

Crossing Borders: The Role of International Fieldwork in Shaping Canadian Occupational Therapists



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Introduction & Background

- Culturally responsive care is essential¹
- Trend towards internationalization of health curricula^{1,2}
- International fieldwork placements (IFPs) build cultural awareness and adaptability^{3,4}
- Increased interest in global health and underserved communities^{5,6}



Rationale & Research Question

- Minimal research on the retrospections of Canadian OTs who completed IFPs during schooling.
- Existing literature focuses on immediate or short-term outcomes⁷
- **Gap:** Limited understanding of the lasting impacts of IFPs.
- **Question:** How do Canadian OTs make sense of their IFPs in relation to their transition from student to practitioner and their current professional practice?



Study Design & Participants

- Phenomenological qualitative design^{8,9} rooted in a constructivist paradigm¹⁰
- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)¹¹
- Purposive and snowball sampling
- Small, homogenous sample (n=8)



Pseudonym	Gender	Years of Practice	Ethnicity
Darian	Female	2	N/A
Bailey	Female	5	White
Kai	Female	7	White
Anne	Female	6	White
Maria	Female	5	White European
Sam	Female	8	White
Reese	Female	4.5	East Asian
Lucy	Female	5	Jewish/White

N/A = researchers were unable to confirm information with participant;

***Host countries included: India, Malawi, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, and Cameroon (virtual).*

Data Collection

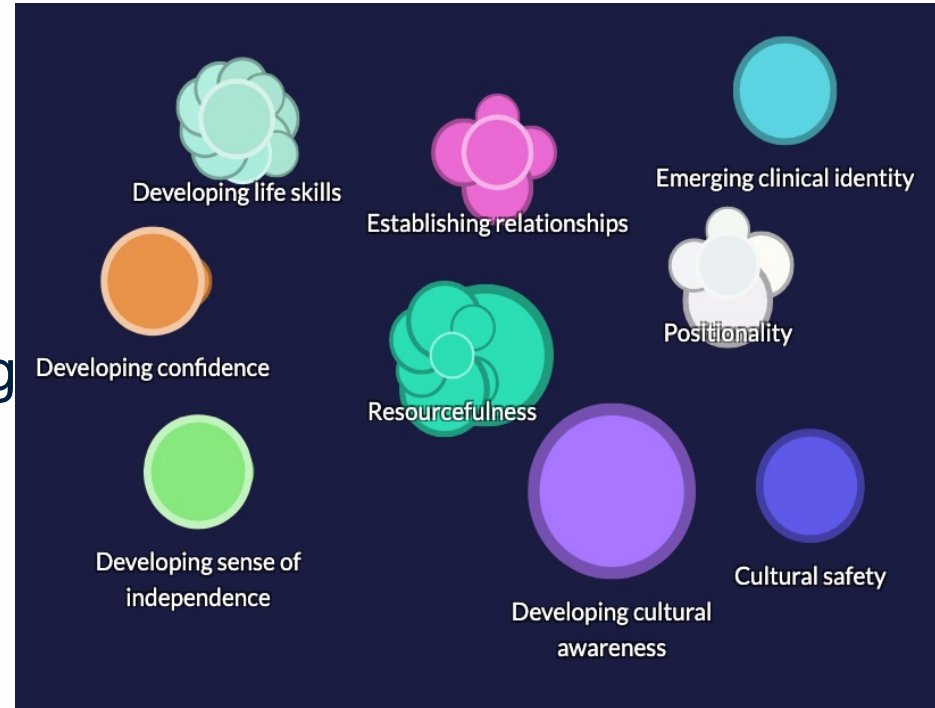
Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Tell us about the location, duration, population, and setting of your international fieldwork placement (IFP)?
2. Can you share your motivation for completing an IFP during your program?
3. Can you reflect on ways that your IFP experience has impacted you personally and/or professionally?
4. Can you tell us about the influence that your IFP experience had on your transition from student to practicing OT?
5. Can you reflect on how your experience completing an IFP has influenced your current practice as an OT?
6. Do you think there are ways OT programs can increase accessibility to IFP opportunities for students?



Data Analysis

- Quirkos
- Transcripts coded to identify underlying meanings
- Interpretative notes to document reflections and analytical thinking
- Emergence of four key themes



Cultivating Self-Efficacy Through Discomfort and Uncertainty



*"When you graduate you feel very, almost incompetent to do the work. It feels like you're just **thrown into this new world**. You have no clue what you're doing... Having that [IFP] and **having gone through that feeling already**, it didn't feel as uncomfortable... **I've done this type of thing before, and I can do it. I am a good OT.**"*

- Reese

Resourcefulness as a Way of Thinking & Practicing



"We had always been told that standardized assessments were the gold standard, and... seeing how the standard isn't the only way to do things was a big eye opener. ... *I think going into to practice, **I wasn't trying to... fit everything into this cookie cutter mold** that I probably would have pushed for, had I only done placements in... structured Canadian settings."*

- Kai

Establishing Relational Growth in Unfamiliar Terrain



*"A family from [an African Country]... were kind of **struggling** with being in this, like '**white controlled environment**'... and I just kind of was like, 'Oh yeah... I actually have been to [that country]'... I started telling them... all the **words** that I **learned in Chichewa**... it kind of **helped** them **open up to me**" - Bailey*

The Ongoing Journey of Cultural Responsiveness



*"Working as an OT student in [the IFP country]...
eliminated that 'white saviourism' ... the things that
you were coming across are **so much bigger than
you.** ... International placements can give you such a
**greater breadth of information about ... system level
issues...**"*

- Sam

Implications

- Transformative learning around resourcefulness and cultural responsiveness
- Ethical global engagement and accessible local alternatives



Future Directions	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accessibility barriers• Local vs. non-traditional placements• Host site and preceptor perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Homogeneity• Time constraints• Volunteer bias• Researcher positionality

Thank you!



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