The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy

Volume 3
Issue 4 *Fall 2015*

Article 7

October 2015

Fieldwork Educators' Perspectives: Professional Behavior Attributes of Level II Fieldwork Students

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Recommended Citation

Campbell, M. K., Corpus, K., Wussow, T. M., Plummer, T., Gibbs, D., & Hix, S. (2015). Fieldwork Educators' Perspectives: Professional Behavior Attributes of Level II Fieldwork Students. *The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy, 3*(4). https://doi.org/10.15453/2168-6408.1146

Fieldwork Educators' Perspectives: Professional Behavior Attributes of Level II Fieldwork Students

Abstract

A review of the literature revealed a lack of consistent expectations for professional behaviors required of level II fieldwork students. This study sought to obtain a consensus of perspectives of level II fieldwork educators by asking, “What are the essential professional behavior attributes for level II fieldwork students?” Delphi methodology was used to collect data in two rounds of surveys. In the first, 49 fieldwork educators listed professional behavior attributes they believed to be important for fieldwork students. The data was synthesized into themes for distribution in the second survey, which were identified as essential, non-essential, or site-specific by 53 participants. The 218 different professional behavior attributes provided by Survey 1 respondents were categorized into 22 attribute themes. In Survey 2, 20 of the 22 attribute themes reached a consensus level of at least 75% and five reached 100% agreement. These results show a current perspective of what fieldwork educators value in level II fieldwork students and may be informative to occupational therapy faculty, students, and fieldwork educators.

Keywords

Professional Behaviors, Fieldwork Educators, Level II Fieldwork

Cover Page Footnote

Special thanks to Dr. Emmy Dagnan for her contribution to our research.

Credentials Display

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DOI: 10.15453/2168-6408.1146

Fieldwork educators have high professional expectations of their students (Chipchase et al., 2012; Garrett & Schkade, 1995; Jensen & Daniel, 2010; Steward, 2001; Vogel, Grice, Hill, & Moody, 2004). However, the literature on this topic revealed inconsistent definitions of professional behaviors (Breines, 1988; Steward, 2001) yet affirmed that professional behaviors are critical for fieldwork requirements (Holmes & Scaffa, 2009) and success (Gutman, McCreedy, & Heisler, 1998; James & Musselman, 2006). Over the past two decades, there has been a dearth of literature examining level II fieldwork educators' perspectives on the essential professional behaviors for occupational therapy students. Herzberg (1994) conducted a study to understand fieldwork educators' perspectives on significant learning style characteristics for fieldwork students. However, the topic has not been investigated since. Furthermore, a widely accepted list of the essential professional behavior attributes that level II fieldwork educators require fieldwork students to demonstrate does not exist. The purpose of this study was to acquire the necessary data to further understand current fieldwork educator perspectives of student professional behavior attributes. The findings from this study will contribute to the body of knowledge concerning professional behaviors expected of occupational therapy fieldwork students. The researchers surveyed 296 fieldwork educators and asked, "What are the essential professional behavior attributes for level II fieldwork students?" The researchers defined attributes as: a quality or feature regarded as a characteristic or inherent part of someone or something. Attributes can include behaviors or attitudes but not occupational therapy specific knowledge-based skills, such as measuring range of motion.

Literature Review

Professional behaviors have been inconsistently defined for years. In an early study, Breines (1988) identified a need for a more integrated definition of professional behaviors. Recent literature also indicates that the lack of consistency continues. Steward (2001) indicated that fieldwork educators regularly placed high value on professional and/or personal attributes, yet the specific attributes were inconsistently defined. Robinson, Tanchuk, and Sullivan (2012) found that students consider professional behaviors to include personal image; verbal, nonverbal, and written communication skills; client-centered behavior; and the ability to recognize differences by setting. Faculty participants emphasized that students need more self-awareness of their own behaviors and that professionalism is specific to context and setting. More research should be conducted on a larger scale to further explore the perspectives on professionalism in occupational therapy (Robinson et al., 2012).

