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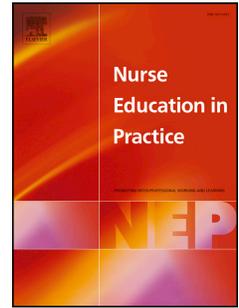
Active involvement of lerning disabilities service users in the development and delivery of a teaching session to pre-registration nurses: Students' perspectives

Penny Smith, Ann Ooms, Di Marks-Maran

ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF LERNING DISABILITIES SERVICE USERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND DELIVERY OF A TEACHING SESSION TO PRE-REGISTRATION NURSES: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

A teaching session about service users' experiences of accessing and receiving health and social care was designed and delivered by service users to first year BSc Nursing students. The aim was to enhance students' knowledge, skills and confidence in caring for people with a learning disability. An evaluation research study was undertaking at one university in London into the perceived effectiveness of the teaching session, including students' perceptions of the extent to which the service users' teaching session was useful, the impact of the session, its benefits and challenges and the sustainability of teaching sessions delivered by service users. Data were collected through an online questionnaire. Quantitative analysis was undertaken of Likert-style questions and qualitative analysis was undertaken using the Framework Method. The session impacted on students' knowledge and understanding of people with a learning disability. Students reported that they felt more comfortable and confident interacting with people with a learning disability. In addition, they reflected on their feelings about caring for people with a learning disability.

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this project was to enhance nursing students' knowledge, skills and confidence in

caring for people with a learning disability. People who have a learning disability have

complex physical and mental health needs, yet experience lower levels of health care

provision than the general population (Michael, 2008). One identified organisational barrier

to accessing services is disabling attitudes among healthcare staff (Emerson & Baines, 2010).

Student nurses from all fields of nursing might be working with children and adults who have

a learning disability. It is therefore crucial that all student nurses have a sound understanding

of what having a learning disability might mean for an individual and to develop knowledge,

skills and confidence in working with those people.

Within the School of Nursing at Kingston University and St George's, University of London, a

need was identified to provide first year students from all four fields of nursing (adult, child,

learning disabilities and mental health) with more experiences with people with a learning

disability. As part of the teaching and learning strategy, service users and carers were

invited to develop and deliver teaching sessions in year 1.

This article describes the teaching session that was designed and delivered by learning

disability service users and their carers, and an evaluation study that was undertaken into

students' experiences of attending the session.

LITERATURE REVIEW

 In the United Kingdom (UK) service user and carer involvement is increasing its focus on

involving patients and the public in shaping and delivering healthcare and healthcare

education (Department of Health (DH) 2001, 2005, 2006; Forrest et al., 2000; Towle et al., 2010; NMC, 2010). Service user and carer involvement has been at the centre of the UK government's strategy to modernise public services (DH, 2005; DH, 2010; DH, 2012). Service users are no longer seen as passive recipients of care but as customers and experts. Whilst increased service user involvement in nurse education mirrors recent UK government policy focus, it should be noted that the involvement of service users in nurse education also address educational and professional drivers (Bollard et al., 2012).

The past two decades have seen increased service user involvement in the delivery and development of healthcare education, with the general consensus that there are benefits for all those involved (Speed et al. 2012). The service user movement has also been influential in driving these developments forward (Brown and Young, 2008) as has a reduction of the public trust in health care professions generally highlighted by a number of high profile enquiries in the UK (Higgins et al., 2011; Francis, 2010; Francis, 2013). The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and the Health Professions Council (HPC), the professions' regulatory bodies in the United Kingdom, require service user involvement in the development and delivery of all pre-registration courses (NMC, 2010; HPC 2011). However, no specific information is provided with regards to how this could or should be accomplished. While service user involvement in professional education has increased over the years, there is still a disparity between the philosophy of service user involvement and the pragmatics of putting it into practice (Lathean et al., 2006).

Service user involvement in curriculum design

For decades, curriculum planners in nursing education in the UK have been expected to involve service users in curriculum design and development (DH 2001, 2005, 2006; NMC 2010, HPC 2011). Studies have been undertaken into the impact and benefits of service user involvement in curriculum planning. Gutteridge and Dobbins (2010) for example undertook a survey of 20 academic staff in one university about their experiences in service user involvement in curriculum development. Some of their findings will be explored later in this literature review.

