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## Occupational Therapy Student Readiness for Transition to the Fieldwork Environment: A Pilot Case Study

### Abstract

The classroom and the field represent diverse and unique teaching and learning environments that students are required to navigate successfully. Facilitating student success in these environments requires the efforts of educators and the students themselves. This qualitative pilot study sought to elucidate perspectives regarding student readiness from the viewpoint of occupational therapy academic and fieldwork educators. Data for the study was collected from interviews and a focus group. The results of the study revealed that academic and fieldwork educators value similar characteristics of student readiness for transition to fieldwork. However, there is a need for collaborative strategies between the academic and fieldwork settings to improve awareness of the value of theory-driven practice and to support authentic incorporation of theory into practice as part of the educative process of supervising fieldwork students.

### Comments

The author reports no potential conflicts of interest.

### Keywords

fieldwork, fieldwork education, clinical education, fieldwork educator, fieldwork supervisor

### Cover Page Footnote

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### Credentials Display

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Practice settings in which occupational therapy students complete their fieldwork education are variable and complex microenvironments. Occupational therapists and students practicing in those environments must be able to act autonomously as well as collaboratively from an interdisciplinary standpoint (Delany & Molloy, 2009). They must be creative, ethical, and critical thinkers with sound professional judgment and the ability to communicate effectively with multiple stakeholders (Delany & Molloy, 2009; Thomas et al., 2005). Because such professional skills cannot be developed solely through classroom experiences, fieldwork education is considered an integral component of professional preparation for occupational therapy practice, providing a contextual learning platform where professional and clinical skills can be further developed.

While fieldwork is essential to professional preparation for occupational therapy practice, barriers to the provision of effective fieldwork education in occupational therapy have been reported. Provident et al. (2009) stated that most clinicians have not had the opportunity for formal training as educators. This includes an understanding of teaching strategies and the appropriate sequencing of learning activities to enhance student practitioner development. Lack of formal training as an educator, coupled with divergent “assumptions and expectations about the supervisory process” (Vogel et al., 2004, p. 8) between students and supervisors, represents a potentially significant barrier to experiential learning.

Delaney and Molloy (2009) found that many fieldwork educators lack formal preparation to undertake the role of student supervision, with many reporting that their past experiences form the basis of their current teaching strategies. Fieldwork educators’ teaching methods appear to be based on preconceived information without addressing how to move students along the continuum of learning to the more critical and active skill of knowledge building. Students often report the belief that there are considerable gaps between the academic knowledge gained in the classroom and the use and expression of that knowledge in fieldwork (Rezaee et al., 2014).

In occupational therapy education, fieldwork is the mechanism ostensibly used to bridge the theoretical foundations of practice learned in the classroom, with application through practice in the field. However, professional health education has long been faced with the barrier of the theory-practice gap (Roberts et al., 2017). In their study focused on experiences by nursing students, Newton et al. (2009) described three distinctive barriers that affect knowledge translation. First, students reported an overall lack of authentic experiences in the academic setting, which adversely affected their ability to perform in the clinic. Second, students reported a lack of learning opportunities in the clinical setting. They did not feel that their supervisors actively sought or created practical learning experiences for them. Third, students reported that learning in the field was significantly influenced by their interactions with fieldwork educators. The authors concluded that the theory-practice gap actualizes as learning environments that are fundamentally different, therefore, impeding transfer of knowledge. Occupational therapy students are also subject to changing perspectives about theory as they progress through their professional education. Nash and Mitchell (2017) conducted a longitudinal study that explored students’ attitudes regarding theory in relation to occupational therapy practice. The authors found that as students progressed through their didactic and fieldwork learning experiences and entered professional practice that their perceived value of theory diminished, most notably when fieldwork supervisors did not clearly communicate how theory was applied in practice.

Perceived lack of didactic preparation for fieldwork represents another potential barrier explored in the literature. Fieldwork educators have articulated their concerns about student capabilities,

documentation writing, patient handling skills, and work ethic (Rodger et al., 2011), noting that when students enter fieldwork lacking in these solid foundational skills, the ability to supervise them effectively is compromised (Thomas et al., 2007). In her qualitative pilot study exploring fieldwork educator perspectives on student preparedness for fieldwork, Hanson (2011) noted that participants expressed frustration at students' lack of communication skills, which affected the assessment and intervention process. Fieldwork educators in the Hanson study articulated the need for students to engage in independent self-assessment and review of skills as a prerequisite for entering fieldwork.