Educators' hold high expectations of student professional behaviors, despite the absent consensus of the specific attributes and skills considered most desirable (Steward, 2001). According to Steward (2001), commonalities in professional expectations included communication skills, initiative, recognizing knowledge gaps and asking for help (awareness of limitations), common sense, and interest in learning. Some educators emphasized conduct while others emphasized

interpersonal skills. Jensen and Daniel (2010) noted that fieldwork educators were more hesitant to accept level II fieldwork students due to concerns about the unprofessional behaviors of students. Chipchase et al. (2012) surveyed clinical educators and identified 57 characteristics divided into six themes: (a) knowledge and understanding, (b) willingness, (c) professionalism, (d) communication and interaction, (e) personal attributes, and (f) skills. In the literature, fieldwork educators emphasized communication skills, yet the level of expectations varies for the other professional behaviors. Jensen and Daniel concluded that more research is needed to clarify American occupational therapy fieldwork educators' perspectives with regard to supervising fieldwork students.

In separate studies, Gutman et al. (1998) as well as James and Musselman (2006) determined that errors in student professional behaviors could influence the fieldwork experience. Both studies emphasized the need for students to self-reflect on behaviors and the education process as suggested in Fidler's (1996) description of standards for professional education. Fidler emphasizes positive self-regard, evolving self-awareness, interpersonal competence, and a commitment to learning as the standards of professional education. Gutman et al. discovered that the behavioral characteristics most associated with students who failed fieldwork were rigidity of thinking, discomfort with the ambiguity that accompanies clinical reasoning, lack of psychological insight, difficulty interpreting feedback, externalization of responsibility, difficulty learning from mistakes, dependence on external measures for self-esteem, and discomfort with the physical handling of patients.

Understanding how students are assessed during fieldwork is useful to understand the professional behaviors that are evaluated for student development. The Fieldwork Performance Evaluation (FPE) for the occupational therapy student is an American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) form presented to fieldwork educators to measure entry-level competence of supervised occupational therapy students. Educators evaluate students on the following professional behaviors when using the FPE: collaborates with supervisor, takes responsibility for professional competence, responds constructively to feedback, demonstrates consistent work behaviors, demonstrates time management, demonstrates positive interpersonal skills, and demonstrates respect for diversity (AOTA, 2002).

Method

In this study, the researchers implemented the Delphi methodology to collect systematically and anonymously the opinions from experts about the essential professional behaviors for level II occupational therapy fieldwork students. Delphi methodology is a multi-stage research process that typically uses two to three surveys to gather and distill the judgments of individuals with a specific expertise (Atwal & Caldwell, 2003; Kielhofner, 2006). It enables participants to share their point of view anonymously without fear of retaliation. Opinions are collected in the initial survey and synthesized to create the second survey. Each additional survey uses data gathered from the previous survey (Atwal & Caldwell, 2003). The

sample size in the second survey was large enough to allow for at least 75% consensus, a standard consistent with Delphi methodology as noted by Kielhofner (2006).

Participants

The participants for this study consisted of a largely female population between 30 to 49 years of age. In Survey 1, 85% of the participants were female and in Survey 2, 90% of the participants were female. Respondents between 30 to 49 years of age accounted for 72% of Survey 1's sample size and 66% of Survey 2's sample size. The participants represent a large percentage of experienced occupational therapists. Years of practice ranged from less than 5 to more than 31, with the highest representation from those with 21 to 25 years of experience (23% in Survey 1 and 24% in Survey 2). Using the divisions from the U.S. Census regional map, the geographical and regional representation of the respondents primarily comes from the South and Midwest regions (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Respondents living in the South region of the United States accounted for 69% of Survey 1 and 67% of Survey 2. Respondents from the Midwest region of the United States made up 22% of Survey 1 and Survey 2. Nine percent of the participants in Survey 1 and 11% of the participants in Survey 2 represented the West region of the United States. There were no respondents from the Northeast region. The participants that completed Survey 2 were representative of the practice settings depicted in Figure 1. The largest percentages of participants for both surveys currently practice in outpatient and acute care settings. The participants practicing in outpatient settings comprised 62% from Survey 1 and 45% from Survey 2. The participants practicing in acute care settings comprised 28% from Survey 1 and 20% from Survey 2.

