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Creating Professional Identity: Initiating and Participating with Gen "Y" occupational therapy students

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Background: Disaffected, bored, consumer oriented, these are descriptors about Generation "Y" students (Featherstone, 2007). The corollary of these statements is that they focus on family and friends, they are "brand-aware" and are IT consumers of information. These university students are studying in larger cohorts, they are working to pay HECS fees and the traditional bonding activities at university are lessening.

Purpose: The aims were to engender personal pride in the profession and to increase the profile of the profession to the wider community.

Method: A student-led committee was formed. A multi-pronged approach was initiated to embrace the different characteristics of the students. Social events were organised, an occupational therapy jersey was designed, Facebook was initiated, programs were broadcast on the University radio about occupational therapy, skills nights were organised and student groups started speaking at secondary schools. Formal assignments were altered so that corridor displays happened in OT Week and a public Art Exhibition was held. Inter-year students became mentors and higher level students presented their completed work to in-coming students in specific courses.

Discussion: All forms of wider change take time (Latchem & Hanna, 2001) before an impact is perceived while inter-year events and social activities have an immediate impact.

Conclusion: A perceived atmosphere of trust is developing between the students and staff and further activities such as sports teams and selected charities will be initiated in 2010. This preliminary work intends to embrace a greater number of students. As Bradley (2001, p. 71) says, "the job will never be finished - all improvement is the move towards something, not the achievement of the ideal"

Learning outcomes:

- Ø Change processes take time to effect,
- Ø Partnerships create trust and openness,
- Ø Pride in the profession can be engendered through creating informal activities and re-designing formal work.