Constructive feedback offered throughout the fieldwork experience can facilitate a unique learning experience that supports individual learner needs. Hills et al. (2016) explored Generation Y student perspectives on teaching and learning in the clinical environment using a purposive sampling of third- and fourth-year occupational therapy students from one university in Australia. Student participants placed a high value on the clinical practice component of their education as a facilitator of their confidence and perceptions of competency. They noted the importance of constructive feedback to promote the identification of their strengths and weaknesses and expressed their desire for individualized educational approaches that accounted for individual learning styles, goals, and needs. Although students appear to place great emphasis and importance on feedback to facilitate learning, earlier studies found that occupational therapy students entering fieldwork often present as overconfident and unable to accept feedback (Hills et al., 2012), representing another potential barrier to effective supervision of students in fieldwork.

While the perspectives of both occupational therapy fieldwork educators and students has been examined in past literature, there is a paucity of research that has added the perspective of academic educators. Those perspectives form the third and critical leg of what Francis et al. (2016) has referred to as the "tripartite relationship" (p. 288) between students, academic, and fieldwork educators, which provides a foundation for the educational process and is necessary to engage more effectively in discourse about this complex and multifaceted learning environment. Hence, the ensuing research study sought to increase understanding of occupational therapy student readiness for practice in fieldwork and to support improved teaching practices by explicating and corroborating the perspectives of both fieldwork and academic educators. For the purpose of this study, participants were categorized as fieldwork educators if their primary role was a clinician who supervised occupational therapy students on fieldwork. Participants were categorized as academic educators if their primary role was teaching in an occupational therapy program. The research questions were:

- How do occupational therapy fieldwork and academic educators characterize student readiness for Level II fieldwork across multiple practice settings?
- How do occupational therapy fieldwork and academic educators seek to improve student readiness for Level II fieldwork across multiple practice settings?

### **Method**

#### **Research Design**

This qualitative, educational pilot study sought to explicate educator perspectives on student readiness for transition from the classroom to the clinical learning environment and to describe their strategies for improving student readiness, based on their situated perspectives as either academic or fieldwork educators. This study was approved by institutional review boards from both Concordia University-Portland and New York Institute of Technology.

## **Participant Recruitment**

To reach academic educators for participation in this study, recruitment emails were disseminated to occupational therapy program chairpersons at 10 New York based occupational therapy schools. The email introduced the study and requested their help in soliciting faculty to participate. The 10 schools were comprised of both private and public institutions offering entry-level master's degrees in occupational therapy. Fieldwork educators from the clinic environment were recruited via a purchased email list from the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA). This list included 325 occupational therapists from the New York Tri-State region. The intent was to generate a purposeful sample that would represent occupational therapy educators from both academic and clinical environments. In the initial recruitment letter, academic and fieldwork educators were asked to pass along the information to their colleagues. This snowball technique precluded knowledge of a calculated response rate, as it is unknown how many potential participants were reached. The recruitment letter included a link to a demographics survey, which when completed, signified the potential participants' consent to be contacted about the interview and focus group. Twenty-two initial demographic surveys were completed. Following contact by the researcher, nine of the 22 participated in one-on-one interviews and seven participated in the focus group.

## **Data Collection Instrumentation**

The initial survey, sent to both academic and fieldwork educators, was accessed through a Qualtrics link provided in the original solicitation email and postal letter. The returned surveys were sorted by date returned and then categorized according to educational setting (academic and clinic). The fieldwork educator surveys were further sorted by practice setting. In order of return, and from each clinical and academic setting, educators were contacted to participate in either an interview, focus group, or both. Twenty-two occupational therapy clinicians and educators completed the initial step and expressed interest in an interview or focus group. The author contacted each to attempt scheduling an interview or to gauge their interest in participating in the focus group.

One-on-one interviews were conducted in-person or through web-based conferencing and followed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A). A follow-up focus group was conducted after the initial interviews. The author used a prepared focus group protocol with revised questions based on areas requiring more clarification and depth that were identified during the individual interviews (see Appendix B).

## **Researcher-as-Instrument**

Rigor in qualitative research is ensured by the establishment of trustworthiness and can be achieved through multiple strategies consciously pursued by the researcher (Krefting, 1991). Strategies to address trustworthiness include credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 2013).

