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Perceptions of Academic Fieldwork Coordinators Regarding the Value of Fieldwork in Emerging Areas of Practice

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Abstract

This study investigated the perceptions of academic fieldwork coordinators (AFWCs) regarding emerging areas of practice as fieldwork experiences for entry-level occupational therapy (OT) students. Further, this study explored several aspects of fieldwork experiences in emerging areas of practice on student personal and professional development, academic curriculum, partnering community agencies, and the profession at large. A survey designed through Qualtrics®, an electronic survey system, was sent to 163 AFWCs of fully accredited master's and doctoral entry-level OT programs. Forty-four participants (27%) completed the 16-question survey. Significance at $p < .05$ was found in higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy student performance when compared to traditional areas of practice. Common perceptions found among the AFWCs related to emerging areas of practice fieldwork experiences included: improved student professional and personal skills, increased connections and collaborations across and in health care disciplines, an enhanced ability to define and understand OT. Continued opportunities for fieldwork in emerging areas of practice are essential as the profession contemplates new markets and avenues in a changing health care environment.

Keywords
fieldwork, emerging areas of practice, student development, academic fieldwork coordinator

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People, systems, and markets are dynamic. The landscapes of health care, the economy, technology, and education are ever changing, and health care professions are finding it difficult to keep abreast of these changes. Occupational therapy (OT) is one such profession, and occupational therapists are well equipped to adapt to most situations, as adaptability is a foundational tenet of the profession (Bossers, Cook, Polatajko, & Laine, 1997; Brachtesende, 2005; Holmes & Scaffa, 2009). Occupational therapists are beginning to enter boldly into new areas of practice. In addition, occupational therapists have begun to reestablish their presence in once heavily practiced settings in new and innovative ways. Collectively, these are known as emerging areas of practice.

According to the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), emerging and reemerging areas of practice exist "in which occupational therapy's unique skills and training can be used to meet new and growing societal needs" and "currently may have fewer full-time practitioners than traditional practice arenas" (n.d., para. 1). Emerging areas of practice are challenging the OT profession to more specifically serve its consumers, the environments in which they live, and contextual demands (Brachtesende, 2005). In order for occupational therapists to maintain their competency in serving new populations, environments, and systems, they need exposure to emerging areas of practice during their educational fieldwork experiences.

Whenever possible, students need immersion in emerging practice settings to better understand new practice environments and

optimally position themselves to enter these nontraditional arenas. The most logical immersion occurs during fieldwork placements (Bossers et al., 1997). The academic fieldwork coordinator (AFWC) is responsible for orchestrating the students' experiences in emerging areas of practice. Much of the research on emerging areas of practice and their impact on the learning process is based on students' perspectives, and few studies have focused on the perceptions of the AFWCs (Bossers et al., 1997; Gat & Ratzon, 2014; Johnson, Koenig, Piersol, Santalucia, & Wachter-Schutz, 2006). The AFWCs' perspectives regarding fieldwork placement in emerging areas of practice must be captured in order to better understand the benefits, barriers, and influences, if any, of this type of fieldwork on the profession as a whole.

Emerging Areas of Practice

In 2003, the AOTA created the Centennial Vision, which challenged OT practitioners to seek out new practice areas or reenter areas in which the profession's presence had been lost or diminished. As stated in the Centennial Vision, "reinventing aspects of occupational therapy in response to emerging societal needs while remaining true to core values" is crucial to the advancement of OT (AOTA, 2006, p. 1). Table 1 shows examples of the OT profession addressing new markets emerging from society's needs (Brachtesende, 2005).

Table 1

Identified Emerging Areas of Practice

Market
Ergonomics
Design and Accessibility
Consulting and Home Modification
Older Driver Assessment and Training
Consulting to Assisted Living Facilities
Technology and Assisted Living Facilities
Health and Wellness
Low-Vision Rehabilitation
Addressing Alzheimer's Disease and Caregiver Training
Addressing the Needs of Children and Youth
Community Services

Fieldwork placements may differ based on location and demand. Emerging areas of practice are semidependent on the demographic region in which they are located. For example, community-based practice could be emerging in a rural setting but may have been in existence for decades in an urban setting (Holmes & Scaffa, 2009). Working in emerging areas of practice also often requires additional knowledge in the areas of business, program development, marketing, and billing (Brachtesende, 2005). Occupational therapists in emerging areas of practice are required to assume roles beyond traditional practice. Fidler (2000) used the term "occupationalist" to describe "[one] who will have a number of options for specialized study," including:

- Services and programs of wellness, of prevention, of learning enhancement, and lifestyle counseling.
- Community planning and design.
- Organizational, agency, and institutional design and operations.
- Treatment, restorative interventions, and rehabilitation. (p. 101)

Occupational therapists should embody these

qualities to expand OT successfully in the health care arena. However, despite the charge from the AOTA and some of the profession's well known and respected leaders, practitioners appear reluctant to enter emerging workforces, with only 4.3% reporting their primary practice setting as community based or other (AOTA, 2010).

