

Standardized Patients in Psychosocial Practice for Occupational Therapy Students – a pilot project

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Introduction



Everything starts with an observation...

The 'Preparedness Gap' in Psychosocial OT Education

A persistent gap between students' academic knowledge and their practical "preparedness" for psychosocial practice

- Pre-intervention data from three cohorts (N=395) shows high levels of fear:



- The Consequence:** Students report high anxiety and stigmatizing attitudes



Traditional method

Integrating real case (RC) contact into Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

Advantages

- frequently used in mental health and psychosocial education
- Research demonstrates that can effectively reduce stigma and anxiety among students (e.g. Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2022; Van et al., 2022; Patten et al., 2012; Gu et al., 2021)

Limitations

- Costly
- High logistical burden
- Client instability
- Potential burden to clients



Literature Review



Simulation training



- **standardized patients (SPs), high-fidelity mannequins, virtual reality (VR), or role-play**
- consistently **reduces anxiety and increases confidence** among healthcare students and professionals
- Evidence shows that **SPs** and **role-plays** are especially effective in mental health and psychosocial settings (e.g. Zhang & Wang, 2025; Silva et al., 2022; Rabie & Hakami, 2023; Labrague et al., 2019; Øgård-Repål et al., 2018)

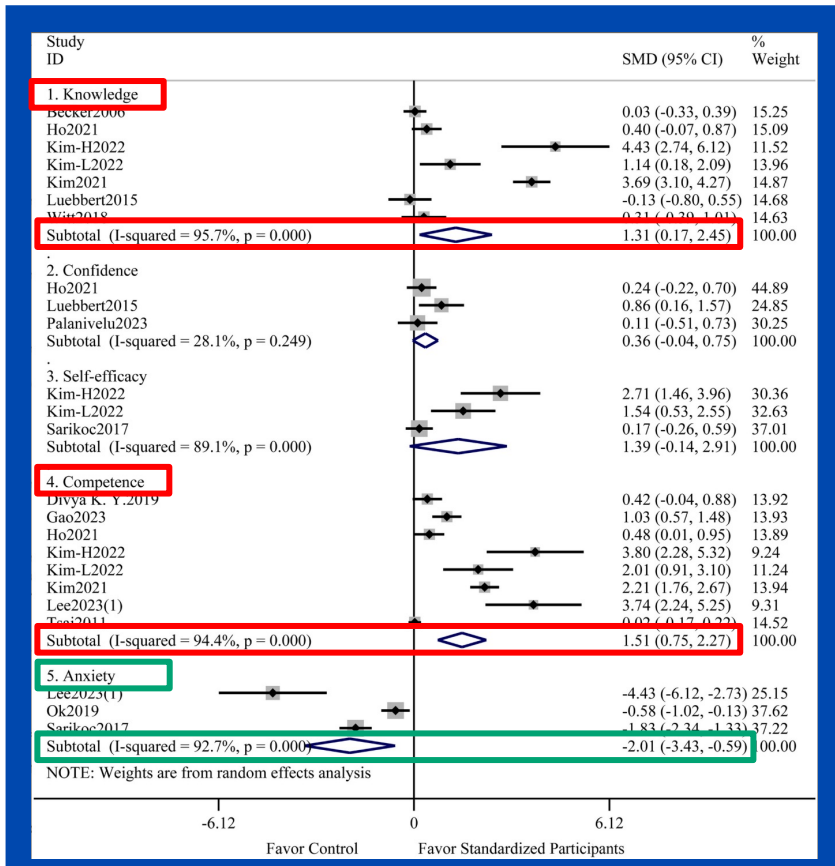
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Standardized Patient (SP)



- a **lay person** who has been **trained** to **accurately and consistently** portray an actual patient
- enable **experiential learning** and **assessment** of students' skills
- provide students with **constructive feedback**
- Literature supported as the **gold standard** for *safe, consistent, and repeatable* skill practice (Lewis et al., 2017)