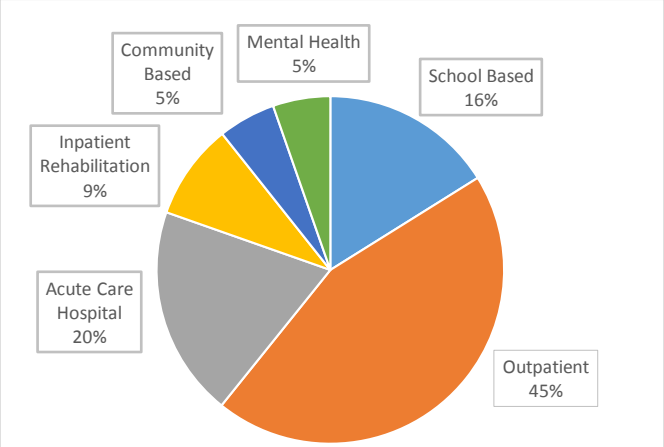

Figure 1. Current practice settings of the participants from Survey 2. The percentages depict the amount of participants that were from that setting.

Procedures

The researchers obtained Institutional Review Board approval from and conducted the research study at a school of occupational therapy in the Southeast region of the United States. The subjects for this research study were licensed occupational therapists who have supervised at least one level II fieldwork student. As cited in Kielhofner (2006), Hassan et al. supported that the sampling in Delphi studies should be either criterion-based or purposive. In order to select expert participants, sampling for this study was purposive. Researchers derived the sample from the school of occupational therapy's academic fieldwork coordinator's national database of Master of Science in Occupational Therapy (MSOT) and Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD) fieldwork educators from the past 3 years. Participation

criterion was based on subjects that were active licensed or equivalent occupational therapists practicing full-time or part-time and with experience supervising level II fieldwork students. To minimize the chance of researcher and participant bias, the researchers were unable to identify the participants and all responses were anonymous (Kielhofner, 2006). Data was collected electronically using Survey Monkey, a third-party hosted survey and data collection tool. The participants of the study were at least 20 years of age. Survey 1 data was collected from January 28, 2014, through February 20, 2014. Data for Survey 2 was collected from February 28, 2014, through March 18, 2014. All of the participants signed a consent form prior to data collection.

The first survey in this study consisted of demographic questions as well as three open-ended questions that gathered statements from the participants to determine essential professional behavior attributes for level II fieldwork students. The demographics collected included level of education, years of experience, number of students supervised, and practice settings. Responses from Survey 1 were analyzed, distilled, and organized into common concepts and ideas. The data was then coded into themes of professional behavior attributes and listed alphabetically in the second survey.

Using the results of the first survey, the second survey was designed to determine if a consensus could be reached on essential professional behavior attributes and was sent to the 296 fieldwork educators who were invited to participate in the first survey.

Strategies for Validating Findings

Two strategies were used to validate the findings from Survey 2: triangulation and member checking. Triangulation and member checking are important validation strategies because they ensure the trustworthiness of the data. When researchers use multiple sources and methods to validate findings with existing evidence and to identify themes and perspectives, triangulation occurs (Creswell, 2013). A review of the literature provided the researchers with a history of themes and perspectives. The past literature was then triangulated with the findings from this study. The researchers compared the themes that emerged in the Delphi study with the attributes found in the existing literature. Member checking occurs when participants review the survey findings and interpretations from the researchers to check for credibility (Creswell, 2013). The second survey was the synthesis of the results from the first survey. In this study, member checking occurred when the researchers sent Survey 1 results to participants during Survey 2 data collection. Creswell (2013) considers the agreement of multiple coders a necessary component of reliability. In this case, reliability was achieved through a team of multiple researchers coding the research results in this study and reviewed by faculty advisors. Furthermore, several of the responses from this study were consistent with professional behaviors found in the literature (see Table 3).

Analysis

In Survey 1, the researchers analyzed responses using an open coding and axial coding

process. Open coding is defined as "coding the data for its major categories of information" (Creswell, 2013, p. 86). Axial coding arises from open coding and occurs as the researchers classify and focus on an open coding theme or core phenomenon. The researchers then re-analyzed the survey results to create themes around each core phenomenon. Researchers create in vivo codes when the names of the codes are the exact words of the participants (Creswell, 2013). In vivo represents a process to familiarize the researchers with the data and progress through the analysis until a final report of the data has been created. In this study, the researchers used in vivo codes for naming and defining the themes. The researchers synthesized and categorized the attributes listed by Survey 1 participants into 22 themes for Survey 2.

