

Success Story Learners Learner Voice

Title:

The effectiveness of field trips as part of educational programmes:

Are field trips effective in providing transferable knowledge from experiential learning to theoretical assessment?

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Department/College: Northumberland College:
Health, Access and Social Care

Context:

Northumberland College

Northumberland College is the only general further education (GFE) college in the county. It has a main site at Ashington and additional sites at Kirkley Hall, Alnwick, Blyth and Berwick Upon Tweed. The college offers outreach provision across the county using its learning bus. It has one Centre of Vocational Excellence (CoVE) for inbound tourism. The college's mission is 'to provide education, training and services that are of high quality meeting the needs of people and industry in Northumberland and beyond'.

Researchers Department

At Northumberland College we offer a broad range of health and social care courses from entry level to level 4. The courses are designed for learners who want to begin a career in the health and social care sector.

I teach on several of the health and social care courses across the department and I have recently completed a MEd in Education. I always place a huge emphasis on action research to improve quality and practice with both my learners and colleagues. As a Lecturer it is essential to be constantly engaged in research to; lead by example; improve on practice and keep updated with the changes in education.

Introduction

Field trips are seen as a useful tool in education providing experiential learning outside of the four walls of a classroom. The idea behind this situated learning experience is to contextualise knowledge in order to develop a deeper understanding. John Dewey and Kurt Lewins foundational

theories are drawn upon to investigate the effectiveness of field trips as part of this experiential process.

'Give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; learning naturally results'. John Dewey

Good field trips can provide an integral part of the learning experience if they are planned well. The aim of this project is to consider how effective field trips are in providing contextualised knowledge and if this knowledge can then be easily transferred to learners work in the classroom.

L2L Role

The L2L role expected was the reflection upon the experiential learning process in order to become more resourceful in theoretical assessment. Readiness and resilience were key aspects of the outcomes however this was for different reasons than originally planned. Although initially the target outcome had been to develop knowledge for assessment, the result had reflected more upon vocational career choices. The reflective processes were still in place however they did not support the expected outcome.

Research Process:

As part of the Diploma in Society Health and Development it is an expectation that learners will take part in a variety of trips to enhance and contextualise their learning. The group to be sampled consisted of 12 learners of mixed ability, working at level 2. A series of visits were planned to follow the content of the course in order to provide an additional method of investigation and experiential learning in support of the criteria for assessment. Two separate visits were planned to a Health Tech Centre where students were able to take part in simulated activities and had the opportunity to work alongside health and social care professionals including doctors, paramedics, occupational therapists and chiropodists. Once the visits had been completed students were asked to provide written feedback on their experience at the Health Tech Centre. Their experiences were discussed in the classroom in the sessions that followed. Although students were unaware of the content during their visit, the assessment task asked learners to produce a report on a patients' pathway. The simulation at the Health Tech Centre was planned to take learners through the specified pathway from initial cardiac arrest to the aftercare that followed. Within the pathway, professionals would work with the learners providing demonstrations, practical activities and knowledge to support their assignment task. Assignment tasks were set specifically to reflect upon the learners experiences. It was believed the experiential learning process would enable students to approach the tasks more confidently and with a greater depth of understanding.

Data was collected from feedback forms completed immediately after the event to find out if any knowledge had been gained from the patient pathway exercise. This was collated and used to inform a second visit at a later date.

A controlled assessment task was completed 4 weeks later asking students to write about a patient pathway explaining the roles of the professionals involved.

The assessment tasks were marked in terms of accuracy and depth of knowledge. For this particular investigation the ability to relate this to the experiential learning process was also important in finding out if the field trip had been effective in delivering knowledge and enhancing understanding.

Evidence collected:

Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected. The data included:

Feedback from the original field trip
Assessment grades
Assessment feedback

Objectives:

Encourage on-going *reflection* on previous and current learning.
Investigating theoretical concepts and relating them to vocational contexts thus creating a new *readiness* for learning.
Through raising learning awareness improve learning *resourcefulness* leading to learning *resilience* through building self-confidence and understanding.

Discussion of Results:

The initial feedback from the field trip was very positive. The learners had enjoyed the practical element and they felt that they had gained a lot from the experience although they were not able to comment fully on specific aspects.

The elements that had remained fresh in their minds were aspects where they had physical involvement however they could not comment on demonstrations that had taken place or on the elements of the day where others had taken turns to be involved in the simulation.

The class that followed helped to refresh any information that learners were unable to remember from the visit. Discussions incorporated elements of the day such as taking measurements and the meaning of high or low readings. Professionals who could support any problems as a result of the readings were also considered.



The assessment task was set under controlled conditions. Learners were encouraged to use any work that they had previously produced in their file. They were also advised to utilise their experiences to provide a context.



The results of the assessment were not as expected. Only one learner had related the patient pathway to their experiences at the Health Tech Centre. The remaining 11 students had not considered any of the professionals involved and overall this task had achieved lower mark band results. There was little evidence of detail and the depth of understanding was minimal.

Quotes from students:

“Opened my eyes to what life is like for the less able”

“I enjoyed the day as it gave me a lot of insight into the different types of careers within health and social care”

“Made me consider being a paramedic”

“Good experience, thoroughly enjoyed the whole day”



Quotes from student reflect overall enjoyment on the day. Learners were able to make links between the practical activities taking place and vocational relevance and career choice immediately following the activity however this was not apparent in later theoretical assessments. Learners were unable to transfer the experiential learning within the workplace setting to the theoretical assessment in the classroom.

Conclusions:

Although the initial data suggested that the field trip had been a success, the end result suggests otherwise. Learners had reacted positively to the overall experience and had enjoyed a day out of the classroom. Where they had been directly involved and able to experience at first hand they had

demonstrated an increased depth of understanding on the day however they were unable to transfer this to their assessment at a later date.

Classroom discussion had helped to encourage reflection and learners were able to demonstrate knowledge when prompted. This was restricted in the control environment of the assessment and although all learners had been advised to use the resources from previous sessions this had not been enough to prompt the correct response on the patient pathway.

Effective use of field trips needs to be considered more fully. To be effective they must follow a number of different stages. There must be pre-trip planning put in place. The trip itself must encourage learners to engage at all times. They should be given the opportunity to gain hands on experience where possible. The post-trip planning should be place following the field trip. Activities should be planned in class to reinforce the learning that has taken place however this should be in addition to the usual classroom based activities. Activities in classroom can be related to the context of the field trip to allow students to spend time reflecting.

For field trips to be effective they must be planned as a three stage process. If good planning is not in place then it becomes a day of lost learning.

Internet Sources

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