In a pilot study, Holmes and Scaffa (2009) surveyed occupational therapists working in emerging areas of practice about their perceptions of working in these practice settings. Despite reporting many benefits to working in emerging areas of practice, including increased opportunities for professional development, providing services to underserved populations, and improving a client's quality of life, the occupational therapists identified many barriers, which may be detering practitioners from entering emerging areas of practice. Barriers identified by the participants included regulatory issues, the need for ongoing research, and time and effort to develop OT services (Holmes & Scaffa, 2009).

Fieldwork Experience

OT fieldwork education provides an experience where didactic instruction transitions into real-life experience. For most OT students, Level I fieldwork experiences occur during the first semester of their academic program, thus beginning the students' application process of theoretical principles in service of clients in a variety of contexts and environments (AOTA, 2009). Rydeen, Kautzmann, Cowan, and Benzing (1995) describe two models of Level I fieldwork experiences. The first model allows students to serve as "staff" members and academic faculty to serve as

"supervisors," and the second model allows students to serve as "volunteers" in a variety of programs and settings with off-site faculty members supporting student supervision (Rydeen et al., 1995, p. 113). Having an occupational therapist on site is not a requirement for Level I fieldwork supervision, as it is for Level II fieldwork (Johnson et al., 2006). Educators of any background may help to develop students' professional behaviors during Level I fieldwork.

Level I fieldwork allows students to sharpen their skills in communication, the therapeutic use of self, and time management through interdisciplinary collaborations that are crucial in their development as independent practitioners (Johnson et al., 2006). In addition, during Level I fieldwork experiences, students gain a greater understanding of the profession of OT, their own professional identity, increased autonomy, and greater flexibility to be responsive to the changing needs of their consumers (Cohn & Crist, 1995; Cooper & Raine, 2009).

Using Level I fieldwork as a platform to introduce students to emerging areas of practice has been explored by researchers at several academic institutions (Cohn & Crist, 1995; Johnson, et al., 2006). Cohn and Crist (1995), in their early work, described how faculty and fieldwork educators must work in collaboration to provide students with fieldwork experiences in emerging areas of practice in order to readily prepare them to reflect current health care and educational trends. Johnson, Koenig, Piersol, Santalucia, and Wachter-Schutz (2006) urged academic programs to continue to introduce emerging areas of practice in Level I fieldwork, as it helps to empower new graduates to

enter the workforce in emerging areas.

Level II fieldwork occurs mainly in traditional OT settings, such as hospitals, outpatient therapy clinics, mental health facilities, school systems, and skilled nursing facilities. Students are expected to integrate their academic knowledge to provide OT interventions under the supervision of an experienced occupational therapist with one or more years of practice experience (AOTA, 2012). Part-time experiences, paid internships, collaborations, and same-site models have all been used in Level II fieldwork, but the most typical scenario is two full-time, 12-week placements (Evenson, Barnes, & Cohn, 2002).

As the OT profession evolves and some academic programs begin to transition to the entry-level doctoral, an additional experience is required. This is referred to as the doctoral experiential component (DEC). The DEC is a 16-week, full-time experience that may include an additional clinical fieldwork experience (Case-Smith, Page, Darragh, Rybski, & Cleary, 2014). During the DEC, there is an emphasis on learning new professional skills, care coordination, advocacy, and advanced practice skills (Case-Smith et al., 2014). Outcomes of the DEC and entry-level doctoral are expected to enhance the ability of graduates to more readily address emerging health care needs (Case-Smith et al., 2014).

Students' Perspectives of Emerging Areas of Practice in Fieldwork

Participation in emerging areas of practice in fieldwork is currently in the minority of fieldwork opportunities for entry-level OT students. Only 11.6% of Level I fieldwork experiences occur in

emerging practice settings (Johnson et al., 2006). Cooper and Raine (2009) identified several advantages for emerging areas of practice placements for fieldwork experiences, including student reports of increased preparedness to work in emerging areas and increased confidence in the application of models and theories in clinical practice. Bazyk, Glorioso, Gordon, Haines, and Percaciante (2010) reported that students were able to recognize the power of occupation more strongly through exposure to non-traditional areas of practice. Researchers used reflective journaling and focus groups to capture the students' perspectives while they were exposed to non-traditional experiences. The students initially wrestled with identifying the use of occupation during their experiences, but over time they more readily identified occupation through the use of conditional reasoning (Bazyek, Glorioso, Gordon, Haines, & Percaciante, 2010). Higher clinical reasoning and application on fieldwork can potentially position OT students to enter new opportunities brought forth through the Affordable Care Act, including primary care, prevention and wellness activities, and interventions (Braveman & Metzler, 2012).

