Culture and Occupational Therapy

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Culture and Occupational Therapy

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BACKGROUND

Cultural intelligence is the ability to effectively interact with clients of diverse cultural backgrounds by balancing personal beliefs with the beliefs of others (Thomas et al., 2008). Because occupational therapy (OT) is a holistic profession, the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE, 2018) lists the ability to analyze the role of diversity and lifestyle factors on a client’s choices and needs as a core educational requirement for all OT students. By learning and utilizing cultural intelligence, OT practitioners (OTP[s]) may be more prepared to establish rapport with new clients by helping OTPs increase their understanding of client values, interests, and support systems, allowing the OTP to develop meaningful goals and interventions.

PROBLEM

A lack of quality cultural trainings can be seen throughout healthcare systems, including OT. Although many healthcare employers encourage culturally competent delivery of services, many facilities lack cultural training programs to help OTPs strengthen their abilities in this area (Abridhame, 2018). Moreover, Wittman and Velde (2002) argue that cultural competence courses alone do not create truly culturally skilled OTPs.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this project is to increase availability of quality and immersive cultural intelligence programs for OT students. This project also hopes to increase OTP and OT student’s confidence levels when interacting with diverse client and coworker populations.

METHODS

Phase 1: Needs Assessment

- Telehealth Observations
  - Site: Helping Hands in American Samoa
  - Setting: Early Intervention
- Informal Interviews
  - Occupational therapist and speech language pathologist at Helping Hands in American Samoa
- Faculty Development Presentation
  - Helped develop and disseminate presentation on intersectionality on USAH campuses to faculty

Phase 2: IRB Approved Research Study

- Assessing the Current Methods of Overcoming Cultural Barriers within the Occupational Therapy Process
- Received 45 OTP participant online survey responses

Phase 3: Program Development

- Lifelong Cultural Learners Fieldwork Level I Program
- Lifelong Cultural Learners Fieldwork Level II Program

RESEARCH THEMES

Global Shift in the Occupational Therapy Process

- Current OT terminology may not create a culturally fluid lense of client engagement, interest, or goals in therapy
- Roles and ADLs in the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (2020) may not align with client’s culturally accepted ones
  - “The goal may be to increase their independence, but (in) many families it is the norm to provide a lot of assistance for loved ones, therefore impeding the loved one’s independence.” (Participant #43)
  - “In some cultures, the women are expected to do all of the self care for their husbands if they are ill, so the male patients become self-limiting.” (Participant #37)

Occupational Therapy Education and Cultural Intelligence

- Traditional lecture format for culturally based CEUs may not be efficient in producing culturally intelligent OTPs
- Emphasis on learning and practicing cultural intelligence through lived experiences
  - “I think current trainings sometimes miss the idea of the individual. There’s no way you can learn everything you need to know about every culture in any single training.” (Participant #13)
  - “It was a surprise what you can learn from someone when you are open to them and their differences. You don’t have to understand the differences, you just have to be open to them.” (Participant #16)

Language and the Occupational Therapy Process

- Language is one of the most common cultural barriers to come across in the clinic Encourage therapists to listen and utilize basic phrases of their clients’ common demographics
- Encourage clinics to provide OTPs with mobile translator devices
  - “I would like to have a quick access guide of therapeutic terms in various languages. Sort of a cheat sheet that can be used when working with patients in the field,” from future cultural training programs. (Participant #16)

Becoming a Lifelong Cultural Learner

- Reflect upon own culture and attempt to identify personal biases so that you can approach all clients with an open mind
  - “Do cultural occupations: Go to a restaurant and ask the staff to explain the foods, talk to the owner or manager; go to cultural dance presentations; go to a store that sells items you don’t buy (maybe a store for people who do drag shows); attend a religious service and many people will answer your questions.” (Participant #3)
  - “Understand that cultures different than your own are not necessarily better or worse. They are just different. Accept that they are different and your personal approval or disapproval of other cultures is irrelevant.” (Participant #36)

DISCUSSION

The current literature suggests a need for increased cultural competence training and CEUs, and although this project’s research study is consistent with this, the research also suggests a need for a shift in the content of cultural trainings and how they are disseminated and applied to clinical practice (Artiga & Orgera, 2018; Shepherd et al., 2019; Wittman & Velde, 2002). The research data collected to propel this project calls for a global shift in the field of OT, a diversification of OT education and training, increased attention to language in the clinic, and for clinicians to commit to becoming lifelong cultural learners. While there is not ample research on impact of culturally immersive fieldwork experiences on student’s overall cultural intelligence, there is some evidence supporting this method, encouraging the development of the Lifelong Cultural Learners Fieldwork (FW) Programs (Chang et al., 2010; Peters & Short 2018; Short & Peters, 2017).

IMPLICATIONS FOR OT

- Diversify the foundation of OT
- Increased ADL and IADL training and classification
- Increased access to OT resources in variety of languages
- Shift in how cultural intelligence is taught
- Placing an emphasis on culture during fieldwork experiences

NEXT STEPS

- Implement and evaluate effectiveness of Lifelong Cultural Learners FW Programs
- Developing professional development program for OTPs
- Develop an online Cultural Collaborative for OTPs

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