Occupational Therapists' Perspectives for Promoting Fieldwork Experiences in Private Practice

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Abstract

Limited private practice fieldwork opportunities exist in Canadian occupational therapy education programs, in comparison to public health opportunities. Private practices are an important resource to provide students with opportunities to gain experience in the private sector. There are limited studies in occupational therapy that identify strategies to encourage occupational therapists to offer placements in this area. This exploratory qualitative study explored the experiences and perspectives of occupational therapists working in private practice and their motivations to participate in occupational therapy student education. Using purposive sampling, nine occupational therapists working in private practice with and without fieldwork educator experience, participated in semi-structured interviews. An interpretivist phenomenological approach was used to analyse data and determine emergent themes. Three themes emerged that highlight key considerations for occupational therapists hosting students in private practice. Conflicting motivators for hosting students were uncovered. Motivators included the enjoyment of mentoring and potential future employee recruitment, whereas barriers were perceived inexperience, logistical concerns, and impact on service provision. Strategies to directly support therapists and facilitate student learning at the university level prior to fieldwork placements in this area, were revealed. For therapists this included university-provided training, effective communication with fieldwork coordinators, and ideas for navigating logistical challenges such as promoting flexible placement approaches. For student learning, curriculum content and delivery methods were discussed. A better understanding of occupational therapists' perspectives of hosting students in private practice can inform practical and viable approaches that can be utilized by education programs and the private sector, to ensure mutually beneficial partnerships.

Keywords: *Canada, health education, preceptorship, private sector, workplace*

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Introduction

There has been a considerable growth in privatized healthcare services in Canada, thought to be a result of increased demand, lifestyle preferences, and global privatisation of healthcare (Rodger et al., 2008). Approximately 25% of occupational therapists in Canada are employed in private practice agencies or clinics (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2013). In more recent figures in one province, 37% of registrants indicated their primary funding is from a privatized funding source (College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia, 2023). In the same province, in 2023, only 22% of fieldwork placements were in this setting while the remaining were hosted in the publicly funded system (D. Drynan, personal communication, February 6, 2024). Opportunities for student placements in this area does not match the growth of privately funded occupational therapy practices. Thus, a small number of new graduates entering the private practice workforce have minimal, if any, exposure to this form of service delivery. Existing literature identifies that fieldwork experience has a significant influence on the practice area that new graduates seek out (Chiang, 2013). Additionally, experiences in various practice placement settings are essential in equipping students with fundamental skills and confidence, as well as developing a key understanding of the profession (Golos & Tekuzener, 2019). Therefore, the fieldwork opportunities should be reflective of the existing and upcoming trends of the healthcare system to match the proportional growth in trending areas (Sloggett et al., 2003).

Private practice placements, compared to publicly funded placements, offer business learning opportunities such as administration, sales promotion, marketing, private healthcare provision, and management in additional to clinical experience (Doubt et al., 2004). Clinically, students have exposure to consultation and group education, along with various assessments and interventions in areas including mental health, quality of life, physical impairments, seating and postural management, and environmental modifications.

In Canada, occupational therapists employed in the public sector are compensated through a salary payment model, regardless of how many clients are seen daily. Because compensation is not linked to clinician productivity, many clinicians in the public sector can provide students placements without financial implications. In the private sector, the payment model is primarily fee-for-service, where compensation is dependent on productivity. Funding often comes from third-party agencies, where clinicians contract their services including workers' compensation boards, automobile insurers, casualty insurers, extended health benefits, lawyers, employers, or directly from individual clients (Nowrouzi-Kia et al., 2019). Past studies have identified compensation and financial implications as barriers to provide student placement opportunities in the private sector (Bridle & Hawkes, 1990; Sloggett et al., 2003).

