

Case Study: Introduction of a teambuilding day as part of initial assessment

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



The context: Thornbeck College offers an educational programme funded by the Learning and Skills Council, to young adults with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC). On arriving at Thornbeck College, the learners undergo an initial assessment period in order for a baseline assessment of their educational needs to be developed. This case study outlines the development of a teambuilding day for the learners as part of that assessment period.

The challenge: Learners are currently assessed whilst they participate in a wide range of functional activities which take place in a range of meaningful environments. Assessment covers the learners' skills in all areas, ranging from academic strengths (e.g. literacy and numeracy skills) to living skills (e.g. using money) to ASC specific criteria (e.g. communication, flexibility of thought and social interaction).

By implementing a one day teambuilding activity session we provided learners and staff with a practical and naturalistic setting for assessment. The purpose was to allow for an emphasis of assessment on social interaction skills, flexibility of thought and communication through the observation of participation in tailored team building games and activities. We hoped it would also provide an opportunity to observe learners' and staff reactions to working as one large group, and give the learners an opportunity to surprise us with their own capabilities.

What we did: In order to develop and implement the assessment day along with the criteria for assessment, a series of actions were carried out.

- Teaching staff, Speech and Language Therapists (SaLT) and the student councilor were involved in discussions regarding the aim, content, assessment strategies and timings for the day.
- A venue was booked, a license sought from the City Council and payment organised.
- Activities were agreed upon between the teaching staff, the student councilor and the SaLT team and a timetable of events was drawn up for the day. Activities included 'Keeper of the Keys', 'Pass the Rhythm', 'The Name Game', 'Emotions cards', parachute games and a game called 'Colours'. These games were selected as they involved the learners socially interacting, communicating and stretching their imaginations, all of which people with ASC can find difficult. Learners and staff were organised into 3 compatible groups, who moved around the activities. Learners and staff also worked together as one large group during the day.
- Two members of the teaching staff observed the learners during participation in conjunction with 3 members of the SaLT team. Information was recorded on an existing extended initial assessment document. Photographs and videos provided evidence for learners to add to their Person Centered Learning Plans as a record of the day.

- An evaluation of the day was carried out by all staff and learners involved at the end of the session.

The outcomes:

As a result of this project we were able to:

- Assess flexibility of thought, key communication and social interaction skills for each learner
- Learn previously unsought information (i.e. it was noted that some learners would only approach staff members, approaching their peers only if prompted by a staff member)
- Observe the interaction between peer groups in a naturalistic way
- Gain an understanding of where individual learners may fit within autistic spectrum condition
- Gain an insight into the likes and dislikes of learners with regard to activities, and note individual unplanned achievements
- Reconstruct time frames for activities and develop potential activities to use with learners in the future
- Allow learners to begin building a relationship or understanding of one another
- See first hand how staff and learners interacted and integrated with each other when out of their comfort zone

The impact:

Implementing this project had the following impact:

- Assessment has been enhanced to further assess communication, social interaction and flexibility of thought in a naturalistic setting
- Learners have had the opportunity to surprise us in the ways they interact with one another in small and large groups, and in their confidence in trying new things
- More activities have been devised that suit the interests and abilities of individual learners
- The SaLT team are able to implement new activities in their future therapy sessions with learners
- According to staff evaluations, they found it useful and interesting to work with learners who they had previously not had the chance to work with
- As a result of the success of the day, a team building event will be planned for each new learner cohort and the games will be used in ongoing assessment activities

	<p>For further information contact: Beth Mullen, Senior FE Tutor or Natasha Stirrat, Learning Support Assistant</p> <p>Tel: 0191 548 8206</p> <p>Email: beth.mullen@ne-as.org.uk natasha.stirrat@ne-as.org.uk</p>
---	---