Gat and Ratzon (2014) explored OT students' perceptions of Level I fieldwork in traditional and nontraditional settings. The nontraditional settings were, in some instances, emerging areas of practice. The students perceived gaining experience in emerging practice settings as helpful not only to their personal development, but also to their ability to be more culturally competent (Gat & Ratzon, 2014). Fieldwork experiences in emerging areas of practice prepare students to work

as practitioners with an increasingly diverse population, including racial, socio-economic, and religious diversity (Gat & Ratzon, 2014). These qualities align with elements of the Centennial Vision of becoming "a powerful, widely recognized, science-driven, and evidence-based profession with a globally connected and diverse workforce meeting society's occupational needs" (AOTA, 2006, p. 2).

The AFWC

AOTA clearly defines the role of the AFWC in five standards (2004). These include knowledge, critical reasoning, interpersonal skills, performance skills, and ethical reasoning. The AFWC demonstrates knowledge in many areas, but most notably is able to "demonstrate the expertise to be able to facilitate the development of future leaders in occupational therapy through student development in supervised quality fieldwork settings" (AOTA, 2004, p. 653). AFWCs hold a unique perspective on the contribution that fieldwork experiences have on their students' professional development. They are responsible for continually assessing areas of leadership, advocacy, and managerial skills while students participate in their fieldwork experiences (AOTA, 2009).

Investigating the AFWC's perspective is vital for harvesting further knowledge on how didactic experiences integrate, more readily or not, in emerging practice settings. This investigation would help to increase the body of evidence regarding the benefits of student fieldwork experiences in emerging areas of practice. In their study of community-centered experiences, some of which included emerging areas of practice, Hansen

et al. (2007) state that positive fieldwork experiences are the springboard to life-long learning and positive community engagement for students. The AFWCs skillfully pair students with settings that enhance their individual development from students to practitioners (AOTA, 2004).

AFWCs hold a unique position in the higher education setting, as they are conduits for the transmission of information to the community at large about the OT profession, their academic programs, and the university or college they represent (AOTA, 2004). AFWCs must also employ outstanding critical and ethical reasoning skills, not only personally but also interpersonally, with students and community educators (AOTA, 2004). They are often the first to meet with potential community partners or fieldwork affiliation sites performing marketing duties and enhancing public relations (AOTA, 2009). These values, knowledge, and attributes place the AFWC in a position to uniquely contribute to the OT profession.

Implications for the OT Profession

According to the values and purpose of fieldwork education, fieldwork experience in the community creates "a progressive, state-of-the-art image to the professional community, consumers, and other external audiences through its partnership with the academic programs" (AOTA, 2009, p. 822). The student alone does not solely gain the benefits of fieldwork experience. Fieldwork educators also increase their own professional development through these collaborative experiences. Students provide fieldwork educators with exposure to best practice and state-of-the-art

research, creating reciprocal value for the student and educator alike, and, ultimately, enhancing the knowledge of the community at large (AOTA, 2009).

Emerging areas of practice provide practitioners with a platform to promote OT services in a variety of ways to a variety of consumers. Fieldwork experiences are the primary opportunity for students to practice the development of professional and interpersonal behaviors and skills. Initial findings regarding students' perspectives on Level I fieldwork experiences in emerging areas of practice indicate that these students are more likely to employ occupation-based interventions than those placed in traditional settings and are more likely to apply occupation-based models and theories in future fieldwork experiences and practice settings (Johnson et al., 2006).

AFWCs play an integral part in creating fieldwork experiences that not only enhance academic coursework for students, but also challenge the students to apply foundational skills in innovative ways and to enhance the knowledge of the supervising fieldwork educator. During the early nineties, a national fieldwork education crisis existed in which the number of available fieldwork experiences were unable to meet the demand of a large number of students (Cohn & Crist, 1995). Today, the profession may face similar difficulties, as the number of new OT programs applying for accreditation continues to increase, producing more fieldwork students than available traditional fieldwork markets.

The future of OT is dependent on the

success of creating new avenues for the profession while simultaneously increasing the demands of OT services by the consumer and meeting changing societal needs. Not yet fully explored is the perspective of the AFWC in emerging areas of practice in fieldwork experiences. This study will further strengthen the understanding of how offering such experiences impacts student development, the academic curriculum, and the OT profession. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of AFWCs regarding fieldwork experiences in emerging areas of practice, thus determining what factors influence OT student development, the academic curriculum, and the OT profession.