Benefits of offering placements in private practice for the clinician and organization include increased personal and job satisfaction, recruitment potential, and the added enthusiasm of the student (Sloggett et al., 2003). Challenges and barriers to offering student placements include legal and ethical concerns, the cost to the company and therapist in time and money, lack of physical office space, and concerns about client satisfaction and quality of care with student involvement (Maloney et al., 2013; Nowrouzi-Kia et al., 2019; Sloggett et al., 2003). Previous research recommends determining facilitators and strategies that can be implemented to promote private sector supervision of student occupational therapists (Kobbero et al., 2018; Nowrouzi-Kia et al., 2019). Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the experiences and perspectives of occupational therapists working in private practice, to understand their motivations to offer student placements or not, as well as their ideas and perspectives of professional education program strategies to best support them in providing fieldwork opportunities.

Methods

Research design

An exploratory qualitative design with a constructivist paradigm was used to gather the subjective experience of participants. Ethical approval for this study was received from the University Behavioural Research Ethics Board (H19-01301) and confidentiality of all data was maintained throughout the study.

Participant selection

Purposive sampling was used to recruit occupational therapists working in all areas of private practice. This method identified individuals with knowledge of and experience with the phenomenon of interest who would add value to the study by providing unique and rich information (Etikan et al., 2016). A list of 649 provincially regulated occupational therapists who registered as providing direct service outside of the publicly funded healthcare system, were sent a recruitment e-mail by a third-party recruiter. Selection criteria comprised registered occupational therapists who at the time of the interview, provided direct service outside of the publicly funded healthcare system. Practitioners were excluded if they were working under 20 hours per week in private practice or had not actively worked in private practice within the last two years. Occupational therapists who had experience working as a fieldwork educator, supervising one or more students in the past, and those who had not yet supervised students, were included.

Data collection

A semi-structured interview guide was drafted based on previous research exploring practitioners' perceptions of hosting students in their practice (Sokkar et al., 2019). Non-leading, open-ended questions were developed to direct the interview conversation towards the purpose of the research project (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview guide (Appendix A) was first piloted with an experienced private sector occupational therapy fieldwork educator. Informed revisions and adjustments to the interview questions were made based on the feedback received (Kallio et al., 2016). One of two versions of the semi-structured interview were followed, depending on if the occupational therapist had previously supervised students or not.

Research process

Once informed consent had been obtained, two co-investigators conducted the individual semi-structured interviews. Participants completed a short demographic questionnaire to add details around the experience, context and practice setting of those who participated in the study. The interview asked participants to speak from current or past experience regarding student placements. They were also able to speak about prospective involvement in offering future fieldwork opportunities or not. Those who had not supervised a student were asked to speak about factors that would increase their willingness to supervise students. All participants were asked to highlight activities that may enhance and facilitate the experience of the student and fieldwork educator in a viable private practice placement. Speculations concerning challenges and barriers to student supervision in the private sector were discussed. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Analysis

A thematic analysis based on an interpretive phenomenological approach (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Neubauer et al., 2019) was used to process the data and identify themes from the transcripts (Clarke et al., 2015). This methodology is based on the theory that experiential knowledge, including a person's individual history and the culture in which they were raised, influences how they perceive the world (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Interpretive phenomenology recognizes that researchers, too, cannot experience phenomena without referring to their frames of reference. Therefore, the research team was reflexive on how subjectivity was part of the analysis process (Moran, 2018). Initial codes for the first three transcripts were manually generated by the three authors separately. The codes were then discussed to reach consensus and create a coding guide to manually re-code all transcripts. Key phrases and concepts were noted to increase authenticity of the phenomena described and improve credibility (Shenton, 2004). All

authors collaboratively reviewed and discussed the codes through dialogue and reflection to develop the final themes and subthemes. Themes were selected not necessarily because of the occurrence in the data set, but because the theme captured something relevant to the research question (Clarke et al., 2015).

Rigour

Co-investigators did not have private practice fieldwork experience and had no working relationship with any participants previous to or throughout the duration of this study. Co-investigators who hosted the interviews aimed to establish rapport to ensure participants were genuinely willing to take part and freely offer data (Shenton, 2004). Throughout the interview process, interviewers summarized participant responses to ensure the researchers understood their intended message. Post-participation member checking was not performed to minimize participant burden (Thomas, 2017). Reflective commentary was used to discuss the interviewer's initial impressions after all data collection sessions (Shenton, 2004).

