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Reflective learning in cyberspace- an international learning opportunity

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Introduction

This paper describes an e-learning experience using on line learning software that has been offered to New Zealand and Canadian students annually from 2006-2009. Mixed student discussion groups reviewed a series of cases with probing questions which were posted on a weekly basis to facilitate discussion. The purpose was to extend student thinking through interactions across institutions and countries and through access to academics with differing expertise that oversaw the discussion and posed reflective questions throughout.

The **objectives** were for students to:

- apply knowledge of clinical reasoning to practice cases
- explore common understandings in international occupational therapy
- experience international distance-based learning

A total of 92 undergraduate and post graduate students from New Zealand and 155 Canadian entry level masters students have participated in this e-learning opportunity over the past 4 years.

Methods

The evaluation of this educational initiative was sought anonymously with Survey Monkey questionnaires at the end of the course each year. Initially the numbers responding each year were low but this has improved to 99% in the latest round.

Results

The survey responses have yielded a number of valuable findings as perceived by students including:

- The opportunity for reflection and self-paced discussion, such that less outspoken students provided very articulate and thoughtful comments in their online contributions.
- Appreciating having time to think about the learning beyond the limited time available in the classroom
- Benefits of the international aspect of the e-learning to consider other cultural issues.
- Students are more motivated to take part when they are challenged with case studies which have provocative topics

Conclusions

We have discovered that differences in the level of theory-practice integration between two groups of students led to greater insight and learning as the more clinically experienced New Zealanders tended to temper the more idealistic solutions of the Canadian students who were more theoretically grounded.

Contributions to practice/evidence base in OT

The evaluation of these online discussion groups using case based learning indicates that this experience can be beneficial for raising awareness of cultural issues, strengthening understanding of clinical reasoning and reflective practice.