Service user involvement in assessment/feedback on practice

Much of the research into service user involvement in education is largely focused on the processes of service user involvement. For example, several studies identified the need for protocols and guidance for service users as a structure for their assessment of/feedback to students and academic staff (Levin 2004; Speers 2008; Anghel and Ramon 2009; Stickley et al 2010; Charles et al 2006; Bailey 2005). Indeed, much of the literature into service user involvement in professional education focuses on service user role in assessment of competence in clinical practice.

Barksby (2014) undertook a study of service users' perceptions of student nurses, where the service users were people with a learning disability and resident in a long stay care setting. This client group are challenging in terms of communication and understanding of who student nurses are and what they are there for. Barksby (2014) found that service users were largely positive about student nurses and the care they received from them although a

small percentage were indifferent to the presence of student nurses in their care home.

Although the study was not about service users' contribution to education, it provided useful

feedback on student nurse performance and competence in a learning disability setting.

Service user involvement in classroom teaching

There is a lack of research investigating the benefits of service user involvement in teaching

nursing students (Tee, 2012). Gutteridge and Dobbins (2010) argued that the central focus

of service user involvement is: "does this involvement enhance student learning?"

(Gutteridge and Dobbins 2010, p. 512). There is a need to discover how or why learning is

enhanced through service user involvement in classroom teaching (LeVar 2002; Gutteridge

and Dobbins 2010).

Hanson and Mitchell (2001) explored a 5-day course of preparation provided to enable

service users in teaching mental health nursing students in the classroom. One of the

intended benefits of training service users to be effective in teaching mental health nursing

students was to offer students a different way of viewing mental health patients so that the

students would move away from the notion of mental health patients as being always

dependent upon nurses.

Benefits to students and their practice of service user involvement

Although there is literature on the benefits of service user involvement to the service users

themselves. The studies into service user involvement identified benefits for students,

service users and the education provider. This part of the literature, however, focuses on the

benefits to students as this has particular relevance for the study presented later in this

article. Giving students an opportunity to learn about the perspectives and experiences of service users in a supportive environment has the potential to enhance professional understanding (Horne et al., 2011). Students have the opportunity to see service users in a different light, valuing them as experts. Involvement can be a positive experience for service users in developing new skills and confidence; it also creates opportunities for the education provider to engage with the local health care community (Warne and McAndrews, 2005).

Nursing practice can be influenced and improved by developing the students' understanding of the service user and carer experiences which can help to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Costello and Horne, 2001; Jackson, 2003). Indeed, Costello and Horne (2001) found that having service user involvement in education enables students to gain insight into the experience of service users, a finding supported by Stickley et al (2010). Students have described exposure to service users in their education as making the student experience "real" (Anghel and Ramon 2009; Schneebeli et al 2010; Atkinson and Williams 2011; Skilton 2011).

Another benefit to students is that having service user involvement in student learning challenges students' assumptions and stereotypes (Schneebeli et al 2010; Thomson and Hilton 2012)

One of the limitations of the literature generally into the benefits to students is that many of the studies were undertaken into one-off examples of service user involvement in nursing education. It could be argued that progress can still be made in establishing a culture where service users are routinely acknowledged as part of the workforce contributing to all aspects

of development and delivery of the curriculum. This could be further encouraged by the development of a more robust research base (Tee, 2012).

There is an absence of substantive research into service user involvement in learning disabilities nursing. However, other areas of nursing education (e.g., mental health) where research has been undertaken into the benefits to students, e.g. mental health, social work, allied health professions (e.g. Repper & Breeze, 2007), may be transferable to exploring the benefits to students when they are learning about people with learning difficulties. Horne et al. (2011) explored nurse educators' perceptions of good practice, attitudes, beliefs, advantages and challenges with regard to engaging and involving service users in teaching. They found that educators perceived that using service users in teaching students can help to develop positive attitudes and empathy for service users by students. The study also identified perceived challenges including how to involve service users with large groups of students and how to ensure that the experiences of a few service users can be perceived as being representative of the larger service user population.

There is also some literature about the benefits to service users of being involved in the education of nurses. Hanson and Mitchell (2001) found that mental health service users benefited from teaching student nurses in terms of expressing that the experience increased their self-esteem by being in the "teacher" role rather than in the mental health patient role.