Analyst triangulation was used to review early findings, where two co-investigators and one primary investigator used line-by-line manual coding to analyze the data of three interviews separately. The data was then compared to illuminate potential blind spots with the aim of understanding multiple ways of seeing the data (Honorene, 2017). Provisional codes were developed, reviewed and refined to manually code all transcripts. Throughout the entire investigation, trustworthiness was maintained through researcher reflexivity, open dialogue, and through the triangulation of multiple researcher perspectives (Honorene, 2017).

Findings

Nine registered occupational therapists (six females and three males) participated in this study. All but two participants had supervised at least one student. One of the two who had not hosted a student had offered, but had not yet been matched. A mix of rural and urban therapists took part; three worked with children and the remainder worked with adults and older adults. Participants had between one and a half years to thirty-eight years of experience working as an occupational therapist, with one to seventeen years of experience in private practice. Two were employed part time and the remainder worked full time in this setting. The participants worked in a variety of private settings including: contractor role, sole proprietor, an employee role, or both a sole proprietor and clinic-based employee role.

Table 1 summarises the three themes and subthemes which speak to participants' motivations to offer student placements, or not, as well as strategies therapists desire to best support private sector supervision and involvement of occupational therapy students.

Table 1:

Overview of the three main themes and subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
1. Conflicting Motivations for Hosting Students	i. Mutual Benefits ii. Perceived Inexperience iii. Organizational Logistics *(Workspace, Scheduling, Legal and Ethical Concerns)*
2. Strategies & Incentives to Support Fieldwork Educators	i. University-Provided Training and Informative Resources ii. Characteristics of students iii. Troubleshooting Logistical Challenges iv. Flexible Placement Structure
3. Preparing the Student	i. University Curriculum Development: Knowledge of Private Practice

Theme 1: Conflicting Motivations for Hosting Students

Benefits for the student, the fieldwork educator, and the private practice setting were uncovered. Therapists' perceptions of inexperience and the influence of various organizational logistics in private practice were key aspects that influenced their ability to host students successfully.

Mutual benefits

Mentoring and personal development were strong internal motivators for taking students. Participant 2 shared that she hosts students "to pass on tacit knowledge that you only get in practice" while Participant 5 explained "I enjoy mentorship... like providing mentorship and teaching." Financial compensation was noted as not being an influencing factor in motivating participants to host a student, as indicated in one response: "I am not motivated by money, I would do it anyways because it is the right thing to do." (Participant 2).

What was unique to the private context was the notion of future employee recruitment which was identified as an influential motivator, and multiple participants spoke to the cost-benefit of this. The experience students gain through fieldwork was reflected as a successful component of the private practice's hiring strategy. Participant 9 stated that "...the student that took the job with us came in and was basically already trained to be very much an entry-level clinician."

Perceived inexperience

One of the most consistently discussed topics by all participants was the learning curve associated with the transition to private practice as a student, new graduate, or an experienced therapist from the public sector. Novice practitioners were hesitant to begin supervising students as they felt apprehensive about what they could offer and teach the student and/or sensed a lack of employer support. In speaking directly about potential private practice therapists considering becoming fieldwork educators, Participant 8 stated, "Confidence could be a big thing, especially for newer grads taking on students. And confidence in their skills and being able to model those effectively, feeling confident in their ability to teach students."

Organizational logistics

Logistical aspects that influenced the perceived ability to host students included perceptions and suggestions around workspace, scheduling, and legal and ethical concerns. Participants who viewed office space as a barrier primarily worked out of their personal home, car, or in small offices with limited desk or computer access. This was specifically indicated as a barrier for students in their initial levels of fieldwork, due to a students' need for increased supervision and support. Limited physical office space for the occupational therapist and student to share was less perceived as a barrier if students were in their later levels of fieldwork and more independent in completing indirect tasks including telephone calls, e-mails, and report writing. Participants indicated that students in these cases could complete work wherever they made office space, for example at their own home. Participant responses were split and contingent on the context/type of practice the therapist was employed in. For example, Participant 4 that did not perceive office space as a barrier explained:

> When you're a contractor, you just have the flexibility to work wherever you can… and just because you're working from home one day, doesn't necessarily mean that the student needs to be there… and like anything else, you'd organize ahead of time.

