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Going Away Together — Exploring the Impact on Learning of Residentials on Youth and Community Work Students

Importance of the issue

This paper intends to encourage you to consider the benefits of going away with your peers and teachers.

Completing university studies is hard. You will be expected to work under intense pressure and complete multiple pieces of work to deadlines while ensuring you maintain a work-life balance.

Research shows us that students are more likely to complete their studies, attain better grades, and have a positive experience if they have positive relationships with peers and tutors. Peregrina-Kretz et al. (2018) claimed: “findings from this study highlight the vital role that informal peer interactions through classes, clubs and residence life have in supporting students to find community and meet their academic and personal goals.”

In an age when more content is being delivered online, in the main due to the COVID-19 pandemic pushing learning online and students finding it more difficult to achieve a balance between socializing, studying, and paid employment, it is increasingly difficult to form bonds with classmates and build relationships with teachers.

53% of students in the U.K. (Student Beans 2021) hold down a job alongside their studies. Considering both the rise in the cost

of living and tuition fees it is hardly surprising that socializing and building relationships with course mates outside of classes drops down the list of priorities during studies.

Students undertaking a Youth and Community Work degree program are required to learn how to build relationships with young people and members of the communities in which they work. They attend placements and are assessed against the National Occupational professional standards of youth work. How to build relationships is a challenging thing to learn in a classroom, and as such, placements and experiences form a vital part of the students' learning.

This paper discusses one potential solution to the problems presented here. Early in the academic year, students are given the opportunity to attend a short residential. This involves students living together for a short period of time, typically three to five days. During this time, students engage in teambuilding activities, eat and socialize together, and potentially complete some of the academic content for their program of study.

Attending a residential means that in a relatively short space of time, students can build relationships that cannot be formed during weekly lectures, can learn about each other through teambuilding games, and engage in shared experiences to further enhance their friendships.

Much research has been done on the impact of residential learning on young people, less so on adults and higher education students, but we are suggesting the impact could be huge in encouraging students of all ages to have time out of the classroom with each other.

Learning Away, a U.K.-based campaign to offer young people a chance for high quality residential learning, evaluated the impact of their residentials on the young people that attended and found, among other things:

- improved achievement, attainment, and progress,
- improved learner engagement and motivation,
- greater enjoyment of learning,
- significantly enhanced relationships with both staff and peers,
- greater cohesion and a sense of belonging.

When examining the case for overnight residentials as opposed to day trips or activities in the classroom, Learning Away (2021) suggests “this experience transforms relationships and develops a strong sense of community and belonging between staff and students involved.”

Consider your feelings on residential trips. Do they fill you with dread or excitement? Would you learn better if you had the opportunity to attend one?

Illustration



Fig. 5. Students have the opportunity to engage in activities they might not normally do. This is a group of students at Harwes Farm in Lancashire taking part in a forest school day.

Courtesy of Jenny Lamb.



Fig. 6. On the residential, students spend time learning, socializing, and eating together.

Courtesy of Jenny Lamb.

References

<https://learningaway.org.uk/> has a wealth of resources and articles to support the impact of residential activities. Template activities and case studies can be used from here. Although this resource focuses on secondary school-aged young people, the lessons and impact are just as relevant in higher education.

Peregrina-Kretz, Diliانا, Tricia Seifert, Christine Arnold, and Jeffrey Burrow. 2018. “Finding Their Way in Post-Secondary Education: The Power of Peers as Connectors, Coaches, Co-Constructors and Copycats.” *Higher Education Research & Development* 37 (5): 1076–90.

Prince, Heather E. 2021. "The Lasting Impacts of Outdoor Adventure Residential Experiences on Young People." *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* 21 (3): 261–76.

Student Beans 2021 (an app or card to discover all the places that offer a student discount).