Method

A cross-sectional survey using a mixed methods design was created to investigate the AFWCs' perspectives regarding fieldwork in emerging areas of practice and to explore the factors of their fieldwork programs. A mixed methods design was used in order to obtain a holistic account of the AFWCs' perspectives unique to their programs, yet also to attempt to obtain any generalizable information across OT programs (Murphy et al., 2013). A single method design does not allow for comparison across datasets, whereas a mixed methods design allows for such comparison, thus producing a more accurate account of the AFWCs' perspectives (Murphy et al., 2013; Shutt, 2011). The AFWCs participated in the survey over four-weeks. The survey was anonymous, did not collect any identifiable information or have the ability to retrace IP addresses, and was completed entirely online. Potential participants were sent a

follow-up email 2 weeks after the initial survey was sent to remind them to complete the survey. The University of Indianapolis Institutional Review Board approved the study with exempt status.

Participants

The participants of this study included AFWCs from fully accredited OT programs (master's or doctoral). The participants included AFWCs of any race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and longevity of position. Excluded from the study were AFWCs from entry-level OT programs with a developing or applicant status as defined by the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). AFWCs were identified through the list of fully accredited programs found on the AOTA's website (AOTA, 2014). An excel spreadsheet organized contact information for each school's AFWC email address. At the time of the study, 163 fully accredited OT programs reported to ACOTE ("Number of Programs," 2014). A larger number of OT programs (36%) exist in the Northeast region (Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont) as compared to the nation as a whole. A response rate of at least 33% was deemed acceptable for this study, given the average response rate for electronic surveys found by Nulty (2008) was 32.6%. The participants could terminate their participation in the survey at any time.

Procedure and Instruments

The researcher developed a self-designed survey with Qualtrics®, an electronic questionnaire survey system, to collect data from the AFWCs of

qualifying academic programs. Development of the survey was modeled from findings by Gat and Ratzon (2014) and Johnson et al. (2006) that investigated students' perceptions of the Level I fieldwork experiences and fieldwork in emerging areas of practice. The findings of Gat and Ratzon and Johnson et al. were also integrated with the knowledge and experience of an AFWC and a former AFWC with 20 plus years of combined experience to produce open-ended questions. The researchers developed additional questions in order to specifically capture the demographics of each program. A committee comprised of a program director in OT, a professor of OT, and a professor of physical therapy reviewed the survey questions prior to submission for construct validity. The researchers made the necessary modifications based on this feedback.

The participants received an email description of the study's purpose and a link to participate in the survey through the Qualtrics® survey system. The participants read an overview of the study and the action of participants proceeding with the survey indicated their consent.

The survey was two-tiered in order to exclude programs that do not presently offer emerging areas of practice in fieldwork experiences; however, all of the participants received seven demographic item questions. The exclusion question on the survey was: "Do you require fieldwork experience in an emerging area of practice?" Those who answered no were directed to a thank you screen, thus concluding their participation in the survey.

AFWCs who offer fieldwork experiences in emerging areas of practice were then directed to four additional quantitative item questions and 12 qualitative questions. Five questions were designed using a 5-point Likert scale to capture additional quantitative results as used by Johnson et al. (2006) in their study examining contexts and perceptions of students on Level I fieldwork. Qualitative measures included open-ended questions regarding the AFWCs' self-perceptions. At the conclusion of the survey, the participants were redirected to a thank you screen.

Data Analysis

The results of the quantitative questions were exported from Qualtrics® directly into IBM® Statistical Package for the Social Sciences® (SPSS), version 22.0, for analysis. Nominal and ordinal data were used; therefore, the results are presented as frequencies and percentages. To determine if there was a significant association in responses to the Likert question (see Table 3), Fisher's Exact Tests or Pearson Chi-Square Tests were conducted as appropriate. To determine if there was a statistical significance for students in traditional fieldwork compared to emerging fieldwork, the Stuart-Maxwell Test was used to test for marginal homogeneity for all categories simultaneously (Abbasi, Dokoohaki, & Jamali, 2009). All tests were two-tailed and a significance level of less than .05 was considered statistically significant.

Due to the small number of responses for several of the Likert categories, some responses were combined to produce a more accurate response across categories. Specifically, all disagree categories (*strongly disagree*, and *disagree*) and all

agree categories (*strongly agree* and *agree*) were combined to produce three categories of "*disagree*, *neither agree or disagree*, and *agree*." In addition, the type of fieldwork placement categories were combined from five categories to four categories. Lastly, the researchers combined responses for supervision categories from seven categories to four categories.

