Evidence Spotlight

Royal College of Occupational Therapists

Practice-based learning

This Evidence Spotlight provides some key reading, selected from the evidence base, about practice-based learning. It includes summaries of research papers, listed under broad subject headings, alongside related CPD activities applicable to the four Pillars of the RCOT Career Development Framework: Professional Practice; Facilitation of Learning; Leadership; and Evidence, Research and Development (RCOT 2021).

Introduction and overview

Practice-based learning is a central component of pre-registration occupational therapy education that allows learners (students and apprentices) to apply and practise their newly acquired knowledge and skills in a safe environment (RCOT 2019). It enables them to integrate theory and practice (Kaelin and Dancza 2019), develop professional knowledge and skills (Miyamoto et al 2019), and prepare for the complexity of practice.

Occupational therapists work in a wide range of settings and contexts, from role-established to role-emerging positions, and practice-based learning (also referred to as placements) should reflect this. The Royal College of Occupational Therapists' *Learning and development standards for pre-registration education* (2019) require education providers to develop partnerships with a range of practice-based learning providers, including public, independent, private and third sector settings, and settings where no occupational therapists are currently employed. This provides the opportunity for learners to obtain a breadth of practice-based experience, in a range of environments, and promotes learning across the four Pillars of the RCOT Career Development Framework.

There is flexibility in how practice-based learning is carried out. While learners in the UK are required to complete a minimum of 1000 hours of successful practice-based learning (RCOT 2019, World Federation of Occupational Therapists 2016) they can do so in a variety of ways, including a proportion of simulated and self-directed learning (RCOT 2019). This flexibility has been particularly important during the COVID pandemic, which has highlighted the need for a variety of practice-based learning opportunities including virtual, hybrid, rotational and research placements (Marchant 2021).

Engaging in a variety of practice-based learning experiences enables learners to develop a wide range of skills for practice, such as leadership and entrepreneurialism. It can also provide opportunities for learners to immerse themselves in culturally diverse situations and develop as reflective practitioners, able to work in a wide range of settings (Sonn and Vermeulen 2018).

This Evidence Spotlight provides summaries of selected research accompanied by CPD activities, including activities related to equity, diversity and belonging. It is intended as a starting point for critically considering the evidence base around practice-based learning. You can use our bite-sized learning resources (details on Page 4) to capture your learning.

References

Kaelin VC, Dancza K (2019) Perceptions of occupational therapy threshold concepts by students in role-emerging placements in schools: a qualitative investigation. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal, 66(6),* 711–719.

Marchant J (2021) Understanding the allied health professions student experience of practice placements during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic. *International Journal of Practice-based Learning in Health and Social Care, 9(2),* 39–48. doi: 10.18552/ijpblhsc.v9i2.741

Miyamoto R, Green D, Bontje P, Suyama N, Ohshima N, Fever SSA, Butler J (2019) Student perceptions of growth-facilitating and growth-constraining factors of practice placements: a comparison between Japanese and United Kingdom occupational therapy students. *Occupational Therapy International, 2019*: 8582470. doi: 10.1155/2019/8582470

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (2021) *Career development framework: guiding principles for occupational therapy.* 2nd ed. London: RCOT. Available at: *https://www.rcot.co.uk/publications/career-development-framework*

Royal College of Occupational Therapists (2019) *Learning and development standards for pre-registration education: revised edition 2019*. London: RCOT. Available at: *https://www.rcot.co.uk/practice-resources/rcot-publications/learning-and-development-standards-pre-registration-education*

Sonn I, Vermeulen N (2018) Occupational therapy students' experiences and perceptions of culture during fieldwork education. *South African Journal of Occupational Therapy, 48(1),* 34–39.

