

OT Students' Perception of the Value of a Fieldwork Placement in a Role-Emerging Practice Setting

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PURPOSE: The culmination of an occupational therapy (OT) student's education is their Level II fieldwork (FW) experience, which provides students the opportunity for practical application of their OT knowledge and skills within traditional settings and role-emerging settings (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020). Although the use of role-emerging FW settings is supported by AOTA, research to date has found mixed results in terms of value to students from their own perspective (Gat & Ratzon, 2014; Nielsen et al. 2017; Overton et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2014). With role-emerging practice areas becoming more common as FW settings, it is important to continue to build on this body of literature as students' perception may change overtime. This study explored Level II OT FW students' (n = 14) perception of (1) a role-emerging FW site, as preparation for clinical practice; and (2) the effect of this role-emerging FW on a student's vision of their future clinical practice.

DESIGN: Qualitative phenomenological study.

METHOD: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with OT Level II FW students at the completion of their role-emerging FW placement. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded, and interpreted using a non-linear, narrative approach. In order to increase trustworthiness, two researchers independently coded the transcripts, compared their codes to identify discrepancies, adjusted the coding matrix or code definitions to resolve discrepancies, then re-coded the transcripts. This process was repeated until a 90% coding agreement was reached. Similarly, two researchers independently interpreted the data, compared their interpretation to identify discrepancies which were resolved through discussion and in consultation with a senior researcher.

RESULTS: Three themes emerged from the analysis: (1) Integrating Independence and Support is Key, (2) Becoming an Occupational Therapist, and (3) Filling a Gap. Participants noted the importance of the support from both their peer partner and their supervisor as catalysts for increasing their independence as student practitioners (Theme 1). All participants spoke about the opportunity and need, in this role-emerging setting, to build skills beyond the obligatory soft and hard skills one typically learns during fieldwork (Theme 2). Through the projects and presentations at their site, expressed discovering a new passion for advocacy and an understanding of program development (Theme 2). Participants also reflected on the work being done at this role-emerging placement and the wider impact it had on both the site and the scope of OT practice within it (Theme 3). They were able to understand the impact of OT on client progress and success, the wide scope of OT service provision needed, and how OT fits into a university setting (Theme 3).

CONCLUSION: Level II FW students clearly felt adequately prepared to enter any OT setting with the skills they learned at their role-emerging placement. They felt that this site built skills that would be useful in any setting but that they would not have had a chance to learn in a traditional fieldwork site. Overall, students painted a picture of an effective and positive Level II FW experience in this role-emerging FW placement and reported the value of this placement on their future practice.

IMPACT STATEMENT: Role-emerging settings are critical to the continued strength of our profession. Forming OT students to be successful in these settings is thus important, but students are often reluctant to complete their FW in that setting. This study confirms the value of role-emerging FW placements.

References

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