



students learning with communities

Early enhancement of professional skills: a broadening of the Nutrition and Dietetics curriculum

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Background

- In 2009, the BSc (Hons) Human Nutrition & Dietetics programme underwent major curriculum reform with a key emphasis on the development of professional skills
- A new module, Professional Practice Studies, was developed and introduced into the new second year curriculum
- Based on the Learning Pyramid model, knowledge retention is rated at 75% in 'learning by doing' and at 100% in 'teaching others'. These methods were applied to the Professional Practice Studies module
- The module facilitated the development of student professional skills through a SLWC project with older persons living in North Central Dublin area, facilitated by Cathrina Murphy of Dublin City Council.

SLWC Project

- The SLWC project included professionally relevant formative assessments
- Students were required to interview, develop evidence-based nutrition related educational materials and provide dietary advice for older persons
- Each student maintained a Reflection Log and formally presented their experiences to the class
- The Project was evaluated by means of a Professional Competence (Skills) Examination (PCE)

Feedback

- Feedback from the older people was positive and included a request to formally meet the same students in Autumn 2011 for evaluation of their progress with the dietary advice provided. This successful evaluation meeting took place.
- Student feedback from the Q6A forms (100% response) highlighted the value of the learning methods used with the older persons
- A high level of student engagement and motivation was observed by academic staff teaching the Professional Practice Studies module

Comment

- Reflective logs are a new and valuable innovation on the Human Nutrition & Dietetics programme
- To develop the professional skills of students, working in a group of three was introduced; 'Dietitian (student), Client and Observer'
- The role of the Observer (student) was to give constructive criticism to the 'Dietitian'
- Students found this concept difficult initially but quickly recognised the value of receiving effective feedback from the Observer
- This method of skills development has been very effective in preparing students for their mandatory HSE practice placement education which is undertaken in student pairs

