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Increasing Occupational Therapy Students’ Feelings of Civic Responsibility through Service-Learning Experiences: A Qualitative Study
Today’s Objectives

• Discussion of “Service-Learning”
• Purpose of the Study
• Methodology
• Participants
• Findings
• Discussion
• Questions ??
Service-Learning in U.S.A.

- 82% of American universities and colleges offer courses incorporating Service-Learning (Moser & Rogers, 2005)
- 75% of students who engaged in Service-Learning said their life perspectives changed after the experience (Astin et al., 2000).
Four components of Service-Learning

1. Active participation

2. Structured reflection time must be *guided* by the instructor

   • (Cashel, Goodman & Swanson, 2003, National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2010)
Four components of Service-Learning

3. Integrate the curriculum to real life: students apply skills and knowledge

4. Be an extension of student learning process
Benefits of Service-Learning in Occupational Therapy Education

Recent studies found MOT students reported *increases* in their:

- Exposure to diverse populations (Greene, 1997)
- Understanding of other health care professions (Flinn et al., 2009; Gupta, 2006)
- Awareness of the needs of a community (Lohman & Aitken, 2002)

...continued
...cont.

- **Ability to lead therapeutic groups** (Bazyk et al, 2010)
- **Technical and clinical reasoning skills** (Atler & Gavin, 2010; Raiz, 2007)
- **Use of therapeutic occupations** (Bazyk et al, 2010; Vroman, Simmons & Knight, 2010)
The Role of Advocacy in Occupational Therapy

- OTRs acknowledge clients’ need to experience *occupational justice* (Wilcock & Townsend, 2009)
- Promote clients’ equality and dignity
- OTR role goes beyond direct service provision; includes advocating to empower clients (*OTPF*) (AOTA, 2008)
Purpose of Study

This study sought to understand MOT students’ experiences during service-learning experiences with ‘clients’ at homeless shelters, specifically related to their feelings of *professional self-efficacy, advocacy, and civic responsibility*.
Study was conducted with two Co-Researchers:

- John J. Bazyk, OTR/L, Chair, School of Health Sciences, Cleveland State University, Cleveland, Ohio USA
- Dave Stephens, Physician’s Assistant and Master of Health Sciences student, Cleveland State University
Study Participants

- HSIRB was secured for volunteers
- Had taken a required Service-Learning course in which maintained a weekly reflexive journal
- 6 First Year MOT students in a large urban public university
- Journals were de-identified
Data Analysis

• Analysts: 2 OT faculty and 1 MSHS student (his thesis project)
• Guided by Strauss & Corbin (1990)
• Analysts each independently read the journals, noted themes, & maintained reflective journals
• Met over 2 months to discuss/debate the themes
Data Analysis

- Member Checking: Four of six participants provided feedback
- Validated conclusions of the researchers
Five Key Themes Emerged:

1. Increased *Self-Awareness*
2. Increased *awareness of the homeless individuals as “people”*
3. Heightened *awareness of social issues*
4. Increased *professional self-efficacy*
5. Development of *advocacy skills and civic responsibility*
Theme 1: *Increased Self Awareness*

- Initially felt anxiety,
- Unsure of own abilities to be ‘good’
- Uncertain how would be able to talk with clients
- Concerned for personal safety

- “[supervisor said] people have been attacked in the past…I did not exactly find this to be a comforting piece of information”
- “I’m concerned about lice, scabies, bedbugs, staph infections…”
Theme 1: 
*Increased Self Awareness*

- Through active engagement with ‘clients’ views changed
- “I am starting to feel a little more comfortable with the women at the shelter, the environment, and myself”
Theme 2: Awareness of Homeless Individuals as Persons

- Initially students had preconceived stereotypes
- Found ‘clients’ also had preconceived notions of them!
- Over time, barriers dropped:
  “I remember sitting there and forgetting for a split second that I was even at a homeless shelter. I just felt like I was hanging out with a bunch of friends.”
Theme 2: Awareness of Homeless Individuals as Persons

“Now I see them as individuals who have had lives before being homeless, who had and still have family, relationships and friends. I never took the time to think about them as human beings who have the same wants and needs and dreams for the future as many of us.”
Theme 3: Awareness of Social Issues

They noted social disparities:

“I left with a knot in my stomach and went back to the dorm cafeteria where they have a create-your-own-deli-sandwich station and a fresh fruit bar with cool whip! As I ate I felt incredibly fortunate and guilty at the same time.”
Theme 3: Awareness of Social Issues

They noted inequities:

“I was able to have a glimpse at the social injustice in our society in that not everyone has access to things that we sometime take for granted: health care, food, shelter, employment.”
Theme 3: Awareness of Social Issues

Realization that homelessness was not about laziness:

“I have also learned that this can happen to anyone. It only takes one factor to fall out of place and you are struggling to survive.”
Theme 4: Professional Self-Efficacy

• Felt greater belief in self and own burgeoning professional skills and knowledge

“Working with the residents at [x] was helpful for no other reason than to reinforce the idea that soon I will be working with real people with problems…and I will have the expertise to help!”
Theme 4: Professional Self-Efficacy

- Able to articulate philosophical and theoretical basis or choices.
- Developing skills to advocate for profession of occupational therapy

“The more I explained [to other professionals] what I was doing and the reasons I chose the activities, the more people understood what OTs are capable of doing and what we stand for.”
Theme 5: Development of Advocacy Skills and Civic Responsibility

• Saw the impact that their eventual work as an occupational therapist might be beyond direct service provision
Theme 5: Development of Advocacy Skills and Civic Responsibility

• “This experience gave me lots of insight into the wide variety of areas that an OT can work in the community, and of course, there are many different ways that all sorts of people could benefit from OT.”
Theme 5: Development of Advocacy Skills and Civic Responsibility

“I’ve also learned that societal, ethical, and moral issues will be a constant in my professional world. This experience has given me insight into some of these matters already.”
Student participants expressed:

• **Personal growth** beyond what would have been possible simply through classroom experiences

• Need to **understand self** within the therapeutic relationship
Discussion

Student participants expressed:

- Direct experience with a diverse population led to decreased anxiety
- Greater understanding of the ‘culture’ of homelessness and challenges homeless population faces
Discussion

• Directly heard the narrative perspective of the ‘clients’
• Marginalized populations also express a desire to be occupational beings
Discussion

• Increased sense of **obligation** as a future OTR **to advocate** for clients in *any* setting

• Promote **occupational justice**
Discussion

• Greater **self-efficacy** in their ability to enact change
• Developing **professional reasoning skills**
• Able to practice **application and analysis skills**, and problem solve a solution
Discussion

• Burgeoning leadership skills
• Greater understanding of the value and relevance of occupational therapy
• Through co-leading groups –
  • Able to motivate client to participate
  • Able to negotiate partnerships with other student
Study Limitations

1. small number of participants (N=6) at one type of university.
   However, can transfer findings to similar population

2. one method of data collection (journals)
   However, the inclusion of triangulation of literature strengthened study
Limitations

3. Possibility self-edited journals for social desirability

   However, many of the participants also revealed ‘negative’ situations within the journals
Additional Completed Research

Two studies of MOT students participants in Service-Learning:

• Service-Learning and the Development of Therapeutic Communication Skills (Completed Summer 2010) (Accepted for publication in *Occupational Therapy in Mental Health*)

• Service-Learning and Development of Empathy: A Mixed-Method Study (In progress)
Selected References

Selected References


• Maloney, S.M, & Griffiths, K. (In press). Occupational therapy students’ development of therapeutic communication skills during a Service-Learning experience. *Occupational Therapy in Mental Health*.

References

QUESTIONS??