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An investigation of the perceived impact of a peer education course on participating occupational therapy students in an Irish university.

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Introduction

This paper evaluates the perceived impact of a peer education course within the Discipline of Occupational Therapy, University of Dublin, Trinity College, Ireland. This course offers the opportunity for third year students to facilitate a selection of professional modules with the first year students, under close supervision from the lecturing staff of the Discipline. One of the main learning objectives is that students are enabled to experience and reflect upon the management of a group prior to fieldwork experience.

Peer education is founded on the belief that people are more likely to hear and personalise messages if the messenger is similar to them (Sloane and Zimmer, 1993). This paper aims to evaluate the peer education course from the perspective of both first and third years students.

Objectives

The aim of this paper is to explore the perceived impact of a peer education course on participating O.T. students in the academic year 2007-2008.

Specific secondary objectives were to:

- evaluate if the aims of the first year peer education modules were met.
- investigate the contribution of participation in the course to professional development of third years.

Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed to answer the research questions. This was achieved through use of purposely designed questionnaires and focus groups, which were administered to both first and third year students following their involvement in the course.

Results

From this study it was established that the aims of the peer learners' modules were achieved (in their opinion) and that facilitating these modules contributed to the peer educators' professional development. An insight was gained into the positive and negative impact this peer education course had on those involved.

Conclusion

This education methodology appears to be highly effective in the opinion of students involved. The relaxed learning environment and the positive comparisons drawn favoured peer education over traditional didactic methods. This represents an overall positive experience.

Contribution to the practice of O.T.

Peer education appears to be a cost effective and successful educational method in which peers mutually learn from each other.