Credibility relates to the accuracy of description by research participants (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008; Elo et al., 2014). Confirmability is the extent to which the researcher was able to remove his or her own bias from the study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). In this study both were achieved through reflexive journaling and member checking. In qualitative research, the researcher becomes intimately related to, and interconnected with, the data. Therefore, transparency in qualitative research is critical to account for inherent researcher bias (Galdas, 2017). Ongoing reflexive journaling throughout the research process allowed the author to continuously examine and question biases related to her former role as an occupational therapy clinician, fieldwork educator, and academic fieldwork coordinator, as

well as her current role as a full-time academic educator. Member-checking allowed each interview and focus group participant to review a data analysis summary and provide further comment, clarifications, and/or feedback. Dependability indicates the degree of consistency in the study (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008; Schwandt et al., 2007). To achieve dependability, careful attention to detail and multiple coding phases ensured a consistent and objective focus and a critical analysis of the collected data. Transferability relates to the depth of descriptions, which allow the findings to be situated within multiple contexts (Creswell, 2018; Schwandt et al., 2007). The interviews and subsequent focus group offered space for the participants to explore their perceptions deeply and compare and contrast those perceptions to those of other educators.

### Data Analysis

All interviews and the focus group sessions were audio-recorded and later transcribed via a transcription service. Transcribed data was imported into MAXQDA<sup>®</sup>. This Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) allowed for facilitated analytic mapping of the raw data and coding processes. The author employed preliminary coding strategies. Memoing, described by Creswell (2018) and Hedlund de Witt (2013), was used to identify key phrases and concepts by listening to the interview recordings with concurrent reading of the transcripts and taking notes. Following the preliminary memoing, in-vivo coding allowed for the extraction of verbatim text from the interviews and focus group to construct the initial codes. Then, structural coding, using a lumpers pattern approach, was used to organize the in-vivo codes into individual topics (Saldaña, 2016). The developed structural codes and segment frequencies for each of the research questions are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Frequency of Coded Segments in the Structural Codes*

<b>Structural Code</b>	<b>Frequency (Segments with Code)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<i>RQ1: How do occupational therapy fieldwork and academic educators characterize student readiness for Level II fieldwork across multiple practice settings?</i>		
Expectations of professionalism	35	24.82
Factual knowledge expectations	26	18.44
Theory knowledge expectations	24	17.02
Clinical knowledge expectations	18	12.77
Learner characteristics	15	10.64
Receptiveness to feedback	9	6.39
Factors that characterize readiness for practice	7	4.96
Generational differences	7	4.96
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<i>RQ2: How do occupational therapy fieldwork and academic educators seek to improve student readiness for Level II fieldwork across multiple practice settings?</i>		
Nurturing growth in the clinic	32	29.62
Nurturing growth in the classroom	23	21.30
Bridging classroom and clinic	25	23.15
Creating a learning culture in the field	12	11.11
Diffentiating between learning environments	7	6.48
Developing clinical reasoning	6	5.56
Giving feedback to students	3	2.78
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>100.00</b>

*Note.* RQ = research question.

The post initial coding strategy of codeweaving (Saldaña, 2016) was used to organize the topics, developed from the structural codes, into a holistic, narrative form to explicate the interrelationships in the data. This coding stage highlighted patterns throughout the narratives collected and clarified the multiple perspectives of the academic and fieldwork educators. The codeweaving process resulted in the development of four overarching themes. Member-checking confirmed the authenticity of the emergent codes and themes (Creswell, 2018) and was conducted by providing each participant with a summary of the data analysis and a request for feedback and/or clarification.

### Results

Eight of the nine study participants identified as female, which is representative of the gender distribution in the profession (United States Department of Labor, 2017). The participants who identified their primary role as academic educator tended to have 6 or fewer years of teaching experience. One participant identified as the academic fieldwork coordinator for their teaching institution. All but one participant reported more than 10 years of clinical experience. Three participants reported no academic teaching experience, with their primary role identified as fieldwork educator. The participants who identified primarily as fieldwork educators were representative of traditional occupational therapy clinical practice environments, including outpatient, subacute rehabilitation, hospital, and school-based settings. Table 2 includes relevant demographics about the academic and fieldwork educator participants.

