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# Creating a Sustainable Occupational Therapy International Collaboration through the Development of a Cross-Cultural Pediatric Experience

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## Background

The multicultural population is expected to rise to 56% by the year 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Despite the ongoing increase in cultural diversity of the U.S. population, there continues to be limited diversity in the field of occupational therapy (Crowe et al., 2016). The profession of occupational therapy was created in the Western world, indicating that Western assumptions are typically described as the “dominant culture” of the profession. As the profession expanded, it transferred Western ideas into occupational therapy practice and education without considering the importance and relevance of concepts from the local contexts. “Valuing Western ideas in occupational therapy without questioning cultural relevance sets up a power imbalance that diminishes non-Western values of interdependence and collectivism and that does not account for different views of occupation (Mahoney & Kiraly-Alvarez, 2019).” It is up to those in Western countries to critically self-reflect and question how as a profession there are unjust power dynamics in the way occupational therapy is described, taught and practiced. It is recognized by academia that there is a need for a necessary focus on culture and occupational therapy. It is questioned to what extent this is implemented into the academic curriculum as what constitutes cultural competency in entry level practitioners varies (Humbert et al., 2012).

## Problem

There are limited opportunities for occupational therapy students to participate in cross-cultural experiences. Students are not given the opportunity to develop the knowledge and training to provide culturally sensitive care.

## Purpose

The purpose of this capstone was to create a sustainable international occupational therapy partnership by creating an opportunity to participate in a cross-cultural pediatric experience between an occupational therapy institution in the United States specifically the University of St. Augustine in San Marcos, California and The Inspiration Center in Belize City, Belize.

## Program

### Needs assessment:

A needs assessment was conducted with The Inspiration Center in Belize City, Belize and the University of St. Augustine in San Marcos, California to determine and identify an opportunity for a cross-cultural experience.

- ❖ Analysis of the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) Accreditation Standards to determine if an opportunity for a fieldwork student could be adapted to fit into The Inspiration Center's Student Elective Program.
- ❖ Semi-structured interviews were conducted with The Inspiration Center and the University of St. Augustine.
- ❖ Observations of various disciplines delivering telehealth services.
- ❖ A need to advocate for the profession of occupational therapy to Belize.

### Development process:

Common themes to ensure a beneficial outcome in an international collaboration:

- ❖ Mutual Benefits
- ❖ Respect
- ❖ Communication
- ❖ Pre-departure training

### Program Development:

- ❖ Identification of an opportunity for occupational therapy students to participate in a cross-cultural experience with the pediatric Belizean population.
- ❖ Opportunity to experience The Inspiration Center's transition into providing telehealth services.
- ❖ Opportunity to observe various disciplines delivering telehealth services.
- ❖ Advocacy for the role of occupational therapy and its benefits to The Inspiration Center.
- ❖ Mutual collaboration to adapt a role for occupational therapy through telehealth.

Key Factors to creating sustainable partnerships:

- ❖ Cultural competence and sensitivity
- ❖ Cultural humility
- ❖ Sharing of power



## Discussion

Graduate students who have participated in fieldwork placements in developing countries:

- Students able to understand how the OT philosophy of health could be adapted to different environments to facilitate health and how it could be applied in culturally different societies that do not have the same health benefits as their own country.

*“For the first time they realized what occupational therapy was truly about”*  
 (Sim & Mackenzie, 2016).

### Significance:

- ❖ Reciprocating benefits
- ❖ Changes in own personal worldview
- ❖ Growth of OT as a profession

### Role of Occupational Therapy:

- ❖ The profession of OT is not established in the country of Belize, determining that there are possibilities of occupational disparity.
- ❖ The development of this program and continuing to develop a sustainable partnership could potentially minimize the occupational inequality and could continue to provide sustainable OT services in Belize.
- ❖ Long-term proposition as it was not just a service-learning project, but rather focused on developing a partnership to bridge the gap between occupational disparities and lack of opportunities for cross-cultural experiences.

## Future Implications

Interprofessional fieldwork IIB clinical rotation opportunity for:

- ❖ Occupational therapy students
- ❖ Physical therapy students
- ❖ Speech therapy students

in which they will be able to practice in an alternative global health care context with the pediatric population of Belize and complete their clinical rotation through this cross-cultural experience with the Inspiration Center.

## Pilot Program

Participation in The Inspiration Center's Student Elective Program

Cultural sensitivity and humility training

OT services provided for six clients through telehealth

Interdisciplinary collaborations

References:



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