Managing the Placement Learning Environment

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University of Central Lancashire
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Within this section we will be exploring the pre-placement management that you need to do in order to provide an effective learning experience for your student. This session will be broken down into three steps:-

**Step 1** Evaluation of yourself as mentor.

**Step 2** Evaluation of your organisation as a learning environment.

**Step 3** Evaluation of the student in relation to the placement learning experience.

Within each step of the session there will be tasks for you to undertake on your own, as well as topics for discussion with others on the module using the discussion board facility.
This section is designed to enable you to develop knowledge and skills in relation to the pre-placement management of a clinical learning experience, within the specific context of your area of practice.
At the end of this section you will be able to:

1. Identify your personal strengths and weaknesses as a mentor and suggest strategies for overcoming any weaknesses.

2. Identify the opportunities and threats within your organisation in terms of the learning environment and suggest strategies for overcoming any threats.

3. Produce a list of questions for the student who will be attending your placement, in order to facilitate a match between the placement and the student's individual learning needs.
Before providing a practice placement for a student it is important to consider what kind of mentor you will be, and the impact this might have on the learning experience. One method of evaluating this is by using a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis, (see diagram);

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<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
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Strengths and weaknesses are considered to be internal factors affecting your performance in a particular role, whilst opportunities and threats relate to the external factors affecting your performance (more about this in step 2).

**Individual Activity**

Think about yourself as a mentor.

Consider what your strengths and weaknesses are in terms of your role as a mentor.

How might these strengths and weaknesses influence the quality of the learning experience for learners assigned to you?

To take this activity forward, you need to consider the following in relation to your role as a mentor/assessor/educator.

When completing a SWOT analysis it is important not just to come up with a list of strengths and weaknesses but also to consider how you can improve on these. This may help you to formulate a development plan in relation to your role as a mentor.

**Discussion Topics**

Post one of your strengths on the discussion board with a short explanation of how this is good for your mentor role. What are the similarities and differences between the professions in terms of personal strengths?

Post one weakness and a solution on the discussion board. Are there any suggestions from others that you might be able to utilise?

Now think about your strengths and weaknesses in relation to your own profession.

Most professional bodies will have guidelines for what they expect a mentor to have in terms of experience and training. If you are unsure check out your professional web pages.

**Individual Activity**

Review the list of strengths and weaknesses you have completed in the above activity

How do the strengths you have identified match up with those of your professional body in relation to practice placement provision?
We have considered the internal factors that can affect your performance as a mentor. Now we need to consider the external factors that can affect the running of a clinical learning experience. This forms the Opportunities and Threats part of the SWOT analysis.

**Individual Activity**
Consider the environment that you work in.

What learning opportunities can be provided by your workplace for a learner?

What threats are there to the learning experience?

Now you need to think about ways in which you can maximise the opportunities and minimise the threats.

**Individual Activity**
How will you use the opportunities in your working environment to maximise the learning experience for your student?

(Hint: You may consider how/when these opportunities fit into the learning objectives for the placement).

How can you minimise the impact of the threats to the learning experience, and what contingencies can you plan in case of possible threats?

(Hint: Possible threats could include things that may happen but are not there all the time).

By considering both the internal and external factors influencing the provision of a good learning experience for a student, and by planning your placement around these factors, you can maximise the potential for learning within your clinical environment.

Having considered your own environment, are any of the issues you have raised relevant to others? Go onto the discussion board and see!

**Discussion Topics**
Using the discussion board, find out what the common threats to quality practice placement learning are across the professions.

Discuss how these problems may be overcome in order to provide a good learning experience for students.
Finally, you need to consider how the student fits into your placement. By considering the student’s background, previous experience, skills, weaknesses and personal objectives, you can tailor make the placement to suit their learning needs.

**Individual Activity**

What information are you provided with about the student(s) from the University?

Does any of this help you to design the placement to suit the student’s learning needs?

What other information might you find beneficial?

What communication mechanisms are there available within the organisation that might allow you to discuss this with the placement coordinators? (e.g. liaison meetings, end of year reviews).

To help you develop your portfolio of ideas to support your role it would be useful to know what other professional mentors/educators have done or are doing. Check out the discussion board.

**Discussion Topic**

Using the discussion board, find out how your profession differs from others in terms of the amount of information provided about the student.

If there are professions who receive the information you would like, how did they achieve this, and is it feasible within your profession?

This is the end of this section – we hope this has supported your learning about your role, and been enjoyable.


http://www.peterhoney.com/product/brochure
PROJECT AIMS

The Project aims to make practitioners more effective at supporting & supervising students in the workplace across a range of healthcare disciplines.

The professions involved in the project are:

- Dietetics
- Nursing
- Occupational Therapy
- Physiotherapy
- Radiography

The principal questions to be addressed in this project are:

- What constitutes effective practice in placement education?
- How can effective practice be implemented at organisational, professional and practitioner levels so as to maximise student learning on placement?
- How can this good practice be developed and embedded in the contexts of health and social care within a multicultural workforce?

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