Survey 2 enabled the researchers to verify the synthesized results from Survey 1 and then ask the participants to identify which of the 22 attribute themes were most essential, non-essential, or site-specific relative to professional behaviors that level II fieldwork students should exhibit. The researchers analyzed the results from Survey 2 to identify the professional behavior themes that fieldwork educators selected to be the most essential attributes for level II fieldwork students to demonstrate. The researchers conducted cross tabulations to analyze Survey 2 results by demographics, such as the populations with which participants work.

Results

From the sample of 296 fieldwork educators, 49 completed Survey 1 and 53 completed Survey 2. The 49 participants in Survey 1 each listed up to 15 professional behavior attributes, totaling 218 different terms that were synthesized into 22 themes for Survey 2. Final attribute themes are shown in Table 1. The participants' verbatim words from Survey 1 are in parentheses and were used as clarifications or partial definitions for the themes.

Table 1

Professional Behavior Attribute Themes

Themes	Definitions
Adaptable	(Pliability, flexibility.)
Adherence to Policies	(Dress code/professional appearance, cell phone policies, hygienic, neat.)
Clinically Competent	(Clinical reasoning, critical thinking, observation skills, hands-on skills, safety awareness, ability to generalize information, problem-solving skills.)
Communication Skills	(Written, verbal, documentation, appropriate language level with clients.)
Confident	(Competence, never feeling inferior.)
Constructive Criticism	(Not easily offended, open to feedback, self-reflective, open-minded.)
Creative	(Improvising, thinking outside the box, resourcefulness, intuitive.)
Culturally Competent	(Sensitivity, respectful of others, accepting of other backgrounds, races.)
Empathetic	(Altruism, compassion, sympathy, caring.)
Enthusiastic	(Excited about work, energetic, interested, passion.)
Ethical	(Honesty, confidentiality, unbiased, knowledge of state laws.)
Independent	(Regarding learning, thinking, working.)
Initiator	(Committed, self-determination, motivated, goal-oriented, eager to learn, hard worker.)
Interpersonal Skills	(Maintain appropriate boundaries, relate well, eye contact, involved, appropriate in confrontations or conflicts, tactful, common sense, attentive, mature.)
Leadership Skills	(Motivation, good sense of business, assertiveness, authoritative.)

Organized	(Prepared.)
Patient	(Calm.)
Personable	(Versatile, good sense of humor, playful, congenial, easy going, pleasant, outgoing, friendly, social, people person.)
Positive Attitude [a]	
Responsible	(Dependable, reliable, accountable.)
Team Player	(Collaborator, cooperative.)
Time Efficient	(Time management, timely, documentation, promptness, punctuality.)

Note. Definitions of themes used terms from the participants in Survey 1; however, not all terms used by the participants in Survey 1 were used as definitions. [a] This theme did not have a definition.

Fifty-three participants reached consensus of 75% on 16 of the 22 attribute themes as shown in Table 2. Of those 22 professional behavior themes listed in Survey 2, the following five attributes were marked as "essential" by 100% of the survey respondents: adaptable, clinically competent, communication skills, ethical, responsible, and time efficient.

Table 2

Survey 2 Results: Ranking of Essential Professional Behavior Attributes

Professional Attribute	Essential Percentage	*n / N*
Adaptable	100%	53/53
Clinically Competent	100%	53/53
Communication Skills	100%	53/53
Ethical	100%	53/53
Responsible	100%	53/53
Time Efficient [a]	100%	51/51
Constructive Criticism [a]	96.2%	50/52
Interpersonal Skills	96.2%	51/53
Positive Attitude	98.1%	52/53
Team Player [a]	94.2%	49/52
Empathetic	90.6%	48/53
Enthusiastic	92.3%	48/52
Organized	90.6%	48/53
Creative	86.8%	46/53
Culturally Competent	88.7%	47/53
Initiator	88.7%	47/53
Personable	88.7%	47/53
Adherence to Policies	86.8%	46/53
Independent [a]	76.9%	40/52
Confident [b]	69.8%	37/53
Leadership Skills [a b]	63.5%	33/52

Note. N = Total participants that answered the question; n = Total participants who selected that attribute as essential. [a] For this professional attribute, fewer than 53 participants responded. [b] Professional behavior that did not meet the 75% consensus required by Delphi methodology.

Figure 2 illustrates that therapists practicing in pediatric, geriatric, and adult populations rank these particular attributes differently. The participants currently working with the pediatric population chose creative, empathetic, independent, initiator, organized, and personable as essential attributes more frequently than those that work with adult and geriatric populations.

