

Case Study: Developing the expert learner in offender education

'Assessment and learning: involving the learner'. LSC funded project.

The context:

HMP and YOI Low Newton is an all female estate which houses women from the age of 18 upwards. Those between the ages of 18 and 21 are classed as young offenders. The women are here for a range of sentences, lengths can vary from two weeks to life.

High percentages of women access education, at present they can access a full or part time timetable although this will be changing in the near future to full time access only.

The challenge:

In a recent sweep for feedback by the Manchester College it became apparent that the learners are not fully aware of their goals, aims and objectives and how they would achieve them. The initial cohort group were a challenging mix of learners who needed to develop communications skills in order to take part in discussions and debates to a high degree to fully appreciate the course material. The case study would test whether developing them as expert learners could enable them to improve their communication skills and measure their own progress against targets they had set.

What we did:

- The learners were made aware that they were taking part in a case study and the concept of the expert learner was explained to them
- Learners were given the ILP and designed supporting documents with the tutor to measure their progress during the sessions
- Community of enquiry was used to structure discussions and enable the learners to measure their progress
- Learners were encouraged to pick their own topics and structure the lesson
- Feedback was collected at the end of the sessions to monitor progress

The outcomes:

- Made learners aware of themselves as expert learners managing their own targets and learning experience
- Evaluated the Manchester College ILP documentation
- Deviated from the curriculum to integrate "Learning to Learn" skills into sessions
- Encouraged the development of communication skills within the classroom
- Evaluated the relevance of this to the wider curriculum

The impact:

- Learners were able to take part in discussions on emotive topics in a mature manner
- Learners responded better to working towards targets as a result of identifying them for themselves
- The Manchester College ILP documentation was not seem as particularly user friendly but worked well with the supporting documentation devised by the learners

- Learners were more aware of the skills they were developing so recognised where they were transferrable
- Learners responded very well to the concept of the expert learner and will use it in their lifelong learning experience
- Learners, through development of communication and learning skills formed a cohesive working group and became more considerate of each other
- The target setting (with tutor support) had a positive impact on other groups (monitored by John McSorley)

Supporting documentation:

The self assessment document (contact us for details) allowed learners to identify their own areas for development honestly and without feeling threatened. Feedback was gathered from the group at the end of the case study, a synopsis of the information gathered is presented below.

Do you feel that you have learned any new skills or improved existing ones during the case study?

- Yes, how to hold a conversation and listen
- It has helped me to improve my analytical skill
- Yes! How to hold a conversation and bite my tongue and listen properly

Do you feel that you are more aware of your targets and how you are progressing against them?

- Yes, it changed the way I think about certain things
- I feel that I am progressing well and covering a wide range of topics
- Yes, I am well on my way

Do you feel that you can transfer the skills that you have developed in the class to other areas of your life?

- Yes, I have because I now stop myself from interrupting a conversation on the wing
- Yes, it helps me to analyse and pull apart problems in my life
- Yes, as I now listen to people better where before I would jump straight into someone's conversations

Are you more aware of the way that you learn as a result of the work that we have done?

- Yes, I have more patience to sit and learn
- Not really, I learn the same way I always have
- Yes, because I am aware that I am better at discussions

For further details about this case study please feel free to contact us at HMP and YOI Low Newton, Brasside, Durham, DH1 5YA Tel 0191 3764118

Email Angela.Salmon@hmps.gsi.gov.uk and John.McSorley@hmps.gsi.gov.uk



HMP and YOI Low Newton