**Table 2**  
*Demographics*

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Education Level</b>	<b>Years in Clinical Practice</b>	<b>Clinical Practice Setting</b>	<b>Years as Academic Educator</b>	<b>Current Primary Role Defined</b>	<b># of Level II Students Supervised in the Clinical Setting</b>
Participant 1 (P1) Interview/Focus group	Entry-Level Master's	> 10 years	Outpatient	< 6 years	Academic Educator	1–3 Students
Participant 2 (P2) Interview	Juris Doctor	> 10 years	Community-Based	< 6 years	Academic Educator	> 10 Students
Participant 3 (P3) Interview/Focus group	Bachelor's	> 10 years	Subacute Rehabilitation/ SNF	n/a	Fieldwork Educator	7–10 Students
Participant 4 (P4) Interview/Focus group	Post Professional Clinical Doctorate	> 10 years	Home Care	< 6 years	Academic Educator and Academic Fieldwork Coordinator	> 10 Students
Participant 5 (P5) Interview/Focus group	PhD	> 10 years	Home Care	≥ 6 years	Academic Educator	7–10 Students
Participant 6 (P6) Interview	Entry-Level Master's	1–3 years	School-Based	n/a	Fieldwork Educator	1–3 Students
Participant 7 (P7) Interview/Focus group	Post Professional Master's	> 10 years	Outpatient	n/a	Fieldwork Educator	> 10 Students
Participant 8 (P8) Interview	Post Professional Clinical Doctorate	> 10 years	Private Practice (Peds)	n/a	Fieldwork Educator	7–10 Students
Participant 9 (P9) Interview	Post Professional Master's	> 10 years	Subacute Rehabilitation/ SNF	n/a	Fieldwork Educator	> 10 Students

The post initial coding strategy of codeweaving identified four overarching themes, supported by the initial structural coding conducted by systematic analysis of the transcribed interview and focus group data.

### **Theme 1: Students Must Possess Multiple Forms of Knowledge as They Move From the Classroom to the Clinic**

The study participants who considered their primary role to be that of a fieldwork educator described factual knowledge components, such as range of motion, manual muscle testing, and knowledge of developmental milestones. Those who primarily identified as academic educators also noted that factual knowledge should include a strong understanding of major diagnoses, precautions and contraindications, patient safety awareness, and medical terminology.

The study participants who identified their primary role as fieldwork educators stressed the value of interpersonal skills as they relate to clinical knowledge expectations. Participant 6 (P6) felt strongly that students needed to learn “the art of being able to have a conversation.” P9 included therapeutic listening and the importance of focused observation to gauge residents’ strengths and weaknesses as vital clinical skills.

All of the participants interviewed and who identified their primary role as fieldwork educators minimized the importance of theory as a necessary component of practice. P3, an 18-year veteran occupational therapy clinician, stated that “in the real world [therapists] don’t talk about theories.” Academic educators had more mixed interpretations of the importance of theory in their expectations of student knowledge. P1 admitted that, as a clinician, she did not place great importance on theoretical knowledge. However, P2 strongly asserted that without the intentional inclusion of theory in clinical decision-making, “you’re not necessarily a practitioner of occupational therapy, you are essentially an aide.”

### **Theme 2: Professionalism in Students is Context and Environment Dependent and Characterized by Both Extrinsic Behaviors and Intrinsic Values**

Both academic and fieldwork educators articulated the extrinsic value of student timeliness, attendance, and appropriate dress. P2 expected these behaviors in both the classroom and the clinic, labeling them “common sense issues.” The interview and focus group participants expressed the importance of empathy, leadership, and emotional intelligence as intrinsic value components of professionalism. P7, a fieldwork educator, felt strongly these values should be nurtured early in the classroom.

All of the participants in both the one-on-one interviews and the focus group expressed the need for students to be open-minded, flexible, adaptable, and receptive to feedback. The focus group participants collectively noted that the presence of these skills in students entering the clinic environment characterize their readiness for practice. Both flexibility and the ability to take in, constructively accept, and apply feedback were common threads that defined professionalism and supported student readiness for practice.

P3 stressed the importance of being a “self-learner” as a component of professionalism. P9 described the independent learner as someone who actively seeks out information. P8 expressed her desire that students entering fieldwork are “passionate go-getters.” P4, a full-time academic educator, remarked that students in both the classroom and in the clinic should have a self-awareness about where their gaps in learning are and a trajectory for what they need to do to fill those gaps.