All those that perceived office space as a barrier also identified that having students work out of their personal homes would be unprofessional and uncomfortable for both individuals.

One of the most commonly discussed barriers amongst participants was the unpredictability of scheduling and caseloads in private practice. Those that perceived scheduling as a barrier typically worked as a contractor or sole-proprietor, and had atypical schedules when compared to a more controlled clinical setting. Others did not perceive scheduling as a barrier, but rather viewed it as a solvable issue through communication and planning:

> It's typically a discussion I include as part of our expectation conversation at the beginning of placement … I let them know that 'if you were to practice in a private practice setting this is kind of something that would probably happen to you. (Participant 8)

All participants discussed various legal and ethical issues as barriers to providing fieldwork opportunities in the private sector. The issues identified were site and role specific and included professional liability, client consent to treatment, and service delivery issues. Participants that engaged in large amounts of report writing voiced concerns around student participation in report writing related to legal implications. Participant 4 explained:

> In private practice, the implications for these things are different [than the public sector] when a report gets sent [to a third-party payer] it could get sent to court and if a student's report is in there they are going to call the student [to court].

Several participants spoke of issues regarding client consent to student involvement in the client's file/claim and stated that clients trying to settle in the legal system "are a little more protective of their information and who they are working with." Participants 3 and 7 both expressed concerns around service delivery, predominantly concerned with ensuring clients and families receive quality services.

Theme 2: Strategies and incentives to support fieldwork educators

It was encouraging to hear from participants about what was working to support them and further initiatives to enhance their motivation for hosting students.

University-provided training and resources

Fieldwork educator workshops delivered by the region's university were highlighted as a valuable resource for learning effective strategies and preparing therapists to offer placements. Participant 9 stated, "The workshop can help reduce an occupational therapist's fears or concerns associated with supervising a student for the first time."

Online fieldwork resources including the university's departmental website, blog posts and frequently asked questions section were reported as valuable resources. Participant 8, who spoke highly about one university's occupational therapy fieldwork education blog, stated "Posts like 'Tips and Tricks for students', how to help students learn, support students during placement, how to assist if students aren't doing well on placement and how preceptors can check in on them, were very helpful."

She also suggested the idea of a private practice discussion board to ask questions and gather ideas from other private practice occupational therapists to utilize others' experience, help others feel connected, and allow them to share resources and ideas. The final department resource that was highly important to all participants was the availability and ease of communication with the fieldwork coordinator.

Participants were asked about receiving incentives or rewards for hosting placements. The opportunity to receive a status appointment with the department at the university which gives access to benefits such as the library, was a perk that many commented on. Participant 8 explained this opportunity is important for her to gain access to research journals:

> It's hard as clinicians finding the time to keep up to date on evidence-based practice and like it's hard especially when journals are inaccessible. I really like and strive for evidence-based practice and I really wanna make sure I'm staying up to date but it's hard to do when I don't have access.

Though participants highlighted that being financially incentivized to take students would be an advantage, most participants explained that compensation would not be a compelling strategy.

Characteristics of students

Participants discussed characteristics that make students compatible for private practice fieldwork. All nine participants unanimously stated that students who are flexible, open, and adaptable to the

unpredictable nature of private practice are ideal candidates. Participant 1 expressed a desire for a student that is "open to lots of different types of learning experiences" and "eager to learn". Interestingly, many participants on their own volition, reflected on preceptor qualities that bolster the student-preceptor relationship. Participant 4 explained that "placements have to have some adaptability too, I think as a good preceptor, it's your job to make it challenging but still fitting that ability level."

