

“Getting it right” Student Nurse Placements in Community Health

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Introduction

- Clinical placements provide opportunities for students to make the link between theory and practice in the workplace (Morgan, 2006)
- Experiences need to be effectively facilitated in order to achieve the learning objectives and provide an optimal learning experience (Billet, 2006)
- Central to the students' learning in the clinical environment is the *invitational quality* of the workplace (Billett, 2006)

Background

- A global shortage of qualified nurses
- Problems with recruitment, retention and an aging workforce in New Zealand (Jackson, Mannix & Daly, 2001)
- Historical perceived 'theory practice gap' impeding the transition of student to registered nurse

Objectives

- Complete a literature review of student nurse clinical placements
- Identify current best practice that supports student learning
- Describe current practice within Child and Family Service
- Review evaluations completed by students
- Make changes where indicated by research or evaluations

Literature review of students' experiences in clinical placements

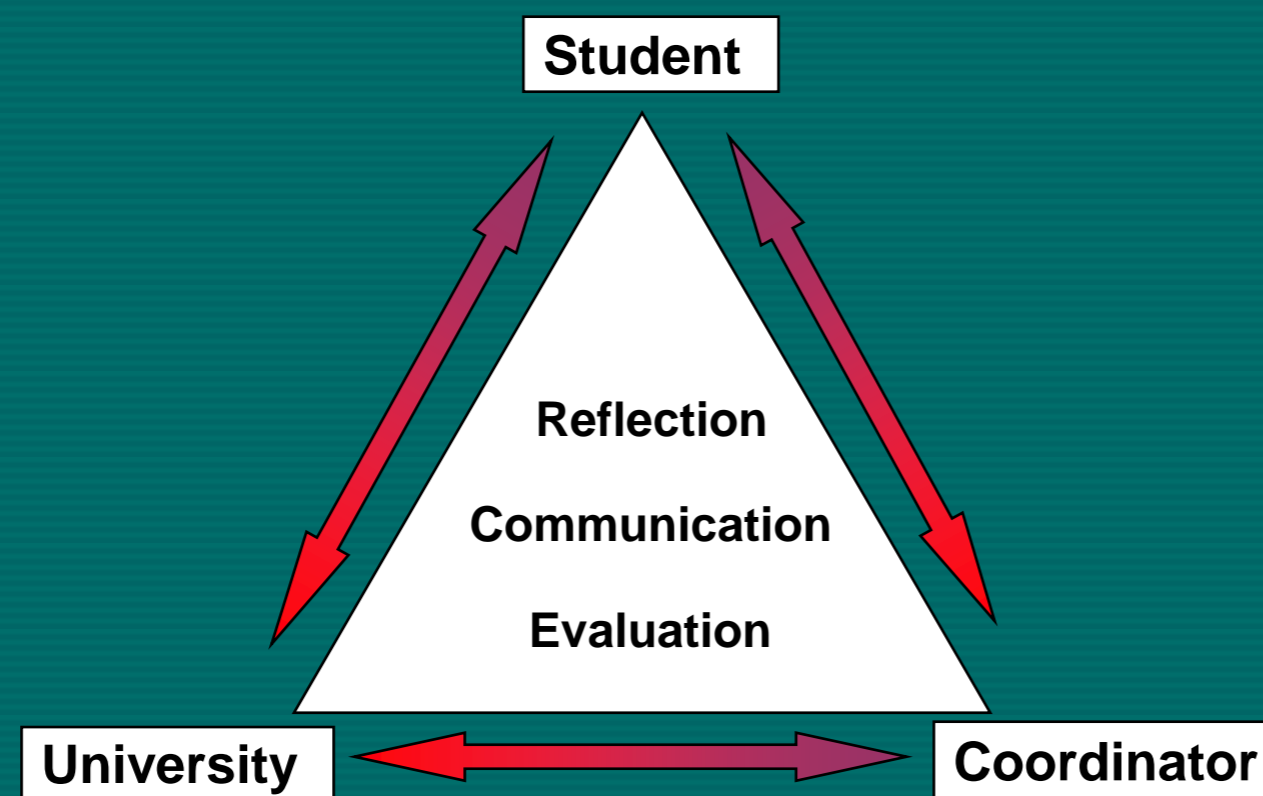
Barriers:

- Workload
- Staffing shortage
- Lack of support or access to mentor
- Lack of communication/feedback
- Lack of work experience
- Inappropriate work experiences
- Personality differences
- Interpersonal relationships

Opportunities:

- Equitable relationships between coordinator and student
- Support in the placement
- Teaching ability and competence of coordinator and tutor
- Feeling valued: having a sense of being part of the team and able to contribute
- Role modelling
- Compassion/empathy
- Placement relevant to practice: programme links theory and practice
- Transparent open communication
- Evaluation of feedback

Child and Family Service model for clinical placements



Student reflection group

Unique features of Unitec student placements in Child and Family Service

- Direct collaboration between student coordinator and Unitec tutor
- Prior to placement, coordinator delivers overview linking theory to practice
- Self-selection to workplace by students
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation by both clinical coordinator and Unitec tutor
- Programme tailored for specific learning needs of individual students in the workplace
- Mid-placement and end-of-placement assessment undertaken by clinical coordinator
- Weekly reflection groups, self-assessment and shared online journaling
- Student presentation of workplace learning to work colleagues and other students
- Weekly timetable incorporates activities undertaken in Child and Family Service
- Student evaluation of clinical placement

Student evaluations of placement in Child and Family Service

- Supportive caring environment
- Practical opportunities
- Experienced clinicians
- Clinicians seen as teachers
- Learning pathways identified
- Good variety of experiences
- Followed cases from start to finish
 - However, students identified the need to avoid holiday placements when few practical learning opportunities were available
- Students really valued clinicians' patience, time and passion
- Students themselves felt valued

Implications for future student placements

- Evaluations identified where the service supports the student well
- Positive feedback to clinicians can enhance workforce retention
- Identifying areas in need of improvement allows opportunity for change in the environment
- Ensures Unitec and Child and Family Service review the structure, processes and support systems for students enrolled in the Community Nursing paper



Student participating in an immunisation programme



Student presentation



Conclusion

The partnership between the student coordinator and Unitec allows for quality student nurse learning and, potentially, employment opportunities post-graduation. This practice partnership facilitates the integration of nursing theory and practice. Positive student experiences in the workplace can be instrumental in developing competent practitioners for the New Zealand workforce.

Final student comment

"I thought that I was well informed about the diversity of community nursing prior to this placement. However, I could not believe how complex the cases could be in real practice. It opened my eyes to be able to see the reality of another side of this world. You really need to be non-judgemental, think and work holistically to let the families accept you to begin to make an improvement in their health"
(Grace, third year student, Unitec, August 2008)