Students & Persons with Dementia: Learning through Service

Melinda Corwin, Ph.D. CCC-SLP
Donna Owen, R.N., Ph.D.
Carolyn Perry, M.S., CCC-SLP

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Service-Learning (S-L)

- Community Service
- Volunteerism
- Field Education
- Perception/Worldview Shifts
- Enhanced Community Relations
Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) for Dementia

- Validation Therapy
- Graphic and Written Cues
- Montessori-Based Intervention

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“Connection Kits”
Project Participants

- Nursing Students (n = 28)
- SLP Students (n = 25)
- Residents of a Long-Term Care Facility (LTCF) with Dementia (n = 19)
- Family Members (n = 19)
Project Questions

- Do students in two different training programs (nursing and speech-language pathology) perceive benefits from participating in a S-L project involving long-term care residents with dementia?

- Do differences occur in students’ perceptions, opinions, and/or attitudes as a result of different S-L assignments with the same clinical population?
Procedures

- Community Partnership Established

- Instructions & Protocol
  - Nursing Students (Control Group)
  - SLP Students (Experimental Group)

- Measures
  - End-of-program survey
    - Perspectives on S-L
    - Attitudes toward community involvement
    - Personal reflections
Results for Students: Perspectives Regarding S-L Experience

- **Both groups** felt that their participation in the project made them take more responsibility for their own learning.

- **Nursing Students** (Control Group):
  - Desired more class time to learn about dementia \((p = .003)\)
  - Project not directly linked to their building of clinical skills \((p = .002)\)
  - Community service should be voluntary rather than a course requirement \((p = .007)\)
(Cont.) Results for Students: Perspectives Regarding Service Learning Experience

- **SLP Students** (Experimental Group):
  - daily life application ($p < .001$)
  - better understanding of course lectures and reading assignments ($p = .007$)
  - more S-L should be implemented into more classes ($p < .001$)
  - increased awareness of roles of health care professionals in other disciplines ($p = .046$)
  - interest in additional S-L classes ($p = .001$)
Results for Students: Attitudes Toward Community Involvement

- **Both groups** generally agreed that...
  - the community participation aspect of S-L showed them how they can become more involved in the community.
  - the work they did through S-L benefited the community.
  - they became more aware of the needs in the community because of the S-L project.
  - they have a responsibility to serve their communities.
(Cont.) Results for Students: Attitudes Toward Community Involvement

- **Nursing Students** (Control Group):
  - already volunteering before the S-L project ($p < .001$).
  - would probably not continue to volunteer after completion of course ($p = .005$).

- **SLP Students** (Experimental Group):
  - would like to continue involvement even after completion of the course ($p < .001$).
Results for Students: Personal Reflections

- **Both groups** generally agreed that participating in the community...
  - helped to enhance their leadership skills.
  - improved their abilities to communicate their ideas in a real world context.
  - demonstrated that they could make a difference in their communities.
Conclusions

Students perceived benefits from participating in a S-L project.

Students’ perceptions and attitudes differed as a result of different S-L assignments with the same clinical population.
- Explicit instruction is helpful.
- Careful not to over-do.

S-L appears to be a promising method for bridging classroom and clinical instruction, especially in the fields of allied health.
Future Directions

- Examine length and type(s) of engagement on the part of person with dementia.
- Examine students’ journal entries.
- Continue to refine “connection kit” techniques.
Contact Information

- Melinda.corwin@ttuhsc.edu
- Carolyn.perry@ttuhsc.edu