Success Story Teachers

Title:
"Can changing the environment for personal/group tutorials encourage the personal development as a learner and improve the learner's experience of these sessions".

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Department/College: Northumberland College:
                        Health and Social care department

Summary:
The project took place over two terms, it was originally planned to work with two groups and to compare the results from the two groups. With one group continuing to have tutorials in the classroom as designated on time table and the other group to have their tutorials in the learning resource centre which is a nicer environment and provides space for private tutorials.
However when as students do they talked to each other the second group used their "learner voice" they chose that they used the same environment. This led to a change slightly to the planned research question.
The Tutorials proved to be very successful the learners enjoyed being able to have a more relaxed session, "having a coffee and chat is much nicer than just water" was one of the key comments from learners.

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*'.

The participants:
 The participants are all full time learners aged between 16 and 25, on a Health and Social care level 3 course. They are mostly aiming to go on to university to become professionals within the Health and Social care sector.

Researchers Department
I am a course team leader within the Health and social care department I am responsible for the BTEC National diploma Health and Social care.

Personal involved in the project Introduction

Although all learning environments aim to develop successful outcomes they may not achieve the desired result. This can be due to a number of factors. Some of which include the social behaviour of the learner and the environment itself.

Bandura's theory of social learning focuses on learning that occurs within a social context. Bandura introduced concepts such as observational learning, imitation and modelling. Through modelling we can teach new behaviours and influence the frequency of those previously learned, self-efficacy being one of these planned behaviours.

In order to ensure that this happens effectively it is important to take account of the characteristics, abilities and experience of learners as individuals or as a group when beginning to plan a learning environment (Kemp, Morrison, Ross, 1998).

An ideal opportunity for social learning to take place would be during sessions set aside for personal, social and moral development. In this case, tutorial sessions are used as the focal point with a comparison being made between learning taking place in formal and informal settings.

Research Process:

2 groups of learners completing a BTEC National diploma health and social care, was selected to take part in the investigation. The aim was to consider social learning processes in formal and informal settings. The ideal session for considering this aspect of learning was in tutorials where there was a strong focus on personal and social development. Tutorial sessions were planned throughout the year to take place in both classroom and learning resource centre settings. Sessions in the learning resource centre took place in an area called the deli bar where learners were able to purchase drinks and snacks whilst sharing information with staff and fellow pupils. More formal sessions were planned to take place within the class base room where usual delivery of course content would take place.

Learners were observed during sessions in their interactions with staff and other pupils. Observations were recorded as evaluative statements on each individual session plan across the tutorial periods.

Learners were asked to complete a written feedback form with questions relating to how they felt about tutorials and the environment in which they took place.

Qualitative data was collected through observations of group and individual learner behaviour. Written feedback from learners provided a more formal basis of data collection and results from group discussions with learners helped to triangulate evidence in order to provide a more solid conclusion.

Evidence collected:

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

Feedback from learners
Results of group discussions
Observations of learner behaviour

Discussion of Results:

Through observations the informal environment appeared to be more conducive to social learning. Learners were more confident in sharing information and they appeared to be more motivated overall. The work completed within the tutorial sessions was richer in quality and in quantity. Students seemed to be happier in their surroundings thus leading to higher motivation levels within the group. It was suggested that they liked being away from the classroom as privacy was a problem in the more formal setting. Feedback from learners supported the results of the observations with positive comments on the overall experience within the informal setting.

The Tomlinson report in 1998 called for an individually designed learning environment referred to the "learning eco system" made up of the components such as an individual learning programme, effective teaching and support. The informal tutorial sessions have provided a more individualised programme of support for social learning. Students were able to develop independence in their own learning and to voice their choices and preferences leading to a sense of value and development of Bandura's preferred self-efficacy behaviour.

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Conclusions:

Informal learning environments can be more effective in the process of social learning if good planning is in place. Care must be taken over the type of environment. It must be formal enough to be conducive to learning yet informal enough to allow learners to relax and enjoy their surroundings. Educators must consider the planned outcomes of the sessions. Although informal environments are beneficial for personal and social development they can hinder intellectual development if the surroundings are not compatible with the planned outcomes.

If planned effectively, informal settings can be beneficial to both educator and learner through the development of learned behaviours which will have a holistic impact on the overall learning experience.

Summary of the three most important impacts

- Tutorials became a pleasant experience that learners wanted to be at
- Learners felt able to easily share information away from confines of classroom
- Allowed the tutor to adopt a different role, away from stricter classroom rules

Moving forward:
It is planned within the next curriculum year to hold all tutorials in the learning resource centre. I would like to extend this project to being able to take some of the academic sessions in this area when learners are working independently. Would like to be able to look at whether the environment can improve the achievement of the learners.

The role of L2L:
The L2L role was used with half of the learners in that they received six designated sessions with an experienced L2L tutor, the other group received some aspects of this programme.
The project aimed to
Encourage on-going *reflection* on previous and current learning. Being able to reflect current progress and identify areas for improvement development thus creating a new *readiness* for learning.
Through raising learning awareness improve learning *resourcefulness* leading to learning *resilience* through building self-confidence and understanding.

Sources

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