order to survive. If the education system is to succeed in helping to prepare young people for this changing world of work, it must make use of all the resources (natural, human and financial) at its disposal. It also must learn how to generate new resources by developing new types of community partnerships.

Enviroworks: Addressing the challenges

Enviroworks is a Used Building Materials Store owned by the School Board and operated by the students in the Board. The program is based in Queen Elizabeth Collegiate and Vocational Institute but it is not run from the

Kingston's north end. The primary goal of the business is to divert as much construction and demolition waste as possible from Kingston's landfills. Enviroworks obtains these materials (e.g., doors, windows, bathtubs and sinks) from households and contractors who are disposing of them and sells them back to people who can reuse them.

Enviroworks is an example of a partnership model that pools the resources of the private sector, the public sector, the education system and the community. Construction and demolition make up almost 30 percent of the waste stream in Kingston. By working with local businesses and organizations, Enviroworks diverts over 70 tonnes of materials from local landfill sites every year.

In addition to its environmental benefits, Enviroworks provides students of all abilities with an opportunity to learn about operating a business by actually running an enterprise. Participants gain valuable experience in a number of areas including marketing, sales, accounting, human resource management, computers and entrepreneurship. Students also learn responsibility, adaptability, teamwork skills, communication skills, 'problem-solving techniques, and positive attitudes and behaviours. Due to the nature of the learning environment, students are in a position to practise these skills every day in a real business setting.

Enviroworks is considered a 'county' program, which means that students from any of the 12 secondary schools in the Board can participate. Transportation costs and other fees are absorbed by the School Board. Currently, Enviroworks participants come from five different schools. The program runs for the entire school year (two semesters). Students spend the whole day at Enviroworks and receive four credits per semester in different subject areas.

Courses are held in the store's boardroom and are taught in a practical and 'hands-on' manner that relates directly to the operation of the business. Students earn credits in accounting, for example, when performing such duties as preparing the budget, entering information into the computerized accounting system or producing monthly reports for the School Board. Students earn credits in marketing by working on the marketing plan, conducting market research or creating advertisements for local media. There is no distinction between the business and the classroom, rather, *the business is the classroom.*

Developing a viable business

Enviroworks is an excellent example of a community entrepreneurial venture which took advantage of an opportunity disguised as a problem. The idea behind the program came from observing residents' curbsides on garbage night. An incredible amount of quality material was destined for the dump because the community had no other way to dispose of it. Students would come to class with stories about the reusable materials they had seen while walking to school in the morning.

Enviroworks was a great opportunity both to provide a real environmental service and start a viable business.

At the same time, the City of Kingston was very concerned about increasing pressure on local landfill sites and the fact that tipping fees were very high. Enviroworks was a great opportunity both to provide a real environmental service and to start a viable business. More impor



Enviroworks students pose with used building materials. Photograph by Robert Mooy.

Importantly, there was an opportunity to develop a unique, hands-on training facility that would help prepare students in the Linestone District School Board for the changing world of work by giving them valuable experience to include on their resumes.

Many students have been involved in a wide range of activities since the program began in 1994. As with any company, a great deal of planning and research had to occur before the doors could even be opened. Every challenge was used as a learning opportunity for the first class of 15 students responsible for the start-up tasks. Preparatory work included industry and market research (competitor analysis, supplier analysis, market survey); developing the business plan; creating the accounting system and cash controls; and advertising and promotion. Students also had to locate a suitable facility to house the business, - design the layout of the store, purchase or lease

the necessary equipment, and produce financial forecasts.

Once the store was open for business, a new set of tasks became apparent. Currently, students in the program are responsible for all aspects of the project, such as sales and customer service; budgeting; public relations; strategic and long-term planning; developing and maintaining the business website; preparing for trade shows; and generating quarterly and annual reports. The students also train new staff.

Community partners

Partnerships, not money, are Enviroworks' most valuable resource and the key to the survival of the program. In order to ensure that it continues to increase its partnership base, the School Board has taken a proactive approach in

terms of its involvement in the business community. Representatives from Enviroworks have joined the Greater Kingston Chamber of Commerce, an organization which represents over 900 businesses in the Kingston Area. The School Board takes an active part in the Chamber's social activities, breakfast meetings, and even events such as the Home and Leisure Exposition.

