ViLEARN: UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM DESIGN

Co-teaching a university second-year undergraduate occupational therapy (OT) course led to the opportunity to contribute to the evolution of teaching and learning methods. This was an interesting course in which OT students could learn about psychometric tools for standardised assessment, act in the role of a client with a disability, and, conversely, act as a therapist who had to evaluate their client's functional status and needs. The curriculum was designed as a "flipped classroom" with online material to engage with before attending face-to-face facilitated workshops to consolidate learning and practice their assessment skills.

DISCOVERY

We decided to learn from the student experience and focussed on their successes and struggles. In so doing, we involved students who recently graduated from this course to participate in the re-design of this curriculum and the assessment methods. We invited a representative sample to attend focus groups, communicate with other past students, provide feedback, and video record their advice to the new students which could be shown in class once the new course began.

We dissected the student roles within this course and there were six: a generalist student, a mock client, a mock therapist, an evaluator of standardised assessment tools, a clinical documenter, and a case conference presenter. Each of these roles were dissected into nine cognitive components to frame the requirements: knowledge, skills, abilities, tactics, decision-making, situation awareness, heuristics, interpersonal skills, and intrapersonal skills. We also identified performance elements that were needed to support their study experience in positive ways, such as software interface, quiz-taking, and emotional regulation. These were the elements that we believed that we could influence through course design, teaching attributes, or mentoring.

DESIGN

As a "generalised student", one of the roles that we identified, the student was assumed competent in their interface with the university learning management system, which might not have been the case. As such, we decided to develop web-based video instructional aids and provided phone-based or face-to-face meetings to assist them to navigate the system. We did not want this to be their stumbling block to learning when the technology should enhance, rather that detract from their experience. We made changes to the demands on documentation and propped their ability to act as a client by suggesting relevant symptoms that they could mimic and that suited the client diagnosis (these were provided on coaching cards to the student acting as a client with a disability). We introduced tag-team simulation to case conference role playing which, essentially, meant that they could "phone a friend" for help, or be placed suddenly into an acting role to make sure that they were attentive throughout the tutorial to maximise engagement. We converted the assessment of case conferences into weekly tutorial practice sessions and removed that stressor from their final grading. We also implemented 360-degree camera technology recordings with narration and annotation to capture home and work environments. These immersive and/or web-based experiences allowed us to standardise the evaluation of home and work environments, versus requiring students to attend random sites. This would save their time and help us understand the merits of their findings in known environments.

The video recordings of past students were used in tutorial workshops and, in some instances, a course graduate attended the workshop and gave some coaching and mentoring advice. That was valued by the current students.

REALISATION

Without realising it at the time, we considered later that through our student-centred approach to course design, we met the accreditation standards in Occupational Therapy (OT Council of Australia, 2018), which suggest that "students have opportunities to be represented within the deliberative and decision-making processes of the program" (p. 8). Through this course design, student satisfaction ratings were high and improved from prior years (though never problematic, it shifted the bar from good to better). Past students reported their enjoyment through their involvement, inspiring some to consider a post-graduate educational pathway. Also, new friendships were formed because of the soft-skills developed through leadership, acceptance of change, and the participative methods.

REFERENCES:

Occupational Therapy Council of Australia Ltd (the OTC), (Dec 2018). Accreditation Standards for Australian Entry-Level Occupational Therapy Education Programs. The OTC. https://www.occupationaltherapyboard.gov.au/Accreditation.aspx

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