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Occupational therapy students enabling social change

Susan Gilbert Hunt

School of Health Sciences, University of South Australia, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia

Occupational therapy students are the future ambassadors of the profession and it is essential they develop skills and confidence to address the inequities that exist in our world. Within the curriculum at the University of South Australia (UniSA) students have opportunity to develop both knowledge and skill required to practice at a macro community level. Using an enablement foundations and skills framework (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007) two student exemplars will demonstrate the effectiveness of the curriculum at UniSA. One exemplar focuses on creating structural change within service delivery and the other focuses on addressing cultural stereotyping and marginalisation in a community. Both address the human rights of specific groups in the community from an occupational perspective.

The curriculum structure requires students to work in collaborative and participatory ways from an occupation focus (Gilbert Hunt 2006). Key stages in the curriculum require student to consolidate and evidence their learning prior to the next stage, providing structured scaffolding for learning (Dunlap & Grabinger, 1996). Moreover, the students are required to become 'project managers' responsible for the outcomes of the projects undertaken; this level of accountability and responsibility promotes a high level of engagement in the learning process.

Embedding such learning opportunities as core rather than optional ensures all graduates enter the profession with a vision of what is possible and how we can enable social change. Furthermore the student work can contribute to the growing body of evidence for occupational therapy at the macro community level.

References

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