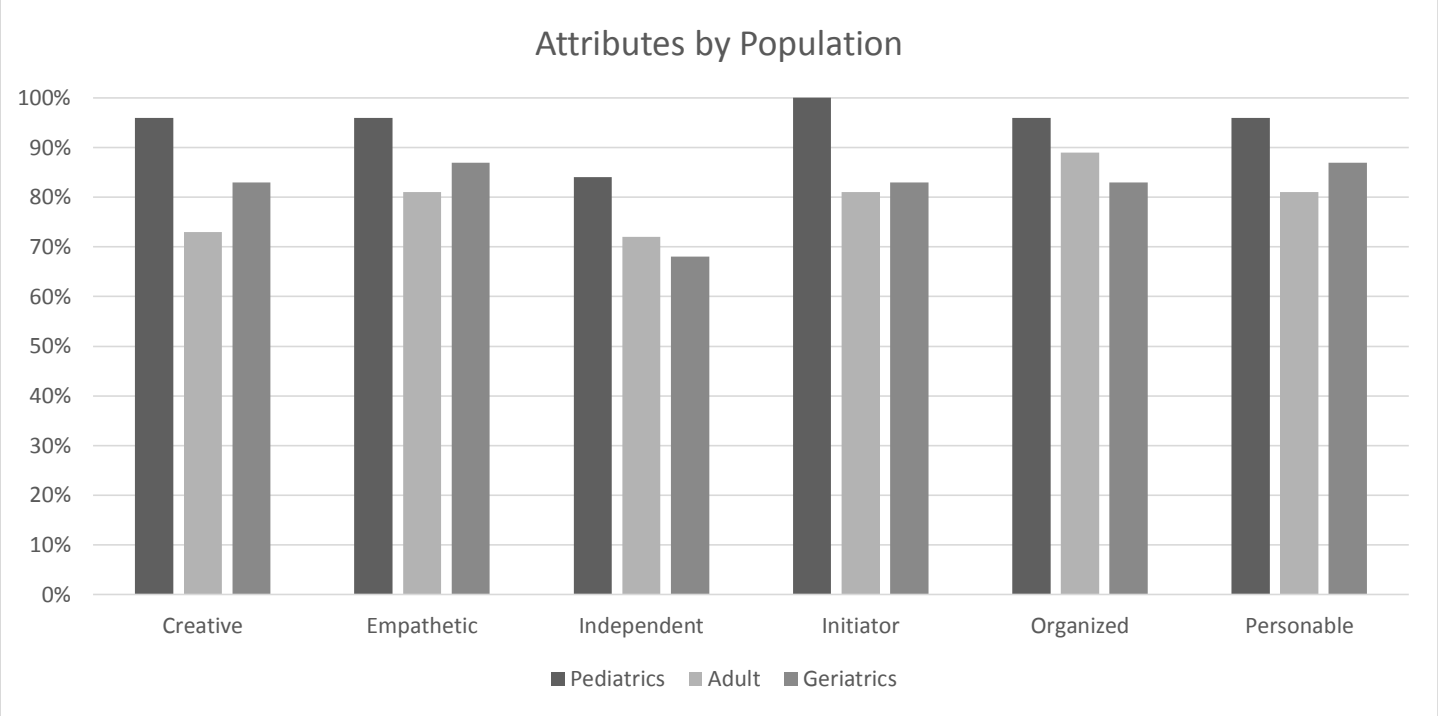

Figure 2. Specific professional behaviors considered essential for the pediatric population in comparison to adult and geriatric populations.

Discussion

The purpose of this Delphi study was to obtain fieldwork educator perspectives on essential professional behaviors for fieldwork students and to contribute to the literature on this topic. As represented by the results shown in Table 2, this research study answered the question: "What are the essential professional behavior attributes for level II fieldwork students?" Comparing the results from this Delphi study to the literature shows that the professional behaviors emphasized by fieldwork educators vary by study, but there are some important similarities. Demonstrating clinical competence and good communication skills are two professional behaviors that were prominent in the literature and this study. This finding suggests a potential requirement for fieldwork students to demonstrate clinical competence and communication skills during level II fieldwork.

