

Project Report: Occupational Therapy Student Placements in Multicultural Support Services: Evaluation of Innovative Placement Models

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Occupational Therapy Student Placements in Multicultural Support Services: An Evaluation of Innovative Placement Models

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Report Contents:

Contents	pg 3
Executive Summary.....	pg 4
Project Background.....	pg 5
Introduction.....	pg 6
Methods.....	pg 8
Results.....	pg 10
Summary.....	pg

Executive Summary

Project Background

In 2007/2008 the Queensland Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Collaborative received funding from Queensland Health to conduct a project: *Invigorating Occupational Therapy Student Placements in Mental Health*. The project aimed to increase mental health student placements through innovative practice placement opportunities including role emerging placements and alternative supervision models. The funding of this project enabled QOTFC to develop new placement opportunities and resources for practice placement supervisors, and to conduct a research project to evaluate the use of innovative placement models such as role emerging placement and two-to-one supervision models. The findings of the project were published in the *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal* (Rodger, Thomas, Holley, Springfield, Edwards et al, 2009).

Following the completion of this project Queensland Health approved a second smaller project to continue the evaluation of innovative practice placements for occupational therapy students. It was anticipated that students enrolled in occupational therapy education programs in Queensland would undertake a range of innovative placement in 2009/2010. However this did not occur, and the majority of students from James Cook University and University of Queensland were offered placements using more conventional supervision models and in established roles.

In the later part of 2010 three students were placed within Multicultural Support Services in Queensland. These placement offered students an opportunity to work with people originating from other cultures and countries in the process of settling in Australia. Such services provide essential support for people who have been granted immigration as refugees or for humanitarian reasons. As there is no established role of occupational therapy within resettlement services such as multicultural support centres, thus the focus of these placements was role-emerging. It was therefore decided that QOTFC would conduct a parallel study to evaluate these placement based on the '*Invigorating Mental Health*' study.

This report provides an introduction to the project and its value to the profession. The report outlines the methodology of the study, reports on the results and makes recommendations for future placements.

Introduction

This project follows a previous successful project which explored, trialed and evaluated new models and approaches to the provision of occupational therapy student practice placements. The *'Invigorating Mental Health Project'* (Rodger et al, 2008) demonstrated the utility of alternative models of supervision to increase student placement opportunities and to encourage students to work in emerging roles on graduation. This second study replicates the methods used in the original study with students and supervisors involved in three placements in multicultural support services in Queensland. The role of multicultural support services and their relevance to the education of occupational therapists is discussed below.

The use of alternative models of practice placement supervision has developed significantly over the last ten years in Australia. The use of role-emerging placements provides opportunities for occupational therapy students, under the supervision of an occupational therapist to undertake a practice placement in an agency that does not employ occupational therapists and where the role of an occupational therapist may not have been previously developed. Role emerging placements enhance both the students who develop occupational therapy knowledge and skills whilst simultaneously identifying a potential role for themselves and for the profession. There are also benefits for the agency that experiences firsthand the application of occupational therapy to their clients and staff.

The Role of Multicultural Support Services

In 2008, Australia ranked as one of the top three countries contributing to the resettlement of refugees (USCRI, 2009). Approximately 13,000 migrants are offered protection in Australia under the humanitarian program for refugees annually. Once granted resident status the Department of Immigration provides a range of services to assist in successful settlement including case coordination and referrals, reception and assistance with accommodation, torture and trauma counseling. After the initial six month immigrant refugees are referred to general settlement services provided through migrant resource centres, migrant service agencies and organisations funded under the Australian Government's Settlement Grants Program (Australian Government 2010).

In recent times public attention has been drawn to the number of migrants due to concerns about the increasing number of people immigrating to Australia. Of the total number of migrants to Australia, refugees comprise less than 1%. Despite the relatively small numbers there is a need to ensure that appropriate services are provided to refugees and humanitarian migrants due to the traumatic nature of their displacement and for many the length of time spent in refugee facilities overseas and in Australia prior to settlement. The Australian government has promoted the resettlement of refugees in regional areas to contribute to the long term development of regional towns and cities and address labour shortages (Duncan, Shepherd & Symonds, 2010).