Benefits to service users

The majority of studies into the benefits of service users of their involvement in professional education are small studies. These studies suggest that service users feel a sense of empowerment when they are involved in the education of professionals (Frisby 2001; Rees et al 2007; Skinner 2010). Others have indicated that they feel a sense of doing something good (Haffling and Hakansson 2008) and contributing to the skills and attitude development of students (Taylor and Le Riche 2006; Branfield 2009; Skinner 2010). Stevens and Tanner (2006) and Taylor and Le Riche (2006) found that service users who are involved in the education of professionals reported increased self-confidence and Simpson et al (2008) reported development of new skills in the service users themselves. Finally, Branfield (2009) found that involving service users in the education of professionals increase service users' understanding of professional roles. However, none of these studies were about service users with a learning disability.

Challenges and barriers of service user involvement

A number of challenges and barriers to service user involvement in nursing education have been identified in the literature. Gutteridge and Dobbins (2010) argue that a strategic approach is needed to make service user involvement successful and meaningful. They identified that there are still unresolved cultural, psychological and organisational barriers to effective, efficient service user involvement. Barriers that they identified included training, support and facilitation of service users, gaining access to appropriate service users and issues of educational quality. Allain (2006) in a study of service user involvement in social work education warned of the need to avoid manipulating or controlling service users.

Several studies identified the need to build partnerships between the university and service user organisations as a way of ensuring power sharing (Barnes et al 2000; Barnes et al 2006). Reports from service users with a learning disability indicate that problems of using learning disability service users in the educational environment include practice, cultural and attitudinal barriers (Forrest et al 2000). This study may be out of date yet there is no more recent evidence to challenge this earlier finding. Manthorpe et al (2003) in a study of learning disability service users and their carers found that some service users and carers have been involved in professional education, including training of learning disability student nurses and social workers. In this study services uses indicated that they were willing to participate in nursing education. However, as they were a self-selected group, it is impossible to generalise their findings. Some had been involved in local nursing education activities but this appeared to be random with little evidence of systematic involvement by service users with a learning disability in the education of nurses. It appeared that family members were more likely to be invited to participate in nursing education than the person with the learning disability.

Summary

There is a sizeable amount of empirical literature related to service user involvement in mental health and adult nursing, and in social work and allied health care professional education. Much of this literature is related to service user involvement in curriculum development and assessment of/feedback to students in practice. However there is little empirical research in the literature about the involvement in classroom teaching of people with learning disabilities. It may be that some of the lesson learned from the research into service user involvement in teaching in other disciplines is transferable to learning

disabilities. The absence of studies into the impact on students of being taught by service users with a learning disability was a major driver for the study presented in this article.

<u>THE "ACT TOO" TEACHING SESSION</u>

The "Act Too" group was invited to develop and deliver a 45-minute session on their experiences of accessing and receiving health and social care. This group was founded in 2000 as an alternative to existing day care services for people with learning disabilities and use drama as a learning tool to help improve confidence, social and living skills and to support and encourage people with learning disabilities to become more integrated into the community at large.

Initial negotiations took place with "Act Too" regarding timings, venue, possible content and payment for the work carried out, and a preliminary visit was made to the intended venue. Providing payment to service users is important in demonstrating the value of their work and on a personal level can increase self-esteem and respect (Jones and Black, 2008).

The "Act Too" team asked for feedback from the lecturer prior to delivery their sessions to the students. They organized a rehearsal for one member of the faculty and minor adjustments were made based on that feedback. For example, it was felt by the lecturer that the scenario required prior technical knowledge that the students did not possess at that time, which could potentially diminish their focus on the main messages. The session was adjusted accordingly with more focus on psychological aspects. All students were invited to attend one of the two teaching sessions, which took place at the university campus, and focused on the experience of people with a learning disability accessing and receiving health and social care.

<u>STUDY DESIGN</u>

An evaluative research study was undertaken to address the absence of empirical studies in the literature related to service user involvement by people with a learning disability in the education of student nurses. The study addressed the following research questions:

- What are the students' perceptions of the usefulness of the service users' teaching session?

- What are the students' perceptions of the impact of the service users' teaching session on their knowledge and attitudes of people with a learning disability?

- What are the students' perceived benefits and challenges of the service users' teaching session?

Research approach

Qualitative and quantitative survey method was selected as the research approach. This approach was selected as it was seen to be a reasonable way for collecting the data required to answer the research questions. Survey research is often used to assess thoughts, opinions, and feelings and consists of a predetermined set of questions that is given to a sample (Shaughnessy et al 2012)

Ethics

This study was deemed to be an evaluation of a teaching method and ethical approval was not required. Students were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, how the data would be dealt with in terms of who would have

access to the data, were it would be stored and how and to what extent the findings would

be reported. Consent was implied as students completing the online questionnaire were

assumed to be consenting. Data were stored on a password protected computer and only

the researchers had access to the data.

