

Tell Me More: Group Reflection of Job Shadowing Experiences

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

Experiential learning is defined as a particular form of learning from life experience (Kolb, 2014). Job shadowing is a work-based experiential learning opportunity in which students explore a job and get a glimpse of the “real world” (Poe, 2015). In many cases, shadowing potential career paths answers the age-old question, “Why do I have to learn this?” (Reese 2005). By participating in a job shadowing experience, students have the opportunity to gain valuable insight into a career in which they may not have otherwise. Shadowing offers the chance to explore a career that is interesting and break down misconceptions about a particular career area (Cho & Gao, 2009).

Job shadowing experiences can reinforce student learning (Reese, 2005). In an effort to capitalize on the learning, reflections can be conducted to heighten the learning experience. Reflection involves “the process of intentionally creating opportunities for learners to reflect upon experiences and transfer learning to real life and future learning” (Stanchfield, 2011, para. 2). Group discussions about those reflections allow students to learn from each other while thinking about their experience at a deeper level.

How it Works/Methods/Steps

Students in this particular class are required to select and complete two job shadows during the semester. Each job shadow had to be at least four hours, but were encouraged to complete closer to eight hours at each location. After the job shadow, they wrote a reflection paper about the experience. In addition to the reflection paper, we spent an entire class period discussing their experiences. This allowed them to learn from each other and spend more time thinking about what they learned.

After the first job shadow, students were grouped with others who completed a similar job shadowing experience. After the second job shadow, students were grouped with others who completed an experience in a career different from their own. Students were grouped using notecards with their name and type of career they shadowed at the beginning of the reflection day class period.

Students were given an assignment sheet to help them discuss and reflect upon their experiences. They selected a leader to facilitate the discussion and each person gave a brief overview of their job shadow. This discussion included why they chose their person to shadow, length of job shadow, activities observed, advice for others, insights, and how the profession/job provides agricultural education. After each shared, they had to create a visual display to convey their discussion with the entire class. The class period lasted 75 minutes which allowed adequate time to complete the activity. Students received 25 points for participating in each discussion day (50 points total). This was awarded in full as long as they were present and participating.

After the activity, students were asked to write a half-page response to guiding questions about the reflection day. Their responses were used to improve the reflection day activities. Questions after 1st reflection day: 1. Did you like sharing with a group your job shadow experience? 2. Would you rather have been with others who completed different experiences than you? 3. How

can this activity be improved? Questions after 2nd reflection day: 1. Did you like being in a group with careers different from the one you observed? 2. What other way could you demonstrate your learning to me (other than a paper)?

Results to Date/Implications

Job shadowing reflection days were implemented in the Introduction to Agricultural Information Science class at MSU in the Fall 2015 semester. This course had 42 students from several different majors ranging from freshmen to seniors. Thirty-six students completed job shadow reflection #1 and 35 completed job shadow reflection #2. Groups for job shadow #1 consisted of those who shadowed agriculture teachers, sales representatives, managers, Extension agents, production agriculturalists, agricultural communications, and one group consisting of a variety of careers. Groups for job shadow #2 comprised of a variety of career fields to allow for more diverse discussion.

Overall students expressed their satisfaction with the reflection day activities. Students commented the reflection activity gave them “... *a different outlook on my experience that I might not have picked up on without the group*” and “*a chance to relate to other students who are pursuing the same career path as me.*”

Students were split in their opinion of the method used to group. “*I like that we shared together about the same job. We all experienced different things.*” While others suggested mixing the groups, “*The point of this assignment was to learn about careers and I feel we would have learned more by sharing with people who job shadowed something different.*” Similar comments were received for their satisfaction with groups for reflection day #2. “*We were able to discuss different things that were very interesting. It also made it difficult to find common ground on certain things.*”

Many commented they didn't have any suggestions to change the activity, but a few selected comments included; *mixing different career paths to let people get a feel for other career paths; more time to discuss our own experiences; we were confused on how to summarize all our experiences; and asking more in depth questions.*

Students were asked to make suggestion as to more novel ways to demonstrate their learning. Many suggested a presentation with pictures, others suggested videos, word clouds, skit, and visual representations (drawings, collages, etc).

Future Plans/Advice to Others

Students should be encouraged to use more graphics/pictures to communicate their discussion to the entire class. This practice will be used for future job shadows/field experiences as a method to encourage students to reflect at a deeper level without creating more papers to grade. This activity can also help build professional networks and group cohesion in the class.

Costs/Resources Needed

There is no cost to conduct the job shadowing reflection. The actual job shadowing experience does require students to travel and possibly miss class. The groups can be composed in a variety of methods. Appropriate classroom space to allow each group to discuss is beneficial.

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