The tasks of assisting in the resettlement fall on a number of contracted organizations and their case workers and volunteers to implement a range of responses to address physical and psycho-social issues affecting migrants. Appropriate recognition and the ability to respond effectively to the health needs of refugee immigrants is an essential

component of the resettlement process. Few occupational therapists have been involved in the settlement of immigrant refugees to date although there is a small body of literature regarding the potential role for occupational therapists in this field of work.

The Relevance of Multicultural Support Placement to Occupational Therapy Education

Whiteford (2000) states refugees are disenfranchised from being able to participate in everyday occupations resulting in occupational deprivation, trauma, relocation as well as issues with language barriers and cultural differences. As a result this raises the possible scope of occupational therapist in this non-traditional practice setting. Smith (2005) suggests that for those who seek asylum in International countries due to persecution and insecurity within their country of origin experience an occupational 'disaster' (p 474). Refugees are frequently unable to work in the professions they may be used to or engage in many of the normal and familiar occupations of their own culture on arrival in the new country.

This form of occupational deprivation was identified by Whiteford (2000) who notes that central to the concept; occupational deprivation is caused not by a lack within the person but by outside factors over which the individual has no control. The effects of occupational deprivation on individuals, families and communities are far reaching. At a pragmatic level people lack meaningful time use which inhibits experiences of wellbeing and a lack of self-efficacy. Over time this may lead to maladaptive responses as has been shown in prison inmates, including disrupted sleep patterns, truncated identities and a process of reducing the individuals occupational capacity and self belief, which may lead to and higher rates of suicide (Whiteford, 2000). However a significant problem is that occupational deprivation creates a barrier to community integration which is the goal of successful resettlement for migrants. Re engaging migrants in meaningful occupation therefore can be seen as an essential aspect of ensuring resettlement and community integration in Australia.

Occupational therapists have specific skills in enabling occupational engagement of individuals through 'redesigning and recycling occupations' after losing important life roles not exclusively due to disability but also for those who have been through traumatic events (Wilson, 2008). Many refugees have experienced firsthand traumatic events that will impact on their mental health and their ability to engage with the new community and the people who are employed to help (Mitchell, 2008). Occupational therapist sare educated to work holistically with individuals and families to enable meaningful occupations which address physical wellbeing and mental health. Working directly with individuals who are traumatised as well as advocating for local services to encourage migrant integration are two roles that could be undertaken by occupational therapists in this area (Mitchell, 2008; Whiteford, 2008).

The aim of this study was to explore the experience of occupational therapy students and their supervisor while undertaking role emerging placements with migrant resources Centres in Queensland. The results of the study therefore will add to the evidence on role emerging practice placements and also provide some initial insights into the role of occupational therapy in the area of migrant resettlement.

Methods

Design

A pre and post placement survey design was utilised with two groups of participants both students and practice educators. It should be noted that this was adapted from a previously conducted study "*Increasing the occupational therapy mental health workforce through innovative practice education: A pilot project*". As a result both qualitative and quantitative data was collected to capture changes as a result of undertaking a role emerging placement. Ethical clearance was gained from human ethics committees at both The University of Queensland and James Cook University.

Participants

Students and supervisors consented to participate within the study. All students attended James Cook University and were allocated placement sites as per standard practice based on preferences and need to meet World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) fieldwork guidelines (2002). One student was allocated to the Brisbane site, while two students were allocated to the Townsville site. All students were female aged between 20-30 years from undergraduate entry programs. Additionally, no students withdrew from the study.

For the first role emerging placement site there was one practice educator (an occupational therapist) and for the second placement site there was two practice educators (an occupational therapy and other health professional). All practice educators were female with at least 3 years clinical experience. Two practice educators had previous supervisor experience of at least one student placement.

The Placement Sites

The first site was located in the Brisbane region where there had not been a specific occupational therapy position. The student worked with health professionals, clients and an occupational therapist (who was not employed in an occupational therapy role) to determine the occupational therapy role. This student was supervised by the occupational therapist onsite. The student was involved in determining the occupational therapy role and life skills model utilised within the practice setting, increasing communication skills through the use of interpreters, identifying barriers with accessing services and listening to life experiences.

The second site was in the Townsville region, and the placements focused on addressing the occupational needs of refugees while practicing from an occupational perspective. The students received supervision from an offsite occupational therapist in the same geographic location in private practice and an on-site supervisors who was the managers of the organisation.