### **Theme 3: Student Readiness for Practice is Contextually Characterized by Educators Situated in the Classroom and Clinic Environments**

Fieldwork and academic educators noted that there were differences in the two learning environments. The overarching theme was that textbook-style information, which included theory, was obtained in the classroom where basic foundational ideas were formed. However, as P9, a fieldwork educator expounded, “nothing is the way you learn it [in the classroom], but it is a frame of reference to draw from.” The fieldwork learning environment was portrayed as one in which information processing must occur quickly and with accuracy. P1 pointed to the fact that in the clinic students are exposed to multiple components of occupational therapy that may have been studied more linearly in the classroom. P5, an academic educator, concurred, noting that in the clinic, didactic information must be translated into practice, and often, perspectives on foundational knowledge must be adjusted because “everything is not textbook.”

There remains an ambiguous nature to bridging the academic and fieldwork learning environment. P6, a relatively new clinician and fieldwork educator, thoughtfully shared that while the classroom provided the foundation and theories, connecting that information to practice and developing the ability to use that information to address client issues did not occur until she was in the clinic environment. P2, an experienced clinician and full-time academic educator, challenged both conventional thinking about pragmatics and knowledge, arguing “It’s more about the fact that we did not instill that professional culture and that attitude of independent learning and self-discovery that we should have in our classrooms. It may not be about that factual knowledge.”

### **Theme 4: Occupational Therapy Educators Seek to Create Collaborative Learning Environments to Support the Transition to Readiness for Practice**

The need for student support in both the academic and fieldwork environments was evident in the educators’ comments and depicted their strong beliefs regarding what they considered their ethical responsibilities in facilitating student success. Similarities and differences in collaborative processes in each of the learning environments was evident when the participants described clinical reasoning development in students.

All of the study participants characterized clinical reasoning as a process, requiring students to move beyond evidence and textbook information. The process requires students to be reflective. The participants characterized reflection as the ability to integrate knowledge with the conscious awareness of its fluidity so that it can be redesigned and restructured in the process of clinical reasoning.

Academic educators expressed their belief that clinical reasoning skills can be fostered in the classroom using case studies, problem-based learning videos, and patient narratives. While these learning strategies are well known in professional health education programs, it is not possible to reenact all the complexities of real-life situations. Because simulated experiences lack the authenticity of the clinic environment, students tend to rely on passive learning strategies (Hamstra et al., 2014).

Student learning occurring in real-time patient care requires teaching strategies that not only engage the learner in the clinical reasoning process but also ensure quality patient care. This requires students to actively include empathy in their clinical reasoning process (Brewer & Stewart-Wynne, 2013). Attaining the ability to include empathy in the clinical reasoning process seems best actualized in the fieldwork learning environment. Here, students gain a unique opportunity to be immersed in the lived experiences of the patients and clients they encounter.

## Discussion

The student-fieldwork educator relationship has been identified in the literature as a critical component to student success (Francis et al., 2016; Hills et al., 2016; Kirke et al., 2007). The ability to deliver positive and constructive feedback is one of the most important characteristics of an effective fieldwork educator (Brueggeman, 2006; Francis et al., 2016; Mann, 2011; Rodger et al., 2011). Results from this study corroborate earlier findings and highlight the significance fieldwork educator feedback plays in the professional development of students. This current study also elucidates academic educator perspectives, bringing to light the added importance of feedback in the classroom learning environment as a precursor to fieldwork.

All occupational therapy educators and clinicians should be well-versed in applying theory to practice and, further, should be able to articulate explicitly how it is applied to practice. The teaching and practice of occupational therapy currently involves varying levels of understanding of how theory relates to practice. This has created a barrier to student readiness for transition to the fieldwork setting. In their study, which implemented a program designed to improve practitioners' ability to incorporate theory into their supervisory practices, Roberts et al. (2017) found initially practitioners' lack of confidence in this area. The findings from this study, coupled with this recent literature, point to the need for collaborative strategies between the academic and fieldwork settings, to improve educator awareness of the value of theory-driven practice and their ability to demonstrate authentic incorporation of theory into practice as part of the educative process of supervising fieldwork students.

Successful assimilation into professional culture requires students to exhibit appropriate professional behaviors, yet research findings have highlighted a growing concern about the lack of professionalism exhibited by students (Eckleberry-Hunt & Tucciarone, 2011; Tran et al., 2014). A recent retrospective review, conducted by Hackenberg and Toth-Cohen (2018), analyzed 319 fieldwork performance evaluations from one occupational therapy education program to determine if poor scoring specifically correlated to low scores in the professional behaviors' categories. While the results of this study did not fully agree with the generational issues noted by Eckleberry-Hunt and Tucciarone (2011) and Tran et al. (2014), participants did identify communication between students, educators, academic institutions, and fieldwork sites as a critical component that support students' ability to transition effectively between learning environments. The insight gained from this study regarding the need for increased communication between educators in both academic and clinical learning environments constituted a unique finding not found in earlier studies.

