



WORKING WITH DEVELOPING COMMUNITIES (WWDC) (VIETNAM) PROGRAM

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Introduction

Cultural competence is an essential skill for all professionals including speech pathology students (Spruce, 2008; Stevens, Peisker, Mathisen and Woodward, 2010; Mathisen, Smith, Teasdale, Park, Woodward, Spruce, Peisker, and Stevens (2009) raising particular challenges not experienced in typical clinical education programs in Australia (Amery, Barr, Mathisen and Woodward (in press).

Cultural competence can be divided into:

- Cultural awareness, humility and respect
- Cultural knowledge and reasoning skills and
- Culturally-competent behaviours.

This is considered to be a lifelong learning task.

Aim

Since 2007, The Working With Developing Communities (WWDC) (VietNam) Program, an additional clinical experience, at The University of Newcastle has enabled speech pathology students to explore cultural awareness, cultural knowledge and culturally-competent behaviour in an intensive and supervised clinical experience.

The WWDC (VN) Program is self-funded, however students access support funding from the iLEAD Travel/Mobility Grant.

Method

Student selection

The WWDC (VN) Program Expression of Interest (EOI) form is uploaded to the Speech Pathology General Blackboard site at The University of Newcastle each March by Dr Mathisen.

All 3rd and 4th year speech pathology students are eligible to apply as they possess the requisite theoretical knowledge and clinical competence in the core areas of speech, language, fluency, voice and swallowing.

The EOIs are collated by the WWDC (VN) Program Convenor (BM).

An interview of 20-30 minutes is arranged at the university 4 months later for all candidates with a panel consisting of Dr Mathisen, Ms Woodward and one of the WWDC student returnees from the previous year. The interview questions are shared equally between the panel members with a specific marking criteria including the quality and quantity of answers,

the relevance and overall mark. Consensus is reached on the 2 best applicants. Dr Mathisen emails the successful and unsuccessful candidates with the outcome of the interviews.

Pre-departure student preparation

A series of monthly pre-departure meetings with the 2 students are arranged both with Dr Mathisen at the university and with Ms Woodward to:

Receive the WWDC(VN) Toolkit re literature and supporting information and help plan the experience.

Arrange mentoring from Ms Woodward regarding the specific therapy sites in VN, types of placement, any teaching or social responsibilities, the timetable, flights, immunization, accommodation, all therapy materials and equipment to be sourced.

Negotiate support and information from WWDC (VN) student returnees.

Arrange assistance from the Professional Education Unit (PEU) regarding risk assessment, student insurance, WWDC (VN) Program certificates on completion.

Submission of a E2/OSA Form re the Safety Implications of Undergraduate Student Practical Off-Site Activities to the Senior Safety Officer.

Arrange special considerations with course coordinators and times to re-sit exams on return (if applicable).

Students have a final meeting with Dr Mathisen with the specific timetable for the visit.

Post-departure outcomes

A meeting with Dr Mathisen and Ms Woodward is arranged at the university 4 weeks after the students return from Vietnam, where a post-departure questionnaire is completed by both returnees. Student narratives, photos and any suggestions for the following year's program are discussed.

All WWDC (VN) Program returnees publish a peer-reviewed journal article on a topic of their choosing about their experiences in the following 12 months.

All WWDC (VN) Program returnees experience working in a multidisciplinary team.

A WWDC (VN) Program certificate is given to returnees for their curriculum vitae.

Both returnees are invited to provide a lecture to the 2nd year cohort and participate in a TFA fundraising activity and media event (where available).

Conclusion

Australian speech pathology programs are becoming aware of the value of supervised clinical placements in developing communities. The Working With Developing Communities (VietNam) Program at The University of Newcastle has provided a unique opportunity for speech pathology students to explore their own culture and to experience another culture in a supervised interdisciplinary clinical environment.

Early research findings indicate that speech pathology students, although challenged, find this intensive clinical experience beneficial for their cultural competence, personal and professional growth as speech pathologists and in terms of transferrable skills to the Australian context, on their return.

Ongoing research will explore the long term impact of this program for returnee students.

References

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