Instruments

Due to a previous study (*Increasing the occupational therapy mental health workforce through innovative practice education: A pilot project*) recently being conducted in a similar nature both the pre- and post- placement evaluation survey tools of that study were modified to explore students and practice educators' experiences with innovative placements in a multicultural setting. Relevant questions

were maintained with all questions being open-ended. As with the previous study, the pre- and post- survey tools were designed as two separate tools for students and practice educators in order to relate to participants experience and roles. The pre-placement survey tool contained questions covering advantages and disadvantages of the placement model, their understanding of the placement model, perceived roles, concerns and hopes of achievement throughout the placement.

The post placement survey contained questions covering advantages and disadvantages of the placement model, their understanding of the model, whether their views had changed, roles, achievements and expectations and resource availability. Practice educators were also questioned in regards to their confidence with supervising a student and any workplace policies that may have impacted on the success of the placement. Further a post placement Likert scale was sent to all participants to determine their level of agreement or disagreement with a number of statements, where one was strongly disagree and five strongly agree. The survey rating scale is shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Post-placement Survey Statements for Students and Practice Educators

Statement about Placement Experiences	Rating (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)
1. This placement provided me/my student with the opportunity to develop my skills as an Occupational Therapist	1 2 3 4 5
2. This placement provided me/ my student with an opportunity to consolidate my understanding about the role of OT	1 2 3 4 5
3. This placement provide me/ my student with the opportunity to further develop the OT role in the specific placement setting	1 2 3 4 5
4. This placement provided me/ my student with an opportunity to gain further knowledge about the role of other team members	1 2 3 4 5
5. In this placement, I felt that I/ my student was a welcomed and valued member of the multi-disciplinary team	1 2 3 4 5
6. There were clear goals and objectives for me/ my student to achieve while on this placement	1 2 3 4 5
7. There was an appropriate level of support and guidance provided to me/ my student while I was on this placement	1 2 3 4 5
8. This placement provided me/ my student with an opportunity to work independently	1 2 3 4 5
9. This placement provided me/ my student with an opportunity to develop my time management skills	1 2 3 4 5
10. This placement assisted me/ my student to increase my confidence in my ability to work as an OT	1 2 3 4 5
11. This placement provided me/ my student an opportunity to work with an appropriate level of responsibility	1 2 3 4 5

12. This placement fulfilled my hopes for this learning experience/practicum	1	2	3	4	5
13. I would recommend this type of placement to other students/practice educators	1	2	3	4	5

Procedure

Students and practice educators were provided with information sheets, consent forms and verbal information regarding the research project, from the research officer. Once all consent forms were obtained indicating that participants agreement to take part in the study, participants were given the option to complete either a telephone interview or written response (due to participants time constraints). Additionally survey's were emailed to participants prior to the study to allow maximum quality information.

All placements were for a seven week period, full time. Feedback was gained both half way and at the end of placements, as per World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) fieldwork guidelines (2002). The post placement telephone interview was completed within 1 week of completion of the placement by the same evaluator. Post placement Likert Scales were completed independently by participants and emailed for analysis.

Analysis

The telephone interview responses were recorded and transcribed into a Word document for analysis. The survey rating scales were aggregated to obtain average scores for students and supervisors as the previous study had reported these. This enabled a general comparison of results with the previous study. Further quantitative analysis is not appropriate due the small number of participants in this study.

The questionnaire data was analysed qualitatively by two occupational therapist researchers not involved in the placement supervision or cordination. The data from both pre and post survey's form students and supervisors were considered the data for this study and were not separated. Independent open coding of the transcripts was undertaken by both researchers. Following open coding the researchers compared results and came to an agreement on the axial coding or categorisation of the data. The axial codes were then further analysed collaboratively to generate themes. This process involved comparison of the codes with frequent reference to the original data to ensure that the concepts and ideas expressed by participants were being represented by the themes. The two researchers determined mutually agreed themes to present the results of the study. Further the results of the post placement survey ranking statements were averaged in order for a comparison of the previous study results.