Data collection

An online questionnaire was developed using principles of the Tailored Design Method

(Dilman et al. 2009). The questionnaire contained a range of Likert-style and open-ended

questions. Likert-style questions measured students' perceptions of the usefulness and

impact and were phrased as statements to which students could disagree, somewhat

disagree, somewhat agree or agree. Nine open-ended questions invited students to reflect

on the strengths and the challenges and about areas for improvement of the session. The

questionnaire was developed by two researchers and reviewed for face and content validity

by a team of senior lecturers within the faculty.   Examples of the Likert-style and open-

ended questions can be found in Table 1.

(Insert Table 1 near here)

Sample

In 2012, 290 first year undergraduate nursing students were enrolled in the adult, child,

learning disabilities or mental health nursing fields of study. All students were invited to

attend the session and 254 students attended (attendance rate = 87.6%). Of the 254

students who attended, 114 completed the online questionnaire (response rate = 44.9%).

All students who attended the teaching session were invited to complete an online questionnaire at the end of the session. A reminder email was sent one week after the session.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS v. 19 together with analysis of variance (ANOVA). Qualitative data were analysed using the Framework Method (Ritchie and Spencer 1994). The Framework Method was originally designed for undertaking social policy research (Ritchie and Spencer 1994) and is now used frequently in healthcare and educational research. The five distinct but interlinked stages enable themes to be identified from qualitative data and for the strength of each theme to be determined through the number of participant responses that are coded within each theme.

The five stages of data analysis using the Framework Method can be found in Table 2.

(Insert Table 2near here)

FINDINGS

Demographics

Of the 114 students who responded to the questionnaire, 76 (66.7%) were enrolled in Adult Nursing, 13 (11.4%) in Child Nursing, 5 (4.4%) in Learning Disabilities and 20 (17.5%) in Mental Health Nursing. The sample is representative of the student population in terms of fields of nursing.

Impact on learning

Students were asked to what extent they agreed that the session was a useful learning experience and 92% of the students agreed. In addition, the session had a major impact on students' knowledge and attitudes. More than 87% of the students agreed that the session had broadened their understanding of how it might feel to have a learning disability. Nearly 94% of the student agreed that the session made them reflect on how they may interact with people with a learning disability and more than 75% feel more comfortable interacting with people with a learning disability because of the session.

Students were asked to reflect on what they learned most from the session and 99 students provided a response. Analysis resulted in four themes. The first was the need to be non-judgemental which was reported by 46 students as what they learned most from the session.

> "I have learnt to treat service users equally, not to judge, disrespect or underestimate their abilities." (Student 3)

> "…to treat people as individuals, recognising the potential of each one of them." (Student 53)

> "I learnt that people with learning disabilities are just like people without a learning disability." (Student 111)

The second theme identified was the importance of listening and good communication skills. The importance of listening and good communication skills was reported by 35 students as what they learnt most.

"… how scary it can be if you don't fully understand what is happening and how important it is that your patient is clear on the treatment you are about to give." (Student 27)

The third theme that emerged from this part of the analysis was increased understanding of learning disability. Fourteen students made comments indicating an increased awareness of what it might be like to have a learning disability.

"The abilities stigma attached to learning disabilities still exists." (Student 31)

"I have learnt that people with learning disabilities can look very different to each other as each person is unique." (Student 112)

The fourth theme that emerged was an unexpected positive recognition by students. Fifteen students indicated that what they learned most was how talented and confident people with a learning disability can be.

"I learnt that people with learning disabilities are talented, confident and capable." (Student 25)

Students' feelings

When students were asked how they felt about hearing about the experiences of people with learning disabilities accessing and receiving health and social care, 99 students responded and three themes emerged.

The first theme was emotional distress. Half of the students reported feeling sad, ashamed and embarrassed on hearing service users' experiences.

> "I feel sad and angry that others feel they have the right to treat people in a way that is degrading." (Student 56)

> "It actually made me feel embarrassed that healthcare professionals would still treat people with learning disabilities the way that was demonstrated." (Student 38)

The second theme was students not feeling surprised about the service users' negative experiences. Students were not surprised to hear of negative experiences because

> "this type of behaviour is seen throughout the community" (Student 85)

Student 21 indicated an absence of surprise because he/she had a sibling with a learning disability.