Although Enviroworks was initially a School Board initiative, it has grown to become a broad community collaboration. The program has provided an opportunity for young people, donors and business partners to feel proud about contributing to the betterment of their community.

Community partners can become involved with Enviroworks in a number of ways. Some, like Ruman Resources Development Canada, provide funding for the program's training component. Others, like Kingston Bathworks, donate materials. Still others, such as the Dacon Corporation, help advise the students in different areas of business management. When Enviroworks was conducting market research and needed help in developing a survey, for example, several marketing research firms, including Thomley Stoker Advertising, were eager to assist. Similarly, local companies such as CKWS Television and GTO 960 helped the students develop TV and radio advertising.

Enviroworks has had great success in approaching local businesses, especially those which offer similar products. Home Depot, for example, is a valuable ally in helping to train students and in providing used materials to Enviroworks. In addition, its corporate philosophy supports both the environment and youth-at-risk. The School Board has approached the home renovation company about working with the Enviroworks program to help develop a more focussed curriculum and to improve employee

training. This partnership is an ideal pilot project for both parties due to their similar organizational interests. The project's long-term goal is to attempt to duplicate the Enviroworks program in cities where a Home Depot already exists.

The program began in 1994 with 15 partners and now collaborates with more than 250 businesses and community organizations. By working together, Enviroworks and its partners have figured prominently in the effort to reduce pressure on Kingston's waste disposal sites.

Demolition and deconstruction division

In an attempt to increase the quality of construction and demolition material it obtains for resale and the amount it diverts from the community's landfills, Enviroworks has started a deconstruction and demolition service. Enviroworks' deconstruction/demolition team (consisting of several students and one supervisor) goes directly to renovation job sites to dismantle and remove quality materials or to demolish smaller structures. This service is offered to the community free of charge. Enviroworks asks only to keep the materials that it removes or demolishes; this way, more material is obtained in better condition. Results include more material being diverted from the landfill, higher sales figures for Enviroworks and a practical, free service for Kingston residents. The service also expands upon the educational aspect of the Enviroworks program by offering students 'hands-on' technical training in the areas of demolition and deconstruction.

Business Prep Program

The Business Prep Program is a partnership between St. Lawrence College and the Limestone District School Board. The program

is designed to give students who plan to study business in postsecondary school a head start. High school students who participate in the Enviroworks project use the same books, study the same materials and complete similar assignments as students in their first year of Business Administration at St. Lawrence College. This partnership allows students to gain advance standing and possible credit for some first year St. Lawrence College Business Administration courses. Students have an opportunity to attend classes at the college and sample the post-secondary experience first-hand. The program was designed to help students improve their chances of success in their first year of college.

The outcomes

The program helps to divert more than 70 tonnes of material from the landfill every year. More than 5,000 Kingston residents have used the free pick-up service and have been encouraged to change their disposal habits now that there is a cost-free alternative to sending waste materials to the landfill.

The program also has helped local businesses and organizations, especially those affected by government cutbacks, to save large amounts of money in demolition and disposal costs. Thanks to Enviroworks, the Canadian Forces Base Kingston saved more than \$20,000 when it was forced to downsize and demolish three of its buildings last year. Queen's University has saved more than \$15,000 in disposal fees over the past two years. Other local businesses and community organizations have been spared thousands of dollars by working with the program.

Enviroworks also has attracted \$250,000 for the school board in the last two years and has generated gross sales of more than \$50,000 each

year. The program is in its second year of operation and is already self-sufficient.

Moreover, by providing an alternative learning environment for young people, the Enviroworks program has encouraged many at-risk students to complete their secondary school requirements. In addition, they have received valuable training and work experience which will assist them in their efforts to gain employment.

Awards

Enviroworks has been recognized locally, nationally and internationally for its environmental leadership and its innovative teaching strategies. The program has won numerous awards and its representatives have presented at conferences all over the world. Most recently, Enviroworks won the NOVA Corporation Global Best Award in the Caring for the Community and the Environment category.

The project also won the National Partners in Education Award for Broad Community Collaboration. This award recognizes innovative business/education partnerships across Canada.

In the case of the Enviroworks program, community partnerships have helped provide a unique training environment for students, developed financial resources for the School Board, and addressed environmental issues that affect the entire community.

Mike Zanibbi

Mike Zanibbi is Coordinator of the Enviroworks Program in Kingston. For more information about the program, visit the Enviroworks website at <http://www.enviroworks.org>

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