Multiple studies have indicated independent learning as a valued student characteristic by fieldwork educators (Chipchase et al., 2012; James & Musselman, 2006; Kirke et al., 2007; Vogel et al., 2004). While the literature explicates independent learning as an important characteristic in fieldwork students, Delany and Molloy (2009) found that fieldwork educators' teaching methods do not appear to address how to move students along the continuum of learning to the more critical and active skill of knowledge building. The findings in this study indicated that independent learning may be more of a process rather than a discrete skill that can be taught. Findings also highlighted that the ability to learn independently was a quality seen in leaders, yet how to develop the skill of effective independent learning remains elusive.

## Limitations

While the study protocol enabled a wide net to be cast for potential participants, the pool from which to draw the purposeful sample was relatively small. However, the concept of data saturation in

relation to sample size has not been effectively justified in qualitative research (Malterud et al., 2016). Therefore, no set number of participants was offered in the study procedures. While the purposeful sample of academic and fieldwork educators had similar years of experience, their diverse clinical backgrounds facilitated the exploration of varied perspectives on student readiness for practice.

With regard to the original research questions, the themes derived from analysis of the interview and focus group data offered substantial insight to answer the first research question: How do occupational therapy fieldwork and academic educators characterize student readiness for Level II fieldwork across multiple practice settings? However, the data analysis did not offer rich insight to fully answer the second research question: How do occupational therapy fieldwork and academic educators seek to improve student readiness for Level II fieldwork across multiple practice settings? Interview and focus group questions were not explicit enough to explore educative practices that might have presented insight into how student readiness might be ameliorated.

### **Implications for Occupational Therapy Education and Future Directions for Research**

The findings of this pilot study have implications for continuing research that more comprehensively examines occupational therapy educative practices across the contexts of policy, practice, and theory. The 2018 Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) standards, in effect as of 2020, include a new standard, which requires master's and doctoral level programs to prepare students for the potential role of academic educator. Future studies might explore how occupational therapy education programs are revising their current curriculums to meet the new standard. Such studies might further elucidate pedagogical perspectives and strategies across the multiple entryways into the profession.

Research that continues to explore how theory is taught and, along the continuum of learning, applied in practice by occupational therapy students, would be prudent and might best be met by examining the Level I fieldwork experience connection to didactic coursework. The ability to articulate and embed theory into practice may be a distinct way to improve student readiness for practice and potentially achieved through stronger educator collaboration across academic and fieldwork learning environments.

### **Conclusion**

This pilot study sought to explore occupational therapy student readiness to enter and engage in fieldwork education through academic and fieldwork educators' perspectives. The results of the study revealed consensus among educators on what characterizes student readiness for practice. Highlighted topics of importance were communication, feedback, professionalism, and the ability to reason clinically. Consensus can facilitate future directions in educational programming that is collaboratively structured between academic programs and the clinical settings in which students engage in fieldwork. The study design and interview strategies limited the data collection and subsequent analysis to fully understand pedagogical strategies used to improve student readiness for transition to the fieldwork component of their education. This represents a rich area for future research.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Protocol**

#### **Face-to-Face Interview Protocol**

1. Set date, time, and location with participant.
2. At beginning of interview, remind participants of the confidentiality of the interaction and the fact that the interview is being recorded for later transcription.
3. Offer a bottle of water.
4. Establish rapport with initial/opening questions.
5. Use active listening strategies throughout the interview.
  - a. Reserve judgement (in both articulation and expression).
  - b. Allow ample time for participant to reflect and respond to the question.
  - c. Express interest in what participant is saying.
  - d. Probe for more detail as needed.
6. Use the interview questions as a guide, but be prepared to follow participant's lead.
7. Close the interview.
  - a. Closing question should prompt participants to add any comment they feel was not covered, but it may be important or add more depth.
  - b. Ask participant if they have any questions or concerns.
  - c. Thank the participant for engaging in the interview process.
  - d. Remind participant that you will be contacting them again to review the interview transcripts for member-checking.