Results

Three students and three supervisors completed pre and post placement surveys and interviews. The survey data demonstrates ratings that were similar to those achieved in the previous project on role emerging placements (Refer to Table 2). The mean average score for all students in this study was slightly higher at 4.23 compared to 4.07 in the previous study. Supervisors mean average score in this study was 4.17 compared to 4.08 in the previous study.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Post Placement Survey

Participants	Number of respondents	Mean Score	Range	Previous Study mean score	Previous Study range
All Students	3	4.23	3.00 to 5.00	4.07	3.00 to 5.00
All Supervisors	3	4.17	3.33 to 4.66	4.08	3.40 to 4.60

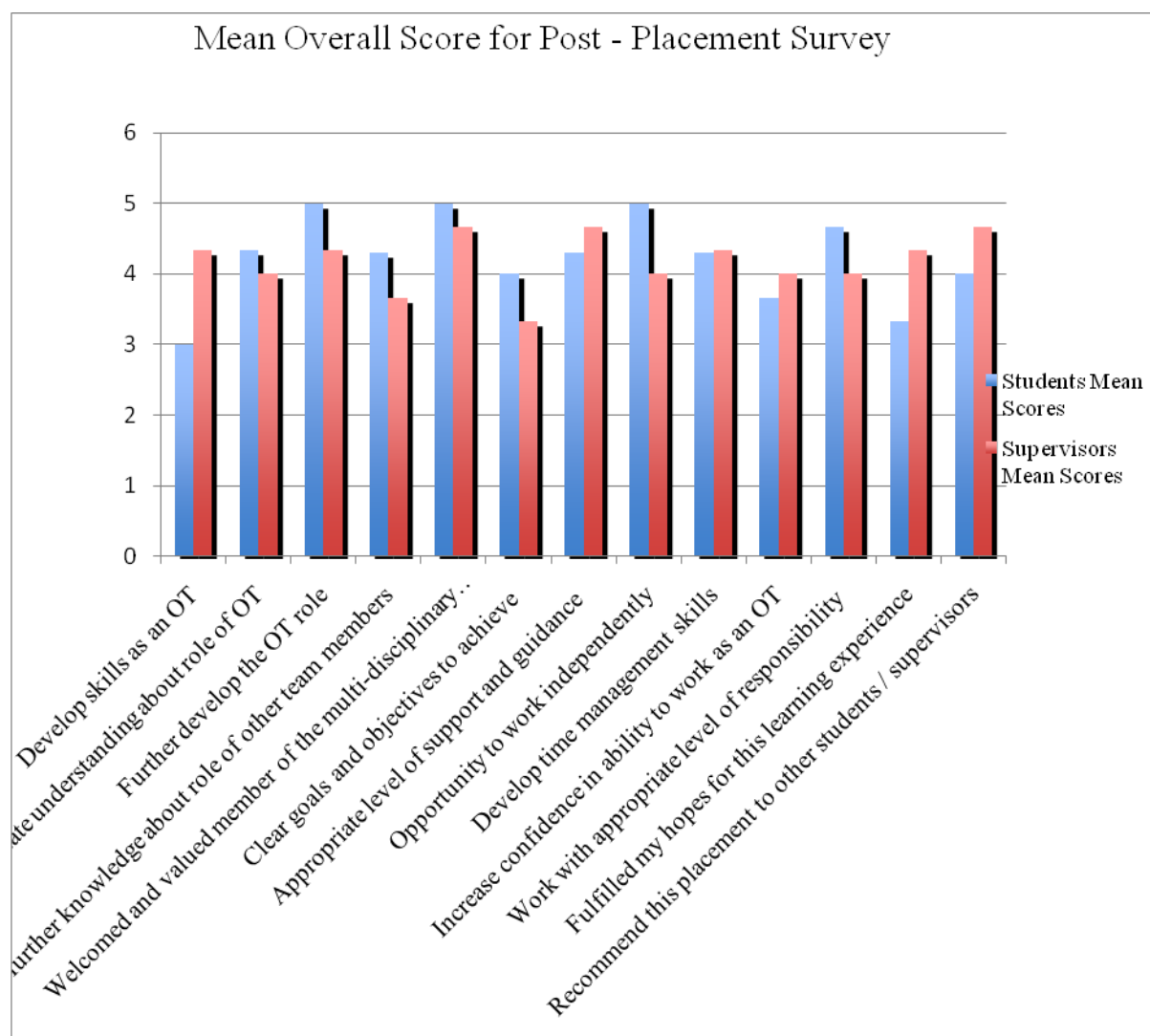
The statements that were rated by supervisors and students with the highest and lowest average scores are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Highest and Lowest Average Scores