World Federation of Occupational Therapists (2016) *Minimum standards for the education of occupational therapists: revised 2016.* [s.l.]: WFOT. Available at: *https://wfot.org/resources/new-minimum-standards-for-the-education-of-occupational-therapists-2016-e-copy*

Career Development Framework Pillars and CPD Activities

Models of practice education

Beveridge and Pentland (2020) conducted a mapping review to identify, categorise and critically consider evidence for models of practice education in allied health and social care professions. Fourteen models were identified, as well as hybrid approaches. Findings highlighted the importance of preparation, communication and allowing sufficient time for new ways of working. However, there was limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of models and their impact on placement capacity.

Reference
Beveridge J, Pentland D (2020) A mapping review of models of practice education in allied health and social care professions. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 83(8),* 488–513.

Leadership
Facilitation of Learning

Practice educators: reflect on the findings and identify models that you could offer. Write an action plan to support implementation.

Learners: identify how you could prepare for a specific model of practice-based learning.

Consider ways in which practice educators can work with learners to ensure that the learner's individual and educational needs are accommodated.

Role-emerging placements

Dancza et al (2019) explored the learning of occupational therapy students on role-emerging placements in UK schools, in an action research study involving students (n=14) and supervisors (n=11). Data was collected from semi-structured interviews, field notes and placement documentation. Three themes emerged: learning without established procedures to follow; learning to use theory to guide practice; and student personal qualities and peer support influencing learning. Findings included that students used knowledge differently to other placements, relying on conceptual and dispositional, rather than procedural, knowledge. The authors identify role-emerging placements can be transformational, and require appropriate support, structured guidance and realistic expectations.

Reference
Dancza K, Copley J, Moran M (2019) Occupational therapy student learning on role-emerging placements in schools. *British Journal of Occupational Therapy, 82(9),* 567–577.

Facilitation of Learning

Consider the differences between 'procedural', 'conceptual' and 'dispositional' knowledge. Identify how these different types of knowledge can be applied/facilitated during practice-based learning to support development of professional skills and identity.

Consider potential challenges of learning in an environment where there are no established procedures to follow. Identify ways in which clarity around the learner's role within the setting could be improved.

Move to digital platforms

Peart et al (2022) explored the experiences of occupational therapy practice educators in Australia during the COVID pandemic. Fifteen educators participated in focus groups and individual semi-structured interviews. Three themes emerged: opportunities lost and then created; the relationship between the student and practice educator; and signing-off of students' competencies. Findings included that the move to digital platforms limited some opportunities, such as in-person service delivery and informal learning. However, it also created learning opportunities for students and educators, contributing to skills such as adaptability and lateral thinking.

Reference
Peart A, Wells N, Yu M-L, Brown T (2022) 'It became quite a complex dynamic': the experiences of occupational therapy practice educators' move to digital platforms during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Australian Occupational Therapy Journal, 69(1),* 38–49.

Professional Practice

Consider factors that may affect student/educator preparedness for both digital and in-person practice-based learning.

Identify potential benefits and disadvantages of digital platforms for people who access services.

Find out more about digital poverty and inequality, e.g. through the **Digital Poverty Alliance** website.

Perceptions of learner–supervisor trust

Lundh et al (2019) explored supervisors' perceptions of trust and how it is formed between supervisor and student. Twelve occupational therapists, from an emergency hospital in Sweden, participated in semi-structured interviews. Analysis identified three ways of thinking about trust: that trust is about the student and is rather static; trust as a dynamic process based on student performance; and trust as something mutual and interrelated. The authors suggest trust can be understood as a multifaceted construct, and that having a deep understanding of possible differences in ways of conceptualising it can help supervisors support learning.

Reference
Lundh P, Palmgren PJ, Stenfors T (2019) Perceptions about trust: a phenomenographic study of clinical supervisors in occupational therapy. *BMC Medical Education, 19*: 404, 1–9. doi: 10.1186/s12909-019-1850-1

Experiences of international learners

Law et al (2022) explored the practice education experiences of international students enrolled on pre-registration occupational therapy programmes in the UK. Six students participated in semi-structured interviews. Analysis generated four main themes: learning opportunities in practice placement; challenges and difficulties; critical elements of a good practice experience; and extra support required by international students. The authors identify a need to enhance practice educators' skills in supervising international students, and recommend universities invest time and resources in supporting international students' learning needs.