Troubleshooting logistical challenges

Four participants provided suggestions for increasing student involvement in assessment and intervention provision during placements. Participant 6 spoke about the importance in having students participate in some of the assessment, even if they do not conduct all of it. Participant 8 highlighted that when working with different funders and assessments differ, she promotes student participation in components when possible. This participant explained, "If there are components that the student has done before, then like let them do it. Even if they're not doing the whole assessment independently, they can still do the components."

Participant 5 and Participant 7 spoke about the value and importance of students preparing intervention activities. Participant 5 shared that the students have strengthened areas of practice of interest to both the clinic and student in that:

> All of the students have developed really great education topics that can either be provided one on one to clients or in a group setting. They've also developed you know certain interventions for example … building up more resources and worksheets and ideas for treatment that then we have used in practice.

Flexible placement structure

It was evident that flexibility was desired in the length of having a student, the days and times, and full-time versus part time. More flexibility in placement structure would increase the offers for junior level placements. Participants agreed that sharing a student within an organization tended to be more popular than across different organizations due to logistical and confidentiality issues. When asked about shared placement opportunities within and across organizations, where two preceptors share their caseloads with one student, Participant 7 explained that "in terms of time management, it's very beneficial for me to be able to share my students with other people." Participant 2 supported this idea and Participant 3 added that those shared placements are "helpful, as it took the pressure off me working with the student full-time." Participant 3 further explained that sharing a student between two different private practice organizations would benefit the student, as it would provide 'an interesting comparison for the student to see how therapists work in different environments.' Participant 4 corroborated this, adding that with shared placements, "you're sharing those responsibilities" and "there is more possibility" for the student as there is access to more clients.

Theme 3: Student preparation for private practice fieldwork

This theme captured the importance of enhancing student's knowledge of the private practice structure and suggested strategies for enhancing the student's foundational knowledge of private practice prior to placement beginning through university curriculum development.

Most important was increasing student's understanding of the purpose of private practice, the occupational therapy role, funding sources and processes, and commonly-used language. Other areas of knowledge included ethics of private practice, navigating professional boundaries, role of healthcare professionals and stakeholders, logistics and limitations, and communication between public health and private practice. Participant 4 summarized their thoughts by adding, "I think what I would really want them to know is ... what is the system? How does it work? Where does our money come from? Who are the different types of people we work with?"

Participant 1 suggested having a lecture hosted by a private practice occupational therapist "to come in and talk about it, to just answer questions, just be real with the students."

Many participants were hesitant when asked about the possibility of a pre-placement private practice online student module provided by the university. Participant 1 stated, "you have to wonder how much did they actually learn and take away from that as opposed to just simply learning by doing." On the other hand, Participant 5 explained that a pre-placement student module "would increase their confidence as well coming in that you kind of have the lay of the land, some understanding of the basic terminology, kind of what to maybe anticipate."

Participants encouraged increasing student competence in report writing practice. Exposure to reporting as highlighted in a previous section was mentioned as something that should be introduced in the curriculum. Participant 8 stated "Reporting is a big part of our work, and communicating with funders, and doing case management is important so learning like tips for private practice and communicating with the funders would be helpful."

Some ways to address practical skills that might be lacking in the curriculum suggested by participants included setting up private practice clinic visits, providing case studies or using role play for private practice scenarios, and providing the opportunity to practice reporting. Participant 1 suggested giving students a case study with "pictures of bathrooms, stairwells, front entrances and bedrooms ... places that you might be prescribing equipment and you come up with possibilities for equipment that people might need." "Ergonomics, job demands analysis ... work hardening" were three areas of practice that Participant 6 suggested students could be introduced to, to support their private practice knowledge base.

Discussion

Though there are barriers and facilitators to the provision of placements in general, the themes identified in this study are unique to private practice and provide useful information for the profession to reflect on. Continuing to provide education and advocacy about the value of offering fieldwork placements for all stakeholders involved are recommended to secure an increased number of private practice placements (Varland et al., 2017). Motivations highlighted in this study can be paired with the strategies proposed to support private clinicians to host students, facilitate placements and in turn increase future recruitment potential (Thomas et al., 2007).