Lowest and Highest Average Mean Score	Students Statement	Lowest and Highest Average Mean Scores	Supervisors Statement
3.00	Develop my skills as an Occupational Therapist	3.33	Clear goals and objectives for the students
5.00 (3 statements)	Further develop the OT role. Welcomed and valued member of the multi-disciplinary team. Work independently.	4.66 (2 statements)	Welcomed and valued member of the multi-disciplinary team. Recommend this placement type/style/alternative to other supervisors.

In the previous study the highest and lowest scored statements for students were clear goals and objectives were achieved (3.00) and opportunity to work independently (5.0). For supervisors the lowest scored statement was Fulfilled placement hopes for the learning experience (3.4) and work independently (4.6). The range of mean overall scores for students and supervisors are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Mean Overall Scores – Post- Placement



The interview data covered a broad range of concepts relevant to the placement and to the role of Occupational therapy within a multicultural support service. Analysis of the pre and post placement data generated three common themes which included; 1) the set up / framework of a role emerging placement, 2) what the students learnt from this model of placement and 3) the occupational therapist role within a multicultural support setting. Two additional smaller themes present in the pre placement responses were not present in the post placement responses; 4) the use of occupation within the setting and 5) anxiety felt by all parties.

Theme 1: Set- up / Framework of a role emerging placement

Students and supervisors discussed the importance of the initial development of a role emerging placement and how this sets the framework for placement to follow. The role of the University was crucial to the initial set-up and development and communication between all the stakeholders i.e. students, organisation, non-OT and OT supervisor. Feedback shows

that the University staff were the people to contact if problems arose, providing ‘*some degree of structure and a safety net in place*’ (Student 1). Participants stated that the university supervisors ensured that communication was open between all parties involved in the placement and ensured all parties were aware of their role. Open communication was reported to be the essence of a successful placement. It was noted that open communication is challenging because of the different reporting lines of each stakeholder ‘*given a majority of those participants [stakeholders] are outside the organisation, to communicate effectively is a pretty good achievement*’ (Supervisor 1). The active engagement of the university in developing the placement was critical.

The importance of the clarity between the supervisors roles, university supervisor, organisational supervisor and OT supervisor, was also discussed. Participants reported that there was a clear role for all parties and that students approached the appropriate person throughout the placements. Participants believed the university supervisor role was to network with the organisation, provide structure including setting clear goals, and addressing any ‘*trouble shooting*’ that may occur throughout the placement. One supervisor continued to report that that lack of structure impacted on her confidence. The organisational supervisors role was to educate on the organisation including policies, procedures and services, provide students with tasks, ‘*act as a gatekeeper*’ in terms of tasks they were getting from staff, and learning about the occupational therapist role within the organisation. Many participants reported that the organisation or staff had not worked with occupational therapists previously and therefore they were unaware of what role they could play and were learning from the students. One supervisor reported ‘*I learnt from them more about the OT profession*’ (Supervisor 1). The occupational therapist supervisor role appeared to be the clearest role to all individuals. This role was perceived as providing an OT perspective, promoting reflection, promoting clinical reasoning, providing feedback, promoting learning and reviewing assessments. Students reported on the importance of reflection, with one student stating ‘*it was a shock because client stories were very violent and traumatic however my supervisors was really good in that we reflected on this*’ (Student 3).

Both the supervisors and students discussed concerns regarding completing a role emerging placement. Students concerns were about noting have an occupational therapist on site to provide that direct support if required. Additionally it was then discussed that the placement might not be ‘*OT specific*’ (Student 1) due to there not being an occupational therapist role already developed. Supervisors concerns were about students being unsure of what the OT role is within the context with one supervisor advising it could ‘*lead to confusion or incorrect information being portrayed to the workplace.*’ (Supervisor 2) Further it was reported that ‘*you could have more than one student on placement at the same time*’ (Supervisor 1).