#### **Possible Interview Questions for Fieldwork Educators:**

##### Opening/Rapport Questions

1. Tell me how you came to first start accepting Level II fieldwork students?
2. What do you like/dislike about being a fieldwork educator?
3. Tell me about your process for accepting a fieldwork student currently.
4. How do you prepare for the experience of supervising a Level II student?

##### Knowledge Questions

5. How do you expect the student to prepare for the Level II fieldwork experience?
6. What factual knowledge is important for the student to have prior to the fieldwork experience?
7. What theoretical knowledge is important for the student to have prior to the fieldwork experience?
8. How do you facilitate knowledge growth throughout the fieldwork experience?
9. How do you expect their knowledge to change or transform by the end of the fieldwork experience?

##### Skills

10. What clinical skills should students possess when they begin Level II fieldwork?
11. How do you see your role in educating students in specific clinical skills?
12. How do you expect student skills to evolve through the fieldwork experience?

##### Attitudes

13. How do you educate students on professionalism?

14. What characterizes a student as professional?
15. Describe how you envision the learning process in the clinic as compared to the classroom setting.
16. Describe how you engage in feedback communication with fieldwork students.
  - a. Describe your expectations of student's response to feedback.

### Closing

17. Would you like to add any comments to our discussion?
18. Do you have any questions?

### **Possible Interview Questions for Academic Educators:**

#### Opening/Rapport Questions

1. Tell me how you came to first start teaching in an occupational therapy program?
2. Prior to your academic path, did you accept Level I fieldwork students in practice?
3. What (areas) did you practice in?
4. Tell me about your process for accepting fieldwork students when you were in practice.
5. How did you prepare for the experience of supervising a Level II student?

#### Knowledge Questions

6. How do you expect the student to prepare for the Level II fieldwork experience?
7. What factual knowledge is important for the student to have prior to the fieldwork experience?
8. What theoretical knowledge is important for the student to have prior to the fieldwork experience?
9. How do you facilitate knowledge growth in the classroom, that will benefit the fieldwork experience?
10. How do you expect their knowledge to change or transform prior to the start of fieldwork? During fieldwork? At the end of fieldwork?

#### Skills

11. What clinical skills should students possess when they begin Level II fieldwork?
12. How do you see your role in educating students in specific clinical skills?
13. How do you expect student skills to evolve through the fieldwork experience?

#### Attitudes

14. How do you educate students on professionalism?
15. What characterizes a student as professional?
16. Describe how you envision the learning process in the classroom as compared to the clinic setting.
17. Describe how you engage in feedback communication with fieldwork students.
  - a. Describe your expectations of student's response to feedback.

### Closing

18. Would you like to add any comments to our discussion?
19. Do you have any questions?

## **Appendix B**

### **Focus Group Protocol**

1. Choose date, time, and location.
  - a. Consider Zoom meeting.
2. 3 days prior to group send reminder email with date, time, and location.
  - a. If face-to-face:
    - i. Name tag preparation.
  - b. If Zoom:
    - i. Provide login instructions.
3. On the day of the group.
  - a. If face-to-face:
    - i. Water
    - ii. Snacks
  - b. If Zoom:
    - i. Enter room early to ensure connections and video working appropriately.
4. Opening statements.
  - a. Brief overview of study and goals for the focus group.
  - b. Guidelines the focus group.
    - i. Engagement is voluntary – may leave at any time.
    - ii. All ideas will be respected.
    - iii. Everyone will have an opportunity to speak if they choose to.
    - iv. There are no right or wrong answers.
    - v. Reminder that the focus group is being recorded for later transcription.

\*As the focus group moderator, I will initiate the opening conversation and present the opening question to get the group started. My role will continue in terms of articulating the questions, ensuring that members are given fair opportunity to speak without being judged, and request clarification from participants as needed.

\*As the moderator, I will take care not to insert my own views or opinions into the discussion.

#### **Potential Focus Group Questions:**

1. How can educators in the academic and clinical setting effectively communicate about the fieldwork experience?
  - a. Describe the various methods of communication you currently use, and how and when they best employed.
2. How do educators from both environments envision a successful student?
  - a. What knowledge, skills, and attitudes represent a high-quality student ready for Level II fieldwork?
3. What is your role as an educator in each setting?
  - a. Describe the student-educator relationship.
  - b. Describe the responsibilities of both the student and the educator.
4. What impacts student learning in each setting?
  - a. What are the potential barriers to student learning?
5. What potential changes to the educative process, in each setting, might facilitate improved student outcomes?