Participants highlighted that occupational therapy staff and administration have the opportunity to obtain an in-depth and extended view of a student's potential as a future employee (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2022). Having both quality and ample private practice fieldwork opportunities, can prepare students to work in these settings to ensure the profession remains dynamic and relevant (Sloggett et al., 2003). While financial compensation was not found to be a strong influencing factor, receiving status appointment with the department for access to benefits such as library access was an incentive. This adds to previous research that has indicated strategies such as a certificate, professional designation as a clinical educator (Doubt et al., 2004) or being invited to contribute to teaching a lecture (Sloggett et al., 2003) assists the reputation of the practice and clinicians (Forbes et al., 2022).

Hesitations associated with hosting students in the private sector were consistent with previous findings that include the unique logistical challenges related to office space, perceived legal concerns, service delivery, and scheduling (Barker et al., 2019; Doubt et al., 2004; Maloney et al., 2013; Nowrouzi-Kia et al., 2019; Sloggett et al., 2003). Contrary to previous research (Bridle & Hawkes, 1990; Potts et al., 1998; Sloggett et al., 2003), potential reduced income and productivity associated with providing fieldwork opportunities was not a significant deterrent, aligning with results from Nowrouzi-Kia et al.'s 2019 study. To focus on the second aim of this study, proposed contributions from the university program combined with suggested practical strategies for private practice settings to support fieldwork educators and enhance fieldwork education, need to be reviewed. Occupational therapy education programs must acknowledge the conflicting motivations and collaborate with private practice therapists, to develop initiatives and increase the proportion of fieldwork in private practice.

Paying attention to the level of student (senior versus junior) is an important message for the occupational therapy programs to pay attention to. Senior level students with a higher level of autonomy and practice knowledge can be more independent and work from their own space. This is in line with Barker et

al. (2014), who suggest that mutual workspaces provide the capacity to teach skills, provide feedback and evaluation in a private setting, and is a space that students can use during their placement. This study confirms that for occupational therapists working from home, it is important to establish parameters regarding use of this space including facilities the student may access and the hours it is available (Potts et al., 1998).

Perceived legal concerns in hosting students in a private context were consistent with findings in similar studies (Barker et al., 2014; Kobbero et al., 2018; Sloggett et al., 2003). The concept of having citizens using limited funding sources or paying for a service not being delivered by a registered occupational therapist, is a consideration that clinicians make when considering hosting placements. This perception of a lessened service delivery can be managed, by providing the client with reassurance that the student is enriching their treatment. Fieldwork educator training must provide instructions to preceptors for having these conversations with clients and families, regarding how students can be a positive experience for all (Forbes et al., 2022).

Ensuring an appropriate fit of student to the private setting is paramount. Sloggett et al. (2003) stated that high levels of independence, maturity, flexibility, assertiveness, creativity, and strong communication and critical thinking skills contribute to successful placements. The occupational therapists in this study confirmed those characteristics are necessary and added that students must be eager to learn, collaborative, and open-minded to change in the ever-changing work environment. To ensure a proper fit, a comprehensive fieldwork profile helps the university communicate to students what a fieldwork placement will entail. Access to fieldwork profiles helps students decide if the private practice placement is of interest and aligns with their learning goals and learning styles. Most occupational therapy programs have a requirement for students to send an introductory letter or resume to their fieldwork site prior to the start of the placement. This is in line with the findings that addressing supervisor-student expectations early on will help the supervisor tailor learning opportunities to the student's learning needs, as well as adjust the student's expectations to be more practical in nature. A questionnaire can be sent from the clinician to the student, or a meeting could be organized ahead of time, to help the student and preceptor get to know one another and communicate expectations.