The assessment for role emerging placements is the SPEF-R and is used in all placements. As a result, the occupational therapists supervisors reported on their difficulty with completing the assessment criteria, in particular, observations of students. Occupational therapist supervisors reported that they had to obtain this information from third parties who were not occupational therapists. One supervisor stated it was difficult to report, ‘*specifically to occupational therapy skills, such as clinical reasoning, reflection which was required in the assessment criteria*’ (Supervisor 2).

Participants discussed the importance for students to have the required resources, facilities, desk, telephone, internet, computers, in order to complete their essential tasks for the placement. In those placements where some of those resources were not available i.e.

computer, the university had organised for the loan of their equipment to facilitate a success placement. However it was also noted that space might not be available in all circumstances and was very unpredictable depending on the programs running within the organisation. Another concern addressed by students was the limited occupational therapy specific literature on refugee settlement in Australia. One student reported that *'I wasn't able to get a clear grasp of what the OT role could be prior to the placement, which more affected my comfort with reading up and being prepared beforehand'* (Student 3).

Theme 2: Students learning from the model of placement

An extensive range of learning experiences was discussed by participants. Students were required to complete a project whilst on placement which included researching, completing a literature review, writing a report and presenting the findings to staff within the organisation. Participants advised the benefits of completing the above tasks further developed students and organisational staff's understanding of the occupational therapy role within the organisation. One student reported *'because we (OT's) can work in so many areas, it can give you more of the thorough understanding of our role'* (Student 2). In order to understand the OT role, students needed to review the foundations of occupational therapy, which included the *'review of the OT models and application of the OT frameworks (to the organisation)'* (Supervisor 3). Developing a clear understanding of the occupational therapist role also challenged students' views about the differences between OT and other professions roles.

'I think it really challenges students view and perspectives of occupational therapy as a profession, it challenges that in a way that they really need to understand how we are different to other professions' (Supervisor 2).

It was also reported that students learnt a range of skills specific to role emerging placements. Students learnt to be flexible due to the unpredictability of what can occur whilst on placement. An example of this was that one location was expecting an arrival of refugee's within the second week of the students placement, however they did not arrive until the second last day of placement. This required students to be flexible and adapt to the situation in order for the placement to still meet the student's requirements. Additionally, it was reported that students needed to have that flexibility in order for a successful placement.

'Being flexible is a major one as the plans often change at no notice, clients don't turn up or you go and see a client about one thing and it will be a totally different thing. Being creative to meet the needs of different clients. You might have to adapt, if you have a resource you are using you might have to adapt it for that person.' (Student 3)

Due to students not having an occupational therapist within the organisation it was identified that teamwork and the ability to collaborate with team members was a skill gained by students throughout the placement. Teamwork and the ability to collaborate were also identified as an organisational benefit as the placement provided *'professional development for staff members'* (Supervisor 1) as they learnt from students.

Student anticipated they would learn *'cultural competency'* (Student 3) and the *'ability to use an interpreter'* (Student 2) effectively during these placements. While they reported that they gained these skills throughout their placement they also gained a greater understanding of the communities willingness and / or unwillingness to utilise interpreter services for clients.

Students discussed the role of advocacy that occupational therapists may play in ensuring access to interpreting services. In particular one student reported that whilst on placement the *'bank would get the client to try and sign stuff but not want to explain things or get an interpreter'* for the client (Student 1).

All participants affirmed the need for student reflection and the student's ability to develop this skill was crucial throughout the placement. It was identified that reflection did not natural occur by students and needed to be facilitated by the occupational therapy supervisor. Students also gained the ability to work *'independently'* and *'self manage'* (Student 3).

'I guess if someone comes into a role emerging place they have to be quite self directed because it is not really much structure where they can passively learn they need to say OK I need to learn this, I need to do this, and then use reflection skills to learn what they've done and make a change to do something differently.' (Supervisor 3)

An area which students reported that they wanted to further develop however did not feel they had sufficient amounts of, was client contact. In particular students reported they *'wanted client contact to expand OT skills, such as doing assessments'* (Student 1). Student's explained that they did get some client contact while with other staff members present, however thought there would be more. This was also affected by clients refusing students to be present throughout intervention. Despite this students still reported that the placement was overall a positive experience which provided a range of skill development that otherwise might have not been achieved throughout a *'standard placement'*.