In Herzberg's 1994 study, fieldwork educators identified the following behaviors as important for fieldwork students: teamwork, active experimentation, doing, adaptability, and flexibility. Twenty years later, both adaptability and teamwork are considered essential professional behaviors each with over 94% consensus. In 2006, James and Musselman reported that the common professional behavior problems associated with fieldwork failure include difficulty receiving constructive criticism, poor organizational skills, inability to globally conceptualize fieldwork, and unpreparedness. Currently, being open to constructive criticism was considered essential by 96% of the participants and 90.6% agreed that fieldwork students should be organized.

Table 3
This Study in Relation to the Literature

Terms	Terms Prominent in this Study [a]	Terms Prominent in this Study [a] and the Literature [b]	Terms Prominent in this Study [a] but NOT the Literature [b]	Terms NOT Prominent in the Study [c] or the Literature [d]
Adaptable	▪		▪	
Clinically Competent	▪	▪		
Communication Skills	▪	▪		
Ethical	▪		▪	
Responsible	▪			
Confidence				▪
Leadership				▪

Note. [a] Prominent in study = Ranked 100% essential by all 53 respondents. [b] Prominent = Five or more authors mentioned the term. [c] NOT Prominent = Did not reach 75% consensus. [d] NOT Prominent = Not mentioned by any authors. [d] NOT Prominent = Not mentioned by any authors.

Professional behavior attributes that fieldwork educators evaluate in students when using the FPE tool were reflected in this study. Furthermore, the following professional behaviors as identified in the FPE tool were also emphasized in the literature: responsibility, constructive feedback, time management, and interpersonal skills (see Appendix) (Breines, 1988; Garrett & Schkade, 1995; Gutman et al., 1998; Holmes & Scaffa, 2009; James & Musselman, 2006; Jensen & Daniel, 2010; Koenig, Johnson, Morano, & Ducette, 2003; Randolph, 2003; Steward, 2001; Vogel et al., 2004). This consistency across studies indicates that responsibility, constructive feedback, time management, and interpersonal skills are attributes that can strongly influence the fieldwork experience.

Confidence, leadership, empathy, and creativity were all terms lacking in the review of literature but were all mentioned in this study of current fieldwork educators. Empathy and creativity were selected as essential by at least 85% of the participants. In contrast, confidence and leadership were not mentioned in the literature and were not considered essential by the Delphi methodology threshold of at least 75% of the participants. One respondent made the following comment:

> Personable traits, leadership, independent may not be attributes that a level II student needs to have at the beginning. Too much of any of those will hide the inadequacies and feelings that if they're nice, friendly, and confident acting, nothing will be asked of them. It covers that they may not ask questions and learn the true intricacies of MD, nursing, and patient interaction. They may not acknowledge inadequacies and stay in a comfort zone that does not stretch their beliefs or skills [*sic*].

This qualitative comment and the fact that it achieved less than 75% consensus for the attributes of confidence and leadership may be the result of expectations that confidence and leadership develop over time during fieldwork and throughout one's clinical practice. The lack of consensus reached by the participants for these professional behavior attributes could suggest the need for further exploration by level II fieldwork educators who view these themes as "essential."

Professional behaviors are recognized as an important element in the development of occupational therapy students preparing for fieldwork and clinical practice. Holmes and Scaffa (2009) specify that the latest Accreditation Counsel for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE)

standards (from 2007) for MSOT and OTD programs reflect professional behavior education. The findings from the Delphi study reflect the previously mentioned inconsistencies found in the literature, particularly the varying definitions yet high expectations of professional behaviors. However, the current study reflects the literature's consistent emphasis on professional behaviors that 90% or more of the participants selected as essential.

Future Research

The results of this study identified 22 professional behaviors that current practicing fieldwork educators consider to be essential for fieldwork level II students. To further expand the evidence of this study, future research could include a population with a larger geographical representation and compare the prevalence of the dominant professional behavior attributes. Cohorts from other universities could be surveyed to compare to the cohort investigated in this study. These results also suggest additional inquiries regarding the development of professional behaviors of occupational therapy students including: What professional behaviors are expected in academic education and is this consistent with clinical education and fieldwork educators? Are there specific professional behavior attributes that occupational therapy program instructors consider to be essential for occupational therapy students? Which professional behaviors do the students' consider to be essential to both academic education and clinical experience? Future research on perspectives from the West and Northeast regions of the United States could use this study to determine if there are regional correlations of fieldwork educators' perspectives.

