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Breaking down the homeless stigma - applying appreciative inquiry with first year occupational therapy students

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Introduction:- The OT programme at Cardiff University has adapted the traditional problem based learning (PBL) approach by integrating appreciative inquiry (AI) into student learning. Two days after commencing their education, and as means to introduce PBL and AI ,

Objectives:-Students are given a visual trigger of a homeless man to evaluate the extent to which they are able to understand and apply PBL and AI, and in order to evaluate the extent to which students percieve the situation as a problem.

Description:- The homelss scenario is placed early within the curricula in order to address potential issues of stigma, and discrimination towards the growing problem of occupational deprivation through homelessness. Studenst are split into 2 section, one to follow PBL and to look at the problem solving process, the other at applying AI wiht the view of looking at the situation with an appreciative eye.

Discussion:-Evlaution showed that applying a problem solving model exacerbates the stigma and negative attitudes towards young people who are homeless. In contrast, students invited to apply the principles of AI to the same homeless case study, showed a much more encouraging client centred and positive attitude to look at the individual with an appreciative eye. It is suggested that looking at this situation with an appreciative eye may provide an added element to PBL, one in which students may focus more on the positive aspect of a particular situation. This approach, if used in PBL may define a recipe for success by helping the individual to consider previous experience and to re-use positive outcomes. Educators could facilitate a positive approach to ensure students engage themselves in the educational process and to use such transferable skills in practice. The evlaution shows that students and clients may somehow be disadvantaged when the learning focus is on problem solving.

Conclusion :- Evaluation showed the value of exposing students to explore the potential challenges of a traditional problem solving approach. In contrast dapting PBL to integrate the use of AI to a homeless situation as an example, students show evidence of being more creative, open and non judgemental in their approach