References
Law CP, Masterson-Ng S, Pollard N (2022) Occupational therapy practice education: a perspective from international students in the UK. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 29(1),* 33–45.

Incorporation of research in supervision

Helgøy et al (2022) explored how practice educators perceive and emphasise research in their supervision of students. Occupational therapists (n=9) working in community services/hospitals in Norway participated in focus groups or an individual interview. Analysis revealed four themes: emphasis on research in supervision of students; practice educators' research competence and awareness of research; institutionalisation of research use in everyday practice; and communication and cooperation between education and practice regarding research. While participants were positive about research, they rarely included it in supervision. The authors suggest ways to promote engagement in and with research, including use of research-based practice guidelines, and engagement in journal clubs or research projects during placements.

Reference:
Helgøy KV, Smeby J-C, Bonsaksen T (2022) Practice educators' emphasis on research in supervision of occupational therapy students. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 29(3), 242*–256.

Facilitation of Learning

Consider the ways of thinking about trust identified in the paper and reflect on how you conceptualise trust.

Reflect on how trust can inform different models of practice-based learning and be graded to increase learner autonomy.

Consider how 'static' perceptions of trust may be influenced by personal, cultural and gender bias.

Professional Practice
Facilitation of Learning

Consider the challenges identified in the study and develop a short and long-term action plan for promoting positive practice-based learning experiences for international learners.

Reflect on how cultural bias could influence perception of learners' interpersonal and communication skills. Identify potential ways of mitigating this.

Evidence, Research and Development

Identify the ways in which research is incorporated into the practice-based learning opportunities you support. Consider how collaboration between the university, learner, and placement setting can be enhanced to facilitate/improve this.

Learners: identify a practice guideline relevant to your placement and reflect on implications for practice.

Appraise a research paper in a journal club attended by learners and practice educators.

Further reading

Ellington A, Janes WE (2020) Online journal clubs to enhance fieldwork educator competency in support of student experiential learning. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 74(3),* 1–9.

Naidoo D, Govender P, Naidoo SN, Ngubane N, Nkosi Z, Mulla A (2020) Occupational risks in occupational therapy service learning: a single-site "Fear Factor" study in South Africa. *Occupational Therapy International, 2020*: 4746813. doi: 10.1155/2020/4746813

Nowrouzi-Kia B, Barker D, Rappolt S, Morrison T (2019) Predictors to private practice occupational therapy fieldwork opportunities in Canada: new evidence suggests new solutions. *Occupational Therapy in Health Care, 33(3),* 247–264. doi: 10.1080/07380577.2019.1616241

Access to journal articles

RCOT members can access the full text of the articles via the RCOT e-journals collection, by searching CINAHL and Medline or, in the case of open access articles, via the link/DOI provided in the reference.

Access the RCOT e-journals collection at:
https://www.rcot.co.uk/practice-resources/library-resources/journals-and-e-journals

Search CINAHL and Medline:
https://www.rcot.co.uk/practice-resources/library-resources/search-cinahl-and-medline

Career Development Framework

The *Career development framework: guiding principles for occupational therapy*, 2nd edition (RCOT 2021) is an overarching set of guiding principles for occupational therapy and offers a structured process to guide careers, learning and development within our profession. It contains four interacting Pillars of Practice (each with nine Career Levels):

- Professional Practice
- Facilitation of Learning
- Leadership
- Evidence, Research and Development

Access the framework at: **https://www.rcot.co.uk/cpd-rcot**

Bite-sized learning

Use RCOT CPD resources to capture your learning from the CPD activities:
https://www.rcot.co.uk/bite-sized-learning

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