The third theme about students' feelings was feeling inspired. Twenty-eight students

commented that they were inspired by what they saw and plan to not make the same

mistakes themselves.

> "… as a nurse we should be helping to give them a voice as they have the capacity to
>
> make their own decisions." (Student 68)

> "Before the session if I had come across a service user with a learning disability I
>
> would approach their family or friend with them, now I will approach them and give
>
> them the chance to answer me back if they can." (Student 11)

Students' considerations

When students were asked to reflect on what they would now consider when working with

people with a learning disability, 102 students responded and two themes emerged. The

first of these was communications considerations. Communication considerations identified

were related to the pace of the communication, effective listening, and using appropriate

language and consider alternative means of communication.

> "Not assume they have understood me and to keep seeking clarity and also to consider
>
> alternative ways of delivering information, such as a large print and pictures." (Student
>
> 18)

The second theme was attitudinal considerations. Twenty-seven students commented that they would be more respectful and would not ignore or judge the individual.

"Speak to the person with a learning disability. Listen to the carer too, obviously, but under no circumstances ignore the person in front of you." (Student 6)

Other frequently occurring comments included "don't treat them like a child" and "treat them like any adult should be treated."

Impact on perceived levels of confidence

The session had a positive impact on the level of confidence of the majority of students. Indeed, 83% of the students reported to feel more confident about working with a patient or service user who has a learning disability. Nevertheless, 16.1% of the students felt that the session did not impact on their level of confidence and one student reported feeling less confident although the reason for this was not stated.

Comparing the service users sessions with taught lecture or watching a video recording

Students were asked to what extent they feel the session had more impact in comparison to a taught lecture or a video recording. All but 3 students agreed/somewhat agreed that the session had more impact than a taught lecture and all but one student agreed or somewhat agreed it had more impact than watching a video recording.

When asked to compare benefits of the service users' session compared to a lecture of video, 105 students responded. Analysis of the qualitative data in relation to these benefits

identified four themes. The first was increased emotional impact. Twenty-four comments

were coded as being related to the emotional impact of the session.

"I had a big smile on my face coming out of the lecture theatre." (Student 29).

One student wrote that the performance "touched her heart" (student 112) and another

student wrote "Seeing them react when we were clapping was inspirational" (student 24).

The second theme was that the service users' session is more real and live. Forty-three

comments were coded under this theme.

"It was real and vivid, a complete up close experience." (Student 25)

"A real life experience is more memorable, it has more impact." (Student 35)

The third theme was the interactive nature of the service users' session. Eighteen comments

were coded in this theme. The session was described as

"more interactive and powerful." (Student 44)

"There is more of a connection with the service users" (Student 36)

The final theme in this section was an increased understanding of what people with a

learning disability can do. Sixteen comments were coded for this theme.

"...seeing them act actually makes me realise that they are just like everyone else."

(Student 80)

"...[it] makes me understand more about how people with a learning disability live

their lives and how they feel, and it helped me to view things differently." (Student

12)

Challenges

Students were asked to reflect on the challenges, if any, raised by this session compared to a

lecture or video and 83 students offered comments. Of these, 27 students said there were

no challenges. The remaining 56 coded comments were analysed and two themes emerged.

The first was emotional challenge. Thirty comments were coded under this theme.

"It was very emotional. I found during the whole hour I had goose pimples!!!"

(Student 114)

"I felt really emotional listening to how people with a learning disability are treated.

The personal touch made it more realistic resulting in more emotions than watching a

video." (Student 46)

"Even though it was very emotional, it was the strength of the session." (Student 30)

The second issue was environmental challenge and logistics.   Sixteen comments were coded

about practical issues related to lack of space, not enough time, and three students raised

concerns about the costs involved. In addition, one student commented on another

challenge of the session, namely that "you can't return to it and refresh your memory" like you can with a video.

Students Identified future Learning Needs

An open-ended question asked students whether they had identified any learning need as a result of the session and 87 students responded. Of these, 64 indicated they had identified a learning need, 16 had identified no learning need and 3 did not appear to understand the question. Of the 65 students who had identified a learning need 5 did not state what that need was. The identified learning needs were analysed and resulted in four themes. The first was attitude change. Eighteen students identified a need to change their attitude.