Theme Three: Occupational therapist role within a multicultural support setting

All participants discussed that the aim for the placement was to identify a need and / or role for occupational therapy within a multicultural support setting. As the setting was *'not traditionally associated with the profession'* (Student 3) the students were required to *'highlight the value of occupational therapy'* (Supervisor 2) within a multicultural support setting. Students discussed the difficulties that they faced with identifying the occupational therapy role due to *'how diverse an OT's role can be'* (Student 2) and the unclear boundaries between professions.

Not only was it identified that the students learnt from a role emerging placement however the organisation also gained benefits from the placement. It was reported that *'it offers the organisation to reflect on the practice and to do an evaluation'* (Supervisor 1). Additionally as previously mentioned, it acts a form of professional development for staff members within the organisation as they are learning from another profession and *'exchanging ideas'* (Supervisor 1). Most importantly not only are there organisational benefits there are also clientele benefits. It was identified that *'they (students) can help identify any gaps in services'* (Supervisor 1) which can result in improved service provision for clients and community.

Additionally educating the staff within the organisation on the role of occupational therapy was an aim for the students. In one placement a participant reported that *'we've been educating not only the people in the organisation but the CEO about what is OT and how OT can work in this setting'* (Supervisor 3) and as a result the *'CEO recognises that (importance of OT) and made a (new) position'* (Supervisor 3). However it should be noted that *'the*

change should be very slow to occur (Supervisor 3) and that the *'politics'* (Supervisor 3) within the organisation can impact on the development of the occupational therapy role. In the other placement organisational staff also reported the *'OT role is a very clear role in the refugee settlement'* (Supervisor 1).

The occupational therapist supervisors discussed student's *'narrow views'* (Supervisor 2) regarding employment options being within a hospital setting and how a role emerging placement within a multicultural support setting challenged these views. In particular a participant reported that there is *'such a model other than the medical model'* (Supervisor 2) and that a role emerging placement exposed students to such models. Additionally students were required to adapt due to *'there being no set OT assessments or interventions'* (Supervisor 3) and determine the processes required in order to provide occupational therapy services. There was a reported change in perception on the role of occupational therapy within a multicultural support setting, with one participant reporting *'I didn't think OT could probably fit in with it, but now I think OT has a large role to play'* (Student 2).

Students perceived that not completing OT specific assessments was a disadvantage of the placement, with one participant reporting that they *'didn't do a single assessment'* (Student 1) which the student perceived as impacting on her development of OT skills. However students continued to report on developing task analysis as part of their role within the setting and developing these into resources for the clients.

Conversely it was identified how the organisation gained from the role emerging placement. It was reported that *'it offers the organisation to reflect on the practice and to do an evaluation'* (M2). Additionally the placement acts as a form of professional development for staff members as they learn from occupational therapy and *'exchanging ideas'* (M2). Most importantly there are benefits for the clients as *'they (students) can help identify any gaps in services'* (M2) which can result in improved service provision for clients and community.

These three themes above identify the importance of setting up the placement effectively and the value of the role emerging placements within the multicultural support setting. There were two other smaller themes identified from the results, both of which may warrant further exploration.

Use of occupation within the setting

Prior to the placement students and supervisors discussed the value of occupation for refugees and the importance of refugees participating in meaningful activities. Respondents continued to identify occupation as a core occupational therapist role, with one supervisor stating *'the OT profession's focus on occupation will be very valuable'* (M1). Additionally it was discussed how the lack of occupation can *'affect a persons health'* (J2) and therefore is an integral component for occupational therapist and students to consider during placement within a refugee setting. Despite the emphasis given to the value of occupation and the importance placed on it by supervisors, the students undertaking the role emerging placements did not discuss this post-placement. It appears that once the placement began students focused on more traditional occupational therapy clinical roles rather than on pursuing a focus on meaningful occupation.