Limitations

The researchers used a purposive sample from one occupational therapy program's level II database of fieldwork locations. This is a limited representation given that there are over 150 accredited occupational therapy programs in the United States (AOTA, 2014). This sample has a limited geographic representation of only 22 states, with 33% of the participants from Tennessee. This study does not represent the Northeast region of the United States and only a limited amount from the West region. A lack of consistency with the sample from Survey 1 to Survey 2 existed with 70% of the Survey 2 participants having also completed Survey 1.

Conclusion

The goal of the study was to contribute to the body of knowledge on professional development of occupational therapy students. Fieldwork educators chose 19 professional behavior attribute themes as essential for occupational therapy fieldwork students with at least 75% consensus. These results represent a sample of current fieldwork educators' perspectives on professional behaviors. Faculty and students may find these results useful in the professional development component of occupational therapy education. Fieldwork educators could reference these results when promoting student success in level II fieldwork.

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Appendix

Professional Behavior Attribute Terms in the Literature

Authors (Year)	Professional Behaviors
Adam, Peters, & Chipchase (2013)	Knowledge of work injury prevention, management, treatment, rehabilitation, communication, professional presence, behaviors of self-reflection, and evaluation.
Breines (1988)	Aggressiveness, competitive, and collaborative attitudes were considered male characteristics and professional. Submissiveness, the need for acceptance, flexibility (derogatorily called inconsistency) in practice dictated by family demands and need for personal fulfillment are female and considered semi-professional.
Chipchase et al. (2012)	Knowledge and understanding, willingness, professionalism, communication and interaction, personal attributes, skills.
Commission on Education (2002)	FPE: Collaborates with supervisor, takes responsibility for professional competence, responds constructively to feedback, demonstrates consistent work behaviors, demonstrates time management, demonstrates positive interpersonal skills, demonstrates respect for diversity.
Fidler (1996)	Positive self-regard, increasing self-awareness, interpersonal competence, and commitment to learning.
Garrett & Schkade (1995)	OAMPD focuses on student transition, adaptive responses and the following performance elements: communication, evaluation and assessment of patients to determine details from observations made during evaluations, treatment planning and implementation in which choices stressed function of client rather than activity, initiative and responsibility taken learning activities of daily routines, documentation.
Gutman, McCreedy, & Heisler (1998)	Rigidity of thinking, discomfort with the ambiguity that accompanies clinical reasoning, lack of psychological insight, difficulty interpreting feedback, externalization of responsibility, difficulty learning from mistakes, discomfort with the physical handling of patients, and dependence on eternal measures for self-esteem.
Holmes & Scaffa (2009)	Interpersonal skills (active listening, cultural competence, seek mentors, negotiate effectively), self-starter/self-directed, adaptable, persistent, flexible, tolerant of ambiguity.
James & Musselman (2006)	Ability to handle stress, clinical reasoning skills, emotional intelligence, interpersonal skills, professional behavior, problem solving skills, getting "big picture," responding to constructive feedback, organizational skills, judgment.
Jensen & Daniel (2010)	Treat fieldwork as a job, self-assess/reflection, communication skills, accept feedback, reflect on feedback and make behavior change, professionalism.
Koenig, Johnson,	Time management, organization, engagement in the fieldwork experience, self-

Morano, & Ducette (2003)	directed learning, reasoning and problem solving, written communication and interpersonal skills, professional and personal boundaries, and use of professional terminology.
Randolph (2003)	PDE: Punctuality, commitment to learning, communication skills, professional demeanor and adherence to code of ethics, respect, personal insight, problem-solving skills.
Robinson, Tanchuk, & Sullivan (2012)	Responsibility, accountability, reliability, respect, strong work ethic, ethics, team work, being knowledgeable, image, communication, client centered practice, professional awareness, context-specific.
Steward (2001)	Communication skills including listening and questioning, initiative, awareness of own limitations, relationship skills/interpersonal, common sense, respect for clients, willingness to read and learn.
Vogel, Grice, Hill, & Moody (2004)	Judgment, initiative, responsibility, independent learning, performance, attitude.

Note. FPE = Fieldwork Performance Evaluation; FW = fieldwork; OAMPD = Occupational Adaptation Model of Professional Development; PDE = Professional Development Evaluation.