"Yes, I have been judgemental without realising it." (Student 28)

"...I need to see beyond the person's disability." (Student 9)

Interestingly 2 students identified themselves as parents of a child with a learning disability, yet they both identified learning needs.

"As I have a learning disabled child myself, I actually thought I knew it all, how wrong I was. I need to listen more to what is being said and take note, just because someone has a learning disability it doesn't mean they cannot think for themselves, I need to learn more about empowerment." (Student 67)

The second identified learning need was the need for them to improve their communication

skills. Eighteen students identified this learning need.

"Broaden my communication skills to be able to apply them in any situation with any

person." (Student 31)

"To never make assumptions but ask more questions." (Student 41)

The third learning need identified was the need to increase their knowledge about learning

disabilities. Twelve students identified this learning need.

"To learn more about the range of different learning disabilities a person can have."

(Student 44)

The final learning need identified was the need to experience working with people who have

a learning disability.

"I would love to have the chance to work with people with a learning disability in the

future." (Student 99)

"I need to be more open minded and positive thinking. It would help me if I was to

work with someone with a learning disability." (Student 66)

Recommendations for Improvement

All but one student would like to attend more sessions developed and delivered by service

users and all would recommend their peers to attend such sessions. The recommendations

made by the students for future teaching sessions included having more sessions like this one, having teaching from service users from other fields of nursing, more opportunities for question and answer sessions with service users and larger, more appropriate classroom facilities for these types off sessions. A typical comment was

"That this form of teaching to be incorporated into the curriculum." (Student 28)

DISCUSSION

There is no literature available about using people with learning disability to teach students nurses; therefore, comparison between this study and previous studies about the contribution to student learning of service users with a learning disability is limited. However, from the literature related to service user involvement in other settings (e.g., mental health, social work), certain comparisons can be made.   Despite this, apart from one or two studies (e.g. Hanson and Mitchell 2001), the majority of literature about service user involvement is not about service user contribution in the classroom.

The policy documents highlighted in the beginning of the literature review (e.g., DH 2001, 2005, 2006; Forrest et al., 2000; Towle et al., 2010; NMC, 2010) demonstrate the political commitment in the UK for increased service user involvement in healthcare and healthcare education. At Kingston University and St George's University effort and resources have gone into finding ways of enabling service users to play a part in the education of nurses.

The discussion of the findings of this study is presented for each of the themes that emerged from the data mapped against the literature.

Impact on learning

Four themes emerged related to the impact on student learning: need to be non-judgemental, importance of listening and good communication, increased understanding about learning disability and positive recognition of people with a learning disability. There is little in the literature about how service users in the classroom impact on student learning. For example, Speed et al. (2012) identified a number of benefits for students from user involvement in nurse education and the study presented here supports this. However, this study goes beyond the benefits identified by Speed et al by demonstrating that being taught by people with a learning disability increased students' knowledge and understanding. This supports findings from Horne et al (2011).

The students who experience the teaching session from "Act Too" had an opportunity to learn about the perspectives and experiences of service users and enhanced their understanding of service users in learning disability, supporting previous work by Horne et al 2011). Students in this study saw service users with a learning disability in a different light, recognising that they have expertise of their own. This supports previous studies by Warne and McAndrews (2005).

Students' feelings

Three themes that emerged from the data in this study were emotional distress for students, the fat that students were unsurprised by the negative experiences of the service users from health and social care and a positive recognition of people with a learning disability. One of

the challenges that student in this study identified was the emotional challenge to them of being taught by people with a learning disability and hearing some of the negative experiences the service users had from health and social care services. Students appeared to be surprised at how their increased understanding of learning disability as a result of this learning experience led them to develop a more positive recognition of people with a learning disability.

Students' considerations

Two themes about student considerations emerged from this study: communication considerations and attitudinal considerations. Students in this study reported positive attitude change supporting previous findings of Warne and McAndrews (2005) including recognition of all that people with a learning disability can do. This positive attitude change experienced by students in this study supports the work of Hanson and Mitchell (2001) who found that service users who taught mental health issues to students offered students a different way of viewing mental health patients so that they moved away from the notion of mental health patients as being always dependent upon nurses.

The second theme – communication considerations – that was identified by students in this study are further discussed under students' identified future learning needs.

