



Evidence in Action

A K20 Center Research Brief

The Experiential-Learning Track: Career Exploration, Student Interest, & Applied Classroom-Learning in Small Rural Junior-Senior High Schools

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Introduction

This intervention brief explores the research article "The Experiential-Learning Track: Career Exploration, Student Interest, & Applied Classroom-Learning in Small Rural Junior-Senior High Schools" by Michael Turnlund, published in 2019. The article addresses the challenge of providing diverse and relevant academic programs in small rural high schools, which often face budgetary constraints and limited staffing. The research problem focuses on how to offer meaningful and relevant courses that align with student interests and career goals despite these limitations. The objectives are to develop a program that provides hands-on learning opportunities tied to classroom objectives and targets individual students' career and postsecondary education goals. The significance of the research lies in its potential to enhance student engagement, career readiness, and community connections.

Methodology

Research Design:

The study employs a qualitative research design, drawing on the author's experiences, interviews, and surveys conducted with staff and students at Clark Fork Junior/Senior High School (CFHS) in Idaho.

Sample:

The sample includes students and staff from CFHS, a small rural school with a predominantly white, working-class student body. The school faced declining enrollment and limited elective course offerings due to budgetary and staffing constraints.

Data Analysis:

Data were analyzed through thematic analysis, identifying key themes and strategies related to the implementation and outcomes of the Experiential-Learning Track (ELT) Program.



Results

The study identifies several key outcomes and benefits of the ELT Program:

1. **Improved Student Engagement:** The program increased student motivation and engagement by offering hands-on learning opportunities that aligned with their interests and career goals.
2. **Career Readiness:** The ELT Program provided students with practical experiences in various career fields, helping them make informed decisions about their postsecondary education and career paths.
3. **Community Connections:** The program fostered stronger connections between the school and the local community, with local businesses and professionals serving as mentors and providing experiential learning opportunities.
4. **Increased Enrollment:** The program contributed to an increase in student enrollment at CFHS, attracting students from other schools in the region.
5. **Diverse Learning Opportunities:** The ELT Program offered a wide range of tracks, including Outdoor Track, Arts & Culture Track, Animal Science Track, Tech Track, Business Track, and Independent Track, each providing unique learning experiences.

The implications of these results suggest that the ELT Program can effectively address the challenges faced by small rural schools, enhancing student engagement, career readiness, and community involvement.

Application into Practice

To replicate this intervention in a school context, educators can:

1. **Develop Themed Tracks:** Create themed tracks based on student interests and career goals. Conduct surveys to identify student preferences and tailor the tracks accordingly.
2. **Utilize Community Resources:** Engage local businesses and professionals to serve as mentors and provide hands-on learning opportunities. Establish partnerships with community organizations to support the program.
3. **Flexible Scheduling:** Implement a flexible scheduling system that allows for dedicated experiential learning days. Consider a four-day school week with the fifth day reserved for ELT activities.
4. **Teacher Involvement:** Encourage teachers to develop and lead tracks, providing stipends for their efforts. Allow teachers to lead tracks outside their credentialed content areas to maximize flexibility.
5. **Student-Centered Learning:** Focus on student-centered learning by offering opportunities for self-directed projects and career exploration. Include job-shadowing and mentorship components to enhance real-world learning experiences.

By integrating these strategies, schools can create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that supports student interests and career development.



Work Cited

Turnlund, M. (2019). The Experiential-Learning Track: Career Exploration, Student Interest, & Applied Classroom-Learning in Small Rural Junior-Senior High Schools. *Northwest Journal of Teacher Education*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.15760/nwjte.2019.14.2.5>