

ABSTRACT. (A. D. Aslett-Bentley).

Curry, chip butties and chow mein: approaches to cultural diversity in the education of Nutrition and Dietetics students at a British University.

Background: It is estimated that approximately 10% of the UK population have community backgrounds outside Britain (Parekh, 2000). Social class and cultural background have been linked to inequalities in health and health care, supporting the need for the development of 'cultural competency' amongst Health Care Professionals (Acheson, 1998). The present British Government is committed to addressing these issues (D.o.H., 1999).

Post-colonial migrations to the mother country have resulted in Britain having one of the most culturally diverse populations in the world. Demographic changes have been accompanied by significant changes in eating habits, adding to existing geographical and socio-economic differences and affecting both immigrant and indigenous consumption patterns. The National Food Survey (NFS) provides a unique record of food expenditure and consumption in Great Britain from World War II to the present day, but yet currently fails to report adequately on the influence of cultural diversity (DEFRA, 2001). In present British eating habits a merging of cultures is apparent and Chinese/Thai food has just overtaken Indian as the most popular food eaten outside the home (BBC News, 2002). Traditional recipes have often been adapted to suit the British palate, as for example with some types of 'curry', but nevertheless a great variety of food consumption habits is evident and this continues to develop and diversify, presenting a continuous challenge in the education of Nutrition and Dietetics students.

Aim: Leeds Metropolitan University is well established at the forefront of the education and training of Nutrition and Dietetics students. In its policy the University is committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination, promoting equality of opportunity and promoting good relations between people of different racial groups. This study aims to investigate and improve approaches to cultural diversity within the educational provision of Pre-registration Nutrition and Dietetics courses. In its wider context it also aims to provide a model for best educational and professional practice.

Research Objectives:

1. To explore and identify approaches to cultural diversity in both Undergraduate and Postgraduate Pre-registration education in Nutrition and Dietetics.
2. To investigate students' post-placement understanding of cultural diversity and implications in Nutrition and Dietetics.
3. To compare and contrast variations in these students' placement experiences of cultural diversity.
4. To evaluate current approaches to cultural diversity in the above courses.
5. To formulate guidelines for best practice in compliance with the Race Relations Amendment Act (RRAA) 2000, which in the UK applies to all public bodies.
6. To disseminate this model more generically to other areas of Health Science and Educational provision.

Methods: A questionnaire has been developed to investigate students' understanding of cultural diversity and their experiences of associated issues during their placement. This research tool was used with a cohort of 25 Postgraduate Diploma in Dietetics students, on their return from placement in May 2002. Further post-placement investigations have been made with Final Year Honours Undergraduate students from Human Nutrition and Dietetics courses, on their return at the beginning of our academic year in September 2002. These investigations are being developed further by the use of Focus Groups with students from the above two Undergraduate courses.

Approaches to cultural diversity within the curriculum in terms of teaching learning and assessment are also under examination, along with how these issues are addressed in student admissions, support, progress and achievement. Another aspect of investigation relates to staffing and includes staff appreciation of these matters as well as staff recruitment, development and career progression issues. Aspects of cultural diversity within the curriculum will be described, mapped and evaluated. Relevant statistics relating to both students and staff will also be collected and reported.

Proposed Outcomes

1. A written review of approaches to cultural diversity in this area of provision, with identification of strengths and weaknesses.
2. Reinforcement of good practice as well as development and promotion of strategies to address any areas identified as requiring improvement.
3. Development and implementation of best practice guidelines with dissemination to related professions.
4. In the longer term monitoring and review of both strategies and developments as an on-going process to inform educational/professional practice.

Provisional Conclusion.

In a multi-cultural society such as the United Kingdom many challenges exist in tackling inequalities in health and health care provision. In order to rise to these challenges and succeed in addressing the issues, it is essential that strategies used appreciate and take into account cultural diversity. A seamless approach is required embedded in education and training that forms a continuum with professional practice. It is anticipated that the above work in progress will provide a model for Nutrition and Dietetics students, which will have much broader applications, not only for other health-related courses but also for educational practice in general both now and in the future.

Key References:

1. Acheson, D. (1998) *Independent Inquiry into Inequalities in Health*. London: HMSO.
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3. Department of Health (D. o. H.) (1999) *Our Healthier Nation: Saving Lives*. London.
4. Parekh, B. (2000). *The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain: Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-ethnic Britain*. The Runnymede Trust.