The qualitative questions were analyzed and grouped for common themes relating to the importance, implications, and barriers of emerging areas of practice. This information was exported from Qualtrics® and imported to Microsoft Word. A qualitative analysis expert was used to ensure validity. Strategies to ensure trustworthiness included the researcher and the qualitative analysis expert reading responses line-by-line multiple times and verifying viewpoints with each other. The researcher and the analysis expert completed deconstruction of the text, including identification and labeling, coding, and categorizing individually and then together for triangulation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). A matrix helped to organize data and investigate and identify frequency of key conditions, which assists in the coding and categorization of data (Shutt, 2011). The matrix also provides a simplified version of the data to highlight areas needed in additional analysis (Shutt, 2011). Both the researcher and the qualitative analysis expert used Shutt's method of data organization. A sample of the data matrix is provided in Table 2.

Table 2
Example of Data Matrix for Qualitative Data

Identifying and Securing Placements	
Condition	AFWC
Self-initiation Personal attention/drive	"Personally go out and look for sites that are willing or open to occupational therapy services." "I am always on the look out for community sites that are offering services for people that will enhance occupational performance and social justice." "Networking with grassroots organizations." "Sometimes I become aware of the existence of the place and reach out to them." "Explore possible sites." "Sometimes I have worked with someone in a community or emerging practice setting." "My own community service (outside of work-related time)." "Some ideas from local media/newspaper ads/organization flyers/etc. that will spark an idea."

Results

Quantitative

Sixty-two participants responded to the survey and 44 fully completed the survey, producing a completion rate of 71% and a response rate of 38%. Fifty-six participants responded to the question "Do you offer a fieldwork experience in an emerging area?" Eighty-four percent of the 56 participants indicated they do offer fieldwork placements in an emerging area. In addition, the respondents reported that 87% of fieldwork experiences in emerging areas occur during the Level I experience. A majority (67%) of the respondents indicated that their program was located in a metro-urban-larger city that was racially and economically diverse with a population size greater than 50,000. The participants also belonged to various levels of Carnegie Classification® institutions.

Additional program demographics are located in Table 3. A large percentage of the AFWCs who responded belonged to programs that offered master's level programs only (91%), while 11% belonged to doctoral level programs. The results examined the responses of the 46 participants who offer fieldwork experiences in emerging areas of practice, with one missing data response noted for Bloom's taxonomy classification (evaluation, synthesis, analysis, application, comprehension, and knowledge), cognitive domains in traditional and emerging areas of practice, and level of fieldwork (Alford, Herbert, & Fragenheim, 2006).

The results of the Likert scale questions (see Table 4) explored the AFWCs' perspectives of emerging areas of practice influencing community partnerships, student satisfaction, value to the student, enhancing curriculum, and a better understanding of the role of the occupational therapist. Using a Fisher's Exact Test, a higher proportion (p = .030) of the AFWCs reported that students do not easily understand the role of the occupational therapist in the early course of their programs (see Table 5). However, as the students advance while on emerging areas of practice fieldwork during Levels I and II and Advanced Practice/Level III, the role is more deeply understood. A higher proportion of the AFWCs (*p* = .030) in the Northeast region (see Table 6) reported student dissatisfaction with completing fieldwork in emerging areas of practice settings.

Using the Stuart Maxwell Test to analyze marginal homogeneity for all categories simultaneously, the AFWCs reported a significant tendency (*p* = .020) for students to learn at the synthesis level of Bloom's taxonomy while students participated in emerging areas of practice (Abbasi et al., 2009; Alford et al., 2006) (see Table 7).

Table 3

Participant Program Demographics

N (%)	
Program Location (N = 60)	
Rural	2 (3)
Metro Urban (population >50,000)	40 (67)
Micro Urban (population 10,000 – 50,000)	4 (7)
Suburban	12 (20)
Other	2 (3)
Admittance terms per year (N = 60)	
1	52 (87)
2	5 (8)
3	1 (2)
4+	2 (3)
Region (N = 54)	
Pacific	3 (6)
West	5 (9)
Midwest	12 (22)
Northeast	18 (33)
Southeast	11 (20)
Southwest	5 (9)
Carnegie Classification® (N = 55)	
Doctorate - Granting Research Universities – Very High Research Activity	10 (18)
Doctorate - Granting Research Universities – High Research Activity	9 (16)
Doctoral/Research Universities	9 (16)
Master's Colleges and Universities – Larger Programs	7 (13)
Master's Colleges and Universities – Medium Programs	12 (22)
Master's Colleges and Universities – Smaller Programs	8 (15)