Increased confidence

Increased confidence in working with people with learning disabilities also emerged as a recurrent theme in this study which does not appear in previous literature about service user involvement. This may be because whilst using different service user-groups have been studied in the literature, using people with learning disabilities is largely un-researched.

Comparison with other teaching methods

Students found the approach to learning through service user involvement in the classroom was far preferable to learning about learning disability through a lecture or video. They found the session realistic and interactive, enabling them to understand what people with a learning disability are able to achieve. There is no previous literature about the impact on students of interactive teaching methods led by service users with learning disabilities.

Challenges of service user involvement in teaching

Students' emotional responses to the experiences of people with a learning disability was an important theme, echoing previous work by Horne et al (2012) who found that using service users in teaching students can help to develop positive attitudes and empathy in students for service users. Horne et al (2012) explored perceptions of nurse educators about good practice, attitudes, beliefs advantaged and challenges of using service users to teach students. The study presented here, with student nurses rather than educators found some similar findings. In addition, the study presented here begins to address some of the shortcomings in research into service users' contributions identified previously by Tee (2012) and Manthorpe et al (2003).

Students' identified future learning needs

One area of findings in this study which appears unique and has not been reported elsewhere is students' identification of their future learning needs as a result of being taught by people with a learning disability. Future learning need identified include the need for personal attitude change, the need to develop better communication skills, a need for more

knowledge about learning disabilities and the need to have more experience working with

people with a learning disability. All students indicated that being taught by service users is

sustainable; they would like more sessions like this one, would recommend to their peers to

attend such classes and requested similar sessions from service users from all fields of

nursing, as well as longer session with more time for questions and answers.

In summary, Gutteridge and Dobbins (2010) argued that the central focus of service user

involvement is: "does this involvement enhance student learning?" From this study it

appears that an interactive classroom teaching session designed and delivered by service

users with a learning disability enhanced the learning of students at this university in terms

of changing their understanding of people with a learning disability, building their confidence

in communication and interacting with people with a learning disability and identifying their

personal future learning needs with regard to people with a learning disability.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the cohort group in this study was of a reasonable size, the study took place in one

institution which means that the findings cannot be generalised to other institutions. In

addition, although the format of the survey questionnaire used in this study is similar to

questionnaires used by this institution in many other evaluation studies, it has not

specifically been tested for validity and reliability. Despite this the questionnaire appeared

to be understood by the respondents and yielded the type of data needed to answer the

research questions. Further studies need to be undertaken into service user participation

from people with a learning disability to increase our understanding of student engagement

with people with a learning disability, the impact and value of learning from these service

users and the sustainability of these types of teaching sessions.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the policy imperatives to involve service users in the education of nurses the

empirical research evidence of using service users in this way is limited; in the case of

learning disabilities, it is virtually absent. The study present here identified a number of

positive outcomes for students of being taught by people with a learning disability which has

had a positive impact on their confidence, attitudes, knowledge, and their understanding of

their own future learning needs.

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Tables

Table 1: Examples of Likert-style and open-ended questions

	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree
The session broadened my understanding of how it might feel to have a learning disability				
I feel more comfortable interacting with people with a learning disability				
The session had more impact on me compared to a lecture				

What did you learn most from this session?

What considerations would you make when working with a patient or service user who has a learning disability?

What learning needs for yourself have you identified as a result of this session?

Table 2: The Framework Method (Ritchie and Spencer 1994)

- **Familiarisation** – This involves reading and re-reading the transcripts to gain a good level of understanding of the data. The researchers immerse themselves in the data in order to become totally familiar with it; researchers develop an overview of the main ideas emerging from the data completely

- **Developing a theoretical framework** - Grouping together the main ideas that were noted from the familiarisation stage into a draft conceptual framework or index

- **Indexing** – Applying the draft theoretical framework back to the raw data in the transcripts to examine the 'fit." The researchers read through the raw data and note the themes and how they fit into the draft theoretical framework

- **Charting** – This involves summarising the original data into manageable pieces of text that are easy to see. It often involves creating a physical chart for each theme of the conceptual framework and transferring pieces of data onto each chart to locate the data to the appropriate theme

- **Synthesising the data** - This is the final stage. In this phase each chart is reviewed in order to make sense of the whole set of data and involves checking the summarising on each chart and comparing it to the original transcripts, or comparing themes to each other. At this stage, sub-themes may emerge and/or themes merged together, further revising the theoretical framework. The charts are developed into explanatory texts in order to clarify the data.