

Field Trips and Immersion Classroom Activities: Expanding the Scope of Experiential Learning in HDFS

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BACKGROUND:

Field trips and immersion classroom activities are valuable forms of experiential learning in the university setting. Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) "combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior" (Kolb, 1984, p. 21).

METHODS

Sample: Convenience sample of 13 (6 graduate / 7 undergraduate students in a death and dying course and 43 undergraduate students in a play course (N=56).

Procedures:

(1) Field Trips: class visited 5 cemeteries (community, private, 2 historic, slave)

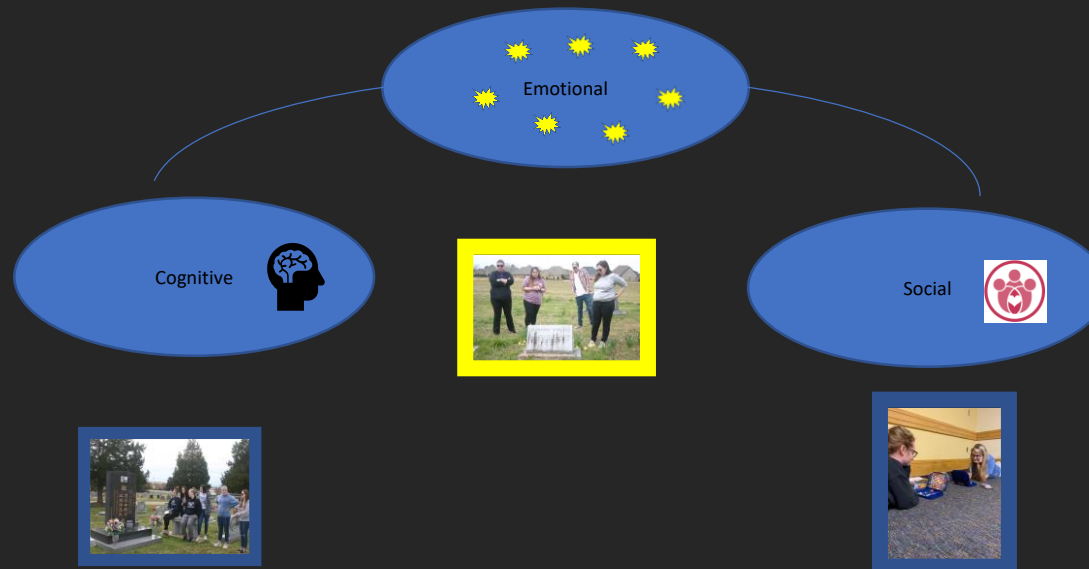
(2) Immersion Activities: play-doh, mural painting, baby washing, Legos (all in one class period) and 6 different types of board / card games (all in one class period)

Students were given reflective prompts prior to each experience and encouraged to share additional thoughts not captured by prompts. A video recording was made following the cemetery field trip as students verbally processed the experience.

Note: This presentation is part of an on-going project that will continue over several years.

Field trips and immersion classroom activities facilitated social and cognitive knowledge for HDFS undergraduate and graduate students.

Emotional Connection: The unsung HERO / SHERO



RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of students' responses were grouped into 3 categories with several sub-themes:

Cognitive knowledge:

(1) Exchange of ideas – cooperative learning from peers

"Even the dead tell have a story to tell." (Primitive Baptist cemetery from the early 1800's with many children's graves.)

"Death does not discriminate." (Comparing all 5 of the cemeteries)

(2) Historical perspective

"So many founders of ECU are buried here . . . The history of ECU in a cemetery!" (Cherry Hill Historic Cemetery)

"Dominos . . . Originated in China . . . And my grandfather said it started on his street!" (immersion activities)

Social knowledge:

(1) Interactions with peers about course content in "new ways"

"I truly enjoyed playing with peers, engaging in games / activities, and watching others enjoy themselves." (immersion activities)

"The feel, the smell when I opened the new can of play-doh. I was right back at my kitchen table as a kid. And I loved all the random open-ended props you added. I could play here all day. I totally get why children get so excited about new play-doh!" (immersion activities)

(2) Empathy toward others

"Observing others having fun – seeing the smiles on their faces while they played. (immersion activities)

"This cemetery is really hard for many . . . It seems forgotten, in the middle of nowhere . . . It feels forgotten." (slave cemetery)

Emotional Element:

Students used descriptive words such as relaxed, joy, happy, excitement, sadness, mixed emotions as they were reflecting on the experiential learning opportunities.

Putting it all Together . . .

It appears that the **emotional connection** between students may be the bridge between cognitive and social knowledge gained from these experiences. Student responses revealed emotional connections to classmates throughout the experiences. Thus, it appears that experiential learning opportunities offer students unique ways to interact with course content, classmates, and the instructor. The field trips and immersion classroom activities required many students to initially operate outside of their comfort zone and process course information in new ways. Based on narrative comments, all students reported that after any initial hesitation, they were very excited about continuing with experiential learning and believed it was beneficial in the learning process.

"There are just some things you can't learn from a lecture."