Table 4
Descriptive Statistics for Likert Scale Questions 1-5

	Agree N (%)	Disagree N (%)
Offering emerging areas of practice increases community partnerships with your college/university. (N = 46)	42 (91.3)	4 (8.7)
Students report greater satisfaction with an emerging area of practice site than a traditional fieldwork site. (N = 45)	8 (17.8)	37 (82.2)
Offering emerging areas of practice as a fieldwork experience is valuable to the student. (N = 46)	37 (80.4)	9 (19.6)
Emerging areas of practice in fieldwork helps to enhance the curriculum in the classroom. (N = 46)	33 (71.7)	13 (28.3)
Students have a better understanding of the role of the occupational therapist when placed in emerging areas of practice. (N = 46)	21 (45.7)	25 (54.3)

Table 5
Students' Understanding of the Role of the Occupational Therapist when Placed in Emerging Areas of Practice During Level of Fieldwork (N = 45)

	Agree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	p
Fieldwork Type			.030
Level I	6 (13.3)	15 (33.3)	
Level II	2 (4.4)	4 (8.9)	
Level I & II	12 (26.7)	5 (11.1)	
Level I, II, & III	1 (2.2)	0 (0)	

Table 6
Students' Satisfaction with an Emerging Area of Practice Site Versus a Traditional Fieldwork Site by Participant Program Region (N = 41)

	Agree N (%)	Disagree N (%)	p
Region			.030
Pacific	2 (4.9)	0 (0)	
West	1 (2.4)	4 (9.8)	
Midwest	2 (4.9)	7 (17.1)	
Northeast	1 (2.4)	12 (29.3)	
Southeast	0 (0)	7 (17.1)	
Southwest	0 (0)	5 (12.2)	

Table 7
Bloom's Taxonomy Cognitive Domains Levels of Students While Participating in Emerging and Traditional Fieldwork (Alford et al., 2006).

	Traditional areas of practice N (%)	Emerging areas of practice N(%)	p
Bloom's Taxonomy Level (N=45)			.020
Evaluation	16 (35.6)	11 (24.4)	
Synthesis	8 (17.8)	23 (51.1)	
Analysis	6 (13.3)	4 (8.9)	
Application	14 (31.1)	4 (8.9)	
Comprehension	0 (0)	1 (2.2)	
Knowledge	1 (2.2)	2 (4.4)	

Qualitative

The researcher and the qualitative analysis expert independently analyzed the responses from the 12 qualitative questions. Qualitative responses with increasing frequency included increasing community partnerships, valuable to the student, and enhancing curriculum in the classroom as affirming the value of fieldwork experiences in emerging areas of practice. The following themes developed regarding offering fieldwork in emerging areas of practice:

- Professional development is enhanced.
- Emerging fieldwork experiences create connections and collaborations across and in health care disciplines.
- The ability to define OT is enhanced and greatly improved in students; an "occupational thinker" emerges.
- Offering emerging areas of practice in fieldwork is, in part, dependent on the curriculum, attitudes, and connections of the AFWC.
- Perceived barriers and future implications.

Further definitions of themes are located in Table 8.

Table 8

Thematic Findings: Summary and Definitions

Theme	Definition
Enhanced professional and personal development Creating connections and collaborations Occupational thinker Curricula influence Barriers and influence	74 comments: leadership, autonomous, creative, and collaborative during fieldwork in emerging practice areas. 38 comments: networking, recommendation from faculty or community, and increased communication with other disciplines attribute to creating fieldwork experiences in emerging areas of practice. 36 comments: embraces occupation as therapeutic intervention, professional advocate, and problem solver through evidence while on emerging areas of practice fieldwork. 22 comments: matching curriculum design and placement in curriculum, matching students to placements aide in offering emerging areas of practice fieldwork experiences. 34 comments: more evidence is needed in emerging areas of practice, documented outcomes, and limited supervision can be factors limiting placements.

Professional and personal development.

The greatest number of responses reported enhanced professional and personal development occurring in students while on fieldwork placement in emerging areas of practice. In regard to students' professional development while on a fieldwork experience in an emerging area of practice, one respondent commented: "Students exhibit stronger communications skills, creativity and ability to think 'outside the box,' and better integrative skills with the ability to make many connections with how occupation is impacted by virtually anything."

When asked to describe what five words best describe the professional skills that emerge from students as a result of fieldwork in emerging areas of practice, the most frequently used words were independent, confident, creative, innovator, and problem solver. The five most frequently used words to describe personal skills that emerge from the student as perceived by the AFWCs included confident, empathetic, communicator, organized, and flexible. These words also matched with the participants' responses regarding the difference in fieldwork experience between emerging and traditional placements. One participant elaborated:

> I think it is very different. The students have to find a niche for themselves, and for OT. Rather than follow the lead of what an [occupational therapist] is already doing at a traditional site, students in emerging areas of practice have to identify what OT can offer and lead the way.