Anxiety felt by all parties

Prior to the placement both the supervisors and students discussed concerns regarding completing a role emerging placement. Students concerns were about not having an

occupational therapist on site to provide that direct support if required. Students were concerned that the absence of an occupational therapist on site might signify that that the placement might not be *OT specific* as there would be no occupational therapy role already developed. The term role-emerging was not familiar to the students and might have lead to increasing their anxiety. Supervisors concerns mirrored the students and focussed on students being unsure of what the occupational therapy role was within the context. One supervisor stated it could *lead to confusion or incorrect information being portrayed to the workplace*. The sense of responsibility on the students to portray the profession in a good light and to advocate for or identify a suitable role was clearly a concern for this supervisor.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm the usefulness of role-emerging placements as an alternative model of practice placement supervision for occupational therapy students. The quantitative data gained from the scoring of statements demonstrate that students and supervisors agreed or strongly agreed with all the pre and post placement survey items. Small number involved in this study prevent further statistical analysis and the significance of the results can not be determined, however there is clear agreement that students, the agency and profession benefit from the development of well structured and supported role emerging placements.

The importance on the placement set up is clearly confirmed by this study. It was shown that the initial set-up and framework completed by the university is critical for a successful placement. Further placement may need to be reviewed and followed up throughout the placement to negate any unforeseen circumstances that may arise in role emerging placements. The role of all parties needs to be clearly defined from the commencement of placement and communication established to ensure that everyone knows these different roles. Rodger et al. (2009) reported results of students being concerned about ‘how to manage conflicting view from supervisors’, effective set-up and communication initially appeared to prevent similar concerns in this study. Overall the participants viewed the universities role to develop and facilitate the initial set up and establish the goals of the placement. The organisational supervisors’ role was seen as facilitating communication between staff and students and ‘acting as a gate keeper’. While the occupational therapist supervisors role was seen as the clearest for all participants with the focus on an OT perspective. This was similar to the finding of the previous study (Rodger et al., 2009).

The study demonstrates that effective frameworks for the establishment and review of role emerging placements support student learning and supervisors’ role definition. It was identified that a role emerging placement resulted in students developing core occupational therapy skills due to the wide range of learning experiences offered in this nature of placement. Results showed that students became more flexible and reflective in practice, which is a core skill for occupational therapist. Previous studies have identified benefits of autonomy and independence in role emerging placements (Fisher & Savin-Banden, 2002, Thomas et al., 2005, Rodger et al., 2009).

The multicultural support service placements provided students with opportunities to gain knowledge and skills appropriate to the setting. In particular students and supervisors felt that the students had been able to identify the role of occupational therapy within Multicultural Support and acknowledged the value of occupational therapy. Both placements resulted in

plans to continue with more placements or to establish a specific occupational therapy position. From the organizations perspective the placements were successful and encourages staff and management to consider future potential opportunities for occupational therapists. Students highly valued the opportunity to work with people from different cultures and recognised their learning in cultural awareness and cross cultural communication.

The approach required in these placements were clearly non-clinical and encouraged students and supervisors to approach the placement from a social and occupational framework rather than from a medical model. While both students and staff recognised that the placement offered a different placement experience, students were concerned about the lack of specific assessment and intervention skills they had learnt. This tendency was possible contributed to by the use of SPEF-R as an assessment tool. This tool specifically outlines assessment, intervention and evaluation in the different sections and directs students to self evaluate, and therefore evaluate the placement experience against these criteria. The suitability of this evaluation tool to non clinical placement settings needs to be reviewed and outlined to students prior to the placement.

Students and supervisors were able to identify that within the multicultural support setting, occupational therapy included the enabling roles of advocate, coach, collaborate, educate and engage (Townsend and Polatakjo, 2007). These roles were relevant not only to the clients who had recently migrated to Australia but also to the staff within the organisations and the community at large. There is a need to consider how the occupational therapy program curriculum supports the students to approach non-clinical situation from the perspective of enabling, rather than treatment praxis. Student occupational therapists and their supervisors may need specific guidance from university educators on how to apply occupational therapy theoretical models to the alternative placements of the future.

Conclusion

The study, although small, adds to the growing body of evidence on role emerging placement in occupational therapy. The value of increasing the scope of practice for occupational therapy outside traditional intervention areas is shown and calls for a broader curriculum focus. In addition this study has particular relevance to the new area of occupational therapy practice in multicultural support settings, which is likely to grow in future years. There is a need to ensure that educational curriculum more directly support the broadening range of potential practice areas for the future profession.

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