Implementing various models of fieldwork supervision, such as joint placements with either other companies or multiple preceptors, are models the occupational therapy programs should explore to address the hesitations (Drolet et al., 2020; Forbes et al., 2022; Sloggett et al., 2003; Varland et al., 2017). This is one favoured strategy to navigate the unpredictability of scheduling, caseload fluctuations and limited physical space and/or resources (Barker et al., 2019) and expose students to increased opportunities including different clinical roles and therapist styles (Thomas et al., 2007). This is a format utilized in the public setting so there would be examples to share with the private occupational therapists as ways to address the barriers associated with schedule unpredictability and time constraints.

Universities should offer guidance for how co-supervising therapists can communicate, plan and collaborate, to balance the student's workload and conduct a joint student evaluation (Commission on Education, 2012). This can be done in multiple ways including the development of educational materials such as workshops and fact sheets, and the distribution of information through communication channels already utilized (blog posts, fieldwork section of the department website, web-based meetings) (Forfa et al., 2022).

While preparing private practice placement settings and supervisors to host students is crucial, improving preparation of students is also essential (Golos & Tekuzener, 2019). Numerous fieldwork educators perceive a gap between front line service delivery and occupational therapy program curriculum and Doubt et al.'s findings (2004) support this specific to private practice. Occupational therapists in this sample found themselves spending a significant amount of time explaining terms and funding processes during the orientation phase of placements (Spiliotopoulou, 2007), which are concepts that participants expressed should be included in the university curriculum ahead of time. The curriculum should include foundational knowledge of the broader private practice structure, as well as opportunities to practice skills like report writing, prior to placement (Barker et al., 2014). These results reinforce that providing students with more context specific learning resources, opportunities to discuss expectations with their supervisor, and foundational knowledge of private practice within university curriculum, will

enhance the student's learning experience while simultaneously reducing the demand on the supervisor (Golos & Tekuzener, 2019; Spiliotopoulou, 2007). Other curriculum opportunities suggested to enhance the learning include private practice guest lectures, panels, and clinic visits (Sloggett et al., 2003), as well as including clinicians on curriculum content committees (Barker et al., 2014).

Additional information and ongoing training is key to impacting therapists' willingness to host students (Varland et al., 2017). The participating occupational therapists confirmed that easily accessible training and resources for the private sector should continue to be offered by the university, including workshops, online modules, a private practice information package, blog posts, FAQs, and discussion boards to help fieldwork educators navigate challenges and gather ideas to enhance clinical placements. Local, provincial and/or national private practice networks may be a good way for clinicians to address concerns and develop ideas for bolstering placement opportunities (Drolet et al., 2020). Frequent and effective communication with the fieldwork coordinator (Barker et al., 2014; Doubt et al., 2004; Drolet et al., 2020), as well as ensuring fieldwork coordinators are easily available for personal consultations throughout the placement, is an effective strategy to increase clinician's willingness to offer fieldwork opportunities. Offering open drop-in virtual meeting times with the university fieldwork coordinator may provide the necessary touch points that some occupational therapists are looking for. To keep the lines of communication open, fieldwork coordinators can send out an optional evaluation at the end of placement to collect feedback from the fieldwork educator about the experience. Through ongoing collaboration to ensure practitioners have access to support through the university, private practice fieldwork capacity and quality can be enhanced and perceived challenges can be overcome (Peiris et al., 2022).

Limitations

Data collection occurred prior to the onset of the coronavirus disease pandemic of 2019, after which many fieldwork placements and private practice organizations were restructured. The generalizability of our results is limited due to a small sample size as well as recruiting participants from one Canadian province. Despite the number of participants, the data collected was detailed, rich and manageable in content for review and analysis (Whitehead & Whitehead, 2016).

Prospective Impacts on Practice

This study contributes practical strategies for clinical practice and education approaches for clinicians and students to grow and enhance occupational therapy private practice fieldwork placements. When supervisors are provided with educational opportunities and resources, therapists often feel more inclined to offer and support fieldwork experiences. They can be provided with strategies on how to balance the supervision as well as manage their typical demands of clinical practice. This study also contributes student educational strategies to enhance education and provide foundational private practice knowledge. Future research could follow-up on specific strategies implemented by fieldwork educators and occupational therapy programs to evaluate the efficacy of strategies. Future research to investigate how to enhance private practice fieldwork opportunities from the student perspective is warranted.

