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"Can't we all get along?" A look at allied health student perceptions of interdisciplinary cooperation.

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Introduction:

Research literature on interdisciplinary teams has suggested interdisciplinary treatment models can provide benefits and be more cost-effective compared to standard care (Clark, 1994; Ryan, 1996). Curricula of allied health educational programs predominately educate students using discipline specific methods. Alternative methods are needed for students to become efficient team members. The Center for Life Skills (CLS), Ithaca College, NY is one such interdisciplinary teaching model (Cozzolino, 2005). CLS is an allied health program where students and faculty work in collaboration to provide intervention to individuals who have suffered a neurological insult.

Objective:

1. Attendees will learn of a successful alternative interdisciplinary teaching model.

Method:

A post-test-only control group design was used to compare interdisciplinary students' perceptions towards other disciplines, their own discipline, and the value of interdisciplinary cooperation. The Interdisciplinary Education Perception Scale (Luecht, et al. 1990) was administered to students from occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech and language pathology and therapeutic recreation following participation in CLS (N=30). A control group of students from these same disciplines with no experience with CLS was used for comparison (N = 60). Demographics were examined for significant relations to the 4 factors in the areas of gender, age, previous experience, major, and academic year. Data analysis incorporated using SPSS 15.0. Frequencies, descriptive, T-tests and ANOVAs were used in analysis.

Results:

Total IEPS scores were significantly higher for the students who participated in the CCLS vs. control. The IEPS subscale of Competence and Autonomy was significant between groups.

Conclusion:

Results indicated participation in CLS has a positive influence on student perceptions of their own and other disciplines and enhanced students' sense of competence and autonomy.

Contributions to Practice:

As the current worldwide economic crisis looms, it is imperative that occupational therapy practitioners become as efficient as possible. Research has demonstrated the efficiency of interdisciplinary teams. Occupational therapy students need to receive education in environments that allows them the opportunity to learn about, work with, and foster relationships with other disciplines. The Center for Life Skills program provides this experience.