Connections and collaborations. The participants reported improved relations with the community when students were placed in emerging areas of practice fieldwork sites. The participants noted an improved relationship with the OT program and the beginnings of a long-term fieldwork partnership. One participant elaborated, "we develop relationships starting with Level I students, then building on long-lasting placements." Fieldwork sites begin to recognize the value of OT students and program affiliations as their experience with OT students increases. A value and understanding of the profession emerges. As stated by one participant, "some sites reach out to us," and

"we begin to receive requests by agencies for our assistance."

In addition to the AFWCs, the faculty as a whole is instrumental in creating collaborations within the department and across the community to expose students to emerging areas of practice. The participants noted, "Faculty members tell me about a new practice setting," and "sometimes there is an intermediary that refers a site to me (faculty, other college staff, etc.)," and "through connections that our full or part-time faculty have in the community." In turn, an improved understanding of the role of the occupational therapist surfaces for the students placed in these settings.

Occupational thinker and increased understanding of the occupational therapist and the profession. One participant stated, "[Emerging areas of practice fieldwork] increases autonomy and occupational thinking not tied to the constraints of delivering OT in a reimbursement environment." Several phrases emerged regarding offering fieldwork in emerging areas of practice, such as "crucial to the profession" and "enhances the occupational therapist's role" in the rehabilitation sciences. Occupation as a central therapeutic intervention is also better understood as students are given the chance to discover opportunities for occupation in a setting where it is yet to exist. One response highlights the benefits of emerging areas of practice in fieldwork on the profession as a whole:

> I believe that these emerging practice experiences have tremendously expanded the minds of future practitioners [in] two ways that OT can meet society's needs.

They have the time energy and skills to demonstrate how OT can be part of the new arenas, and that is a great benefit to society and to the profession.

Influence of curriculum. The participants responded that their ability to match and place students is, in part, dependent on their curriculum and their curricular sequence, noting, "[There has to be] a willingness to work with the school to meet both the school's and the organization's objectives for the affiliation." Opportunities for these experiences have to align perfectly in the semester that the experience is being offered and when a new site is willing to accommodate the student. The site must also match the curricular threads and have a basic understanding of the value of occupation.

Perceived barriers and future implications. Despite the overwhelmingly favorable responses, the participants also illuminated the barriers posed by emerging areas of practice. Phrases that emerged in the area of barriers and future implications included the "need for more evidence-based practice" in emerging areas, including the necessity of "outcome measures"; students' own negative or limited perceptions regarding placement in these emerging areas; and the challenge of limited supervision. The participants reported wanting "more case studies [in emerging areas]," "more evidence-based studies," and "more methods for training non-traditional OT supervisors." In regard to students' own negative or limited perceptions regarding fieldwork placement in emerging areas of practice, the AFWCs responded, "Students sometimes have a difficult time seeing the fit for OT because of their limited

experience." Limited supervision responses included a "reluctance to accept students," and a "need for experienced practitioners." The AFWCs reported a difficult time placing students in areas that are typically reserved for other professionals, like social work or psychology students.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrated that students placed in an emerging area of practice fieldwork setting have a better understanding of the role of the occupational therapist than students who complete traditional fieldwork experiences. Furthermore, students who participate in fieldwork in an emerging area of practice function at a higher level of learning as defined by Bloom's taxonomy and are reported to be better problem solvers with the use of evidence when compared to those placed in traditional areas of practice. The results of this survey captured a proportional amount of responses from each region, with the Northeast having the most responses. The Northeast region currently hosts many of the country's OT programs, thus, emerging areas of practice may be more readily explored in this region compared to other regions. Students more often request traditional fieldwork; thus, students may perceive traditional sites as more advantageous to their learning, which mirrors the quantitative results of this survey. However, the AFWCs were able to fully elaborate their perceptions in the qualitative responses and noted that although students may not be highly satisfied they are more readily able to articulate the essence of occupation while on emerging areas of practice fieldwork. Further, as the students progressed through their didactic programs and completed

additional fieldwork in emerging areas of practice, their understanding of the professional role of the occupational therapist was enhanced. This was supported by both quantitative and qualitative responses.

A positive impact of offering fieldwork in emerging areas of practice is essential to the advancement of the profession of OT as it continues to offer dual single points of entry at the master's and doctoral level. Students are provided with the opportunity to promote OT when placed in fieldwork in emerging areas of practice (Johnson et al., 2006). Through this promotion, they are able to more clearly articulate the role of the occupational therapist and advocate for the profession. As highlighted by Brachtesende (2005), entering an emerging area of practice requires the ability to promote oneself. Students gain the ability to define confidently their future profession and, as found in this study, enhance their professional and personal skills by becoming more confident, organized, flexible, and empathetic. Gat and Ratzon (2014) noted that students perceived of themselves as creative and more culturally competent while completing fieldwork in emerging areas of practice. These acquired skills are beneficial to the students, regardless of their future practice areas.