Conclusion

This study explored the motivations and hesitations that therapists perceive when volunteering to host student fieldwork education opportunities in private practices. The variability in private practice settings requires strategies that must be innovative and dynamic to properly align with the unique needs of the practice context. It is encouraging to note that occupational therapists still feel a professional obligation to host students and are willing to be creative in accommodating them in private practice settings. The recommendations provided are feasible strategies that should be utilized by universities to encourage new private practice clinicians to host students and continue to support experienced fieldwork educators in doing the same. Ensuring clinicians are equipped with strategies and resources is essential for fieldwork opportunities for students to continue to evolve. Furthermore, it is crucial that occupational therapy programs continue to bolster the curriculum with private practice content, to better prepare students in

developing core competencies required to become an entry-level clinician in this growing sphere of practice.

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Appendix A: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

START: Have you supervised students in the past?	
If they answered "YES" to the first question:	**If they answered "NO" to the first question:**

1. How many students have you supervised in the past 5 years?
 	
2. What level of students?
   a. Prompt: National levels 1, 2 & 3
 	
3. Why do you supervise students?
 	
4. What barriers if any did you encounter when hosting a student?
   a. Prompts: personal, agency issues, policy issues, paperwork, costs, logistics (eg. Space)
 	
5. Explain your ideas about what could be done to help prepare students at a curriculum level to best prepare them for private practice placements.
   a. Please provide your input into the topics that you think should be taught to students in preparation for private practice fieldwork
 	
6. In your opinion, what supports could be provided (by the University) that would be useful to you in increasing your willingness to supervise students in the future?
	1. What has prevented or deterred you from supervising students?
	
	2. What level of students would you consider supervising?
	   a. Prompt: National levels 1, 2 & 3
	
	3. What would prompt you to begin supervising students?
	   a. Why would you begin supervising students?
	
	4. What barriers if any do you predict you may encounter when hosting a student?
	   a. Prompts: personal, agency issues, policy issues, paperwork, costs, logistics (eg. Space)
	
	5. Explain your ideas about what could be done to help prepare students at a curriculum level to best prepare them for private practice placements.
	   a. Please provide your input into the topics that you think should be taught to students in preparation for private practice fieldwork

a. Example prompts:

    i. Training

    ii. Resources

    iii. Benefits

    iv. From University and/or employer

    v. Increased support from University faculty

    vi. Decreased duration of fieldwork placement

    vii. Flexibility of placement timing

7. What resources, if any, whether it be incentives or rewards, would assist in increasing your willingness to continue to take more students in the future?

8. What are your thoughts, if any, on opportunities for shared placement? (the student has two preceptors within or across organizations).

9. In your experience, what personal characteristics contribute to a successful student-practitioner relationship in a private practice placement?

a. Example prompts:

    i. Potential involvement of therapist in student selection

6. In your opinion, what supports could be provided (by the University) that would be useful to you in increasing your willingness to supervise students in the future?

a. Example prompts:

    i. Training

    ii. Resources

    iii. Benefits

    iv. From the University and/or employer

    v. Increased support from University faculty

    vi. Decreased duration of fieldwork placement

    vii. Flexibility of placement timing

7. What resources, if any, whether it be incentives or rewards, would assist in increasing your willingness to being taking students in the future?

8. What are your thoughts, if any, on opportunities for shared placement? (the student has two preceptors within or across organizations).

9. What personal characteristics do you think would contribute to a successful

10. If you had to design an online student resource (setting-specific student learning resources) to be completed before starting a private practice placement, what foundational content would you include to best prepare students?	student-practitioner relationship in a private practice placement?
	
	   a. Example prompts:
	
	       i. Potential involvement of therapist in student selection
	
	10. If you had to design an online student resource (setting-specific student learning resources) to be completed before starting a private practice placement, what foundational content would you include to best prepare students?