



The Educational Merits of Incorporating a Service-Learning Component in the Nursing Curriculum

Catherine Madden

cmadden@wit.ie

Waterford Institute of Technology (Republic of Ireland)

Abstract

Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service in the curriculum to enrich the learning experience, while providing tangible benefits for the community. The 'Save a Life' programme was designed to engage nursing students with a community service-learning experience by teaching emergency Basic Life Support (BLS) in schools.

The goal of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the 'Save a Life' programme to teach emergency Basic Life Support in Post-Primary schools and establish the educational merits of incorporating a service-learning component in the nursing curriculum.

The study used a sequential mixed methods design, encompassing two phases. Phase one used a pre- and post-test to evaluate the impact of the 'Save a Life' programme on transition year students' (n = 100) and teachers' (n = 59) BLS knowledge, skills and attitudes. Phase two of the study used focus groups to illuminate nursing students' (n = 8) experiences of undertaking the service-learning placement.

The pre- and post-test training scores indicate that the 'Save a Life programme' impacted positively on school students' and teachers' BLS knowledge, skills and attitudes ($p < .05$). Nursing students reported positive learning outcomes from the service-learning experience, including enhanced cognitive, psychomotor and affective development. The findings inform the potential contribution of service-learning in developing nursing students' competence, confidence and preparedness for professional nursing practice.

This study has particular relevance and implications for nurse educators who seek to develop curricula that will prepare nurses with the knowledge, skills and attributes necessary to meet projected health care needs. It will be of interest to lecturers who support innovative pedagogical approaches and are engaging with communities to improve higher education. The findings have implications for people who strive to improve bystander resuscitation, and advocate cardiopulmonary resuscitation training in communities to improve the chance of survival for victims of cardiac arrest.