The AFWCs reported that students are developing a higher level of autonomy while on fieldwork in emerging areas of practice, which has the potential to increase their "readiness" to enter emerging areas of practice upon graduation. Leadership skills emerge and the student's personal and professional skills are enhanced. Case-Smith, Page, Darragh, Rybski, and Cleary (2014) agree that

occupational therapists of the twenty-first century should take on numerous leadership roles, including those in emerging areas of practice in community services, health promotion, and primary practice. Johnson et al. (2006) noted that students should be given the opportunity to practice professional skills across fieldwork Levels I and II in emerging areas of practice. The results of this study indicated that more opportunities currently exist in Level I experiences than in Level II. This could be explained by the AFWCs having greater success with matching the timing of these placements in the curriculum design and the needs of the site. However, a growing number of programs responded that students are able to participate in Level I and Level II fieldwork in emerging areas of practice in their respective programs.

Bossers et al. (1997) confirmed the value of integrating emerging areas of practice throughout the academic curriculum to promote student engagement. Emerging areas of practice will need to be interwoven in both the doctoral and master's curriculum, as AFWCs perceive that students gain valuable professional skills far more during these experiences than during traditional experiences. Uniquely for doctoral programs, fieldwork in emerging areas of practice supports requirements for the DEC, including independence in decision making, interprofessional leadership roles, and enhanced communication skills (Case-Smith et al., 2014).

The majority of the AFWCs in this study reported that offering emerging areas of practice in fieldwork is essential, crucial, and vital to the profession and direction of OT. Bossers et al.

(1997) confirmed this finding in their study and reported an overall awareness of the role of the profession in the community where emerging areas of practice fieldwork placements occurred. Community collaborations and partnerships grow out of ideas and collaborations not solely of the AFWC, but of the OT faculty as a whole. Innovation and ingenuity is shared, creating ideas for future areas of practice. Further, organizations not yet involved with OT programs begin to recognize the value of the profession and request affiliation agreements based on the positive experiences of those organizations with long-term partnerships. As supported by Cooper and Raine (2009), fieldwork affiliation sites benefit greatly from OT partnerships by introduction of specialized skills, short-term voluntary "labor," and the potential for greater partnerships through research that promotes evidenced-based interventions in new settings.

Increased exposure of the OT profession to the community at large, added support to the doctoral curricula, and enhanced professional and personal skills are unique contributions that fieldwork in emerging areas of practice provides. The need to prepare the future OT practitioner for community-based models can only genuinely occur during fieldwork in emerging areas of practice (Cooper & Raine, 2009). The results of this study support the benefits of student fieldwork placements in environments and avenues where occupational therapy may not currently exist.

Limitations and Future Research

Type II errors could exist due to the decrease in power to detect a significant change in

difference. Limitations also include the original design of the survey and limited construct validity. Qualitative results also captured favorable responses from the AFWCs in three areas that the quantitative results did not. This may suggest the Likert questions did not accurately capture the participants' responses.

An additional limitation existed with adjustment to the Likert scale after nine responses were recorded; combining of categories was performed during analysis in order to better capture all intended responses, thus potentially obscuring marginality. The amount of time this survey took to complete may have also been a limitation, as the average time recorded was well over the anticipated time noted by the researcher. A response bias may also exist in this study. The perspectives of the AFWCs who did not support emerging areas of practice were not fully captured. This purposive sample of AFWCs may have more of a vested interest in emerging areas of practice fieldwork. However, this study investigated an avenue that has not yet been explored: the perspectives of the AFWCs on emerging areas of practice.

Researchers should consider conducting future studies in the areas of emerging practice. Areas of research concentration may include additional entry-level doctoral programs that reach accreditation. Future studies could simultaneously investigate student, AFWC, and emerging areas of practice fieldwork site personnel perceptions in order to further explore collaborative perceptions about fieldwork placement in emerging areas of practice.

Conclusion

This study illustrates the importance of fieldwork placement in emerging areas of practice as perceived by AFWCs. Increased student confidence in articulating the role of the occupational therapist and improved identification of the importance of the occupational therapist in community-based settings by other health care professionals and community agency personnel helps to strengthen the growth and direction of the profession as a whole.

As reported by the AFWCs, students' skills are enhanced, both personally and professionally, in unique ways that the didactic portion of the curriculum and traditional fieldwork cannot provide. As the profession of OT continues to grow in the areas of community health and wellness, homeless shelters, international practice, and consultancy/advocacy roles, among others, it is important to document the ways in which the AFWCs and students are influencing and are influenced by these emerging areas of practice.

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