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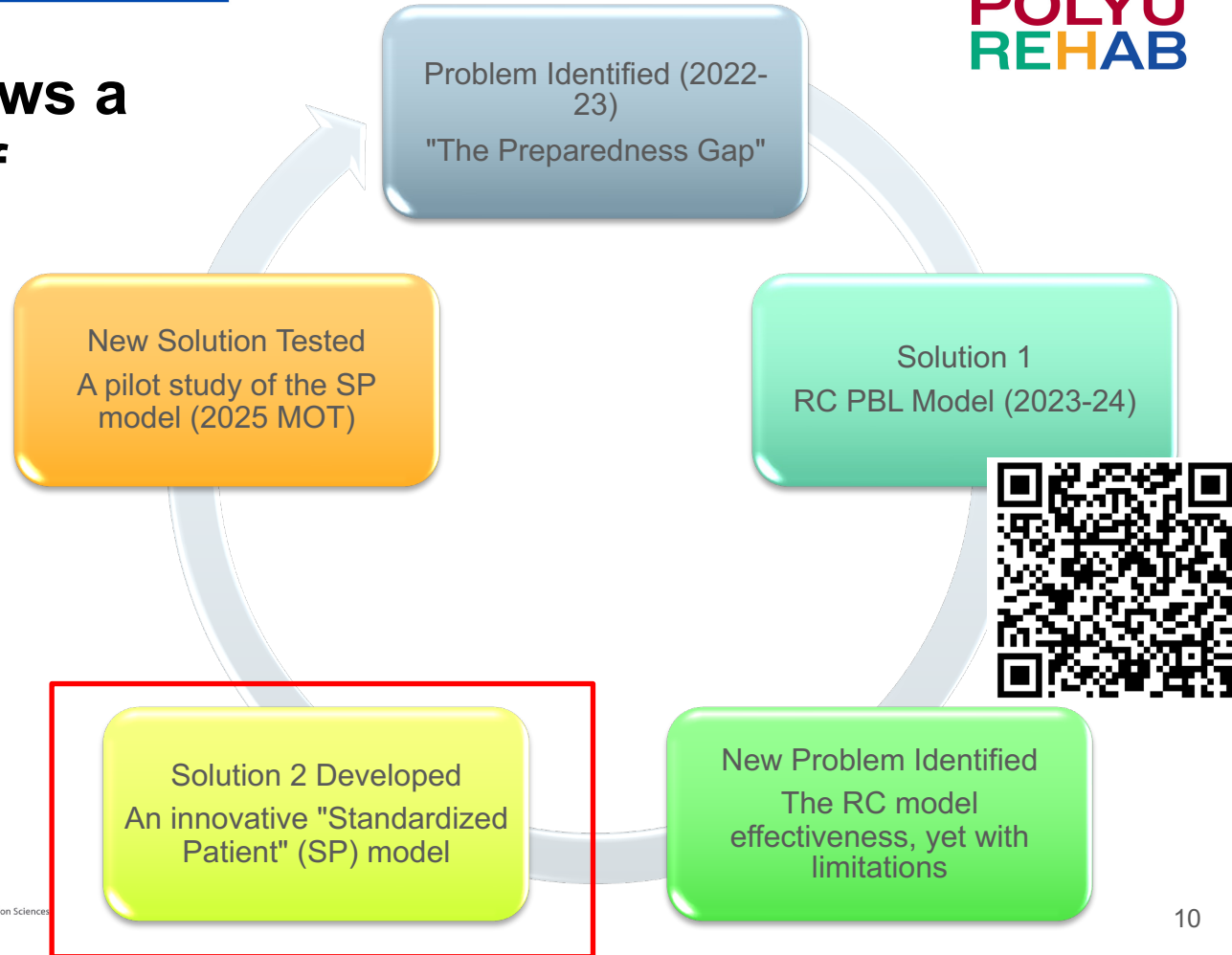
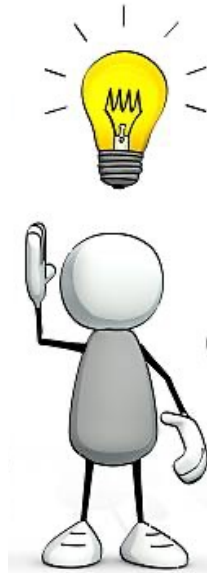
Meta-analysis by Zhang & Wang (2025)

- Comparisons with control groups indicated that SPs significantly increased **knowledge** (SMD = 1.31), **competence** (SMD = 1.51) and reduced **anxiety** (SMD = -2.01).

Methodology



Our research follows a multi-year cycle of enquiry



"Standardized Patient" PBL Pilot Project



Task 1: Preparation of SP – But who can be our SPs?

*“In healthcare simulation, **actors** may be hired to perform in an educational activity; however, as SPs, they are doing something different from actors. They are **part of an educational team**, focused on **fulfilling the learning objectives** of a simulation activity in service to learners.”*

The Association of Standardized Patient Educators (ASPE),
Standards of Best Practice (SOBP)
(Lewis et al, 2017)

Innovation & Collaboration



Drama-in-education training in
Applied Theatre program!

戲劇藝術碩士 (應用劇場, 戲劇與教育)

Master of Fine Arts in Drama (Applied Theatre, Drama and Education)

2 年全日制 | 3 至 4 年兼讀制 | 修讀 60 學分

Full-time 2 years | Part-time 3-4 years | 60 Credits

Curriculum Charts 課程大綱

Required Courses 必修科目

- Thesis Project in Drama 論文習作
- Professional Practice I, II, III 專業實習一、二、三
- Applied Theatre: Theory and Practice
應用劇場：理論與實踐
- Drama as a Performing Arts Subject: Teaching and Learning
戲劇作為表演藝術學科
- Drama-in-Education 戲劇教學法
- Drama Therapy Theories 戲劇治療理論
- Drama, Theatre & Creativity 戲劇、劇場與創意
- Acting for Drama and Theatre Education I, II 演技一、二
- Critical Studies in Education for Performing Arts Educators I, II
教育研究與評論一、二
- Thesis Project Seminar I, II 論文習作研討課一、二
- Process Writing (English) / Process Writing (Chinese)
寫作訓練 (英 / 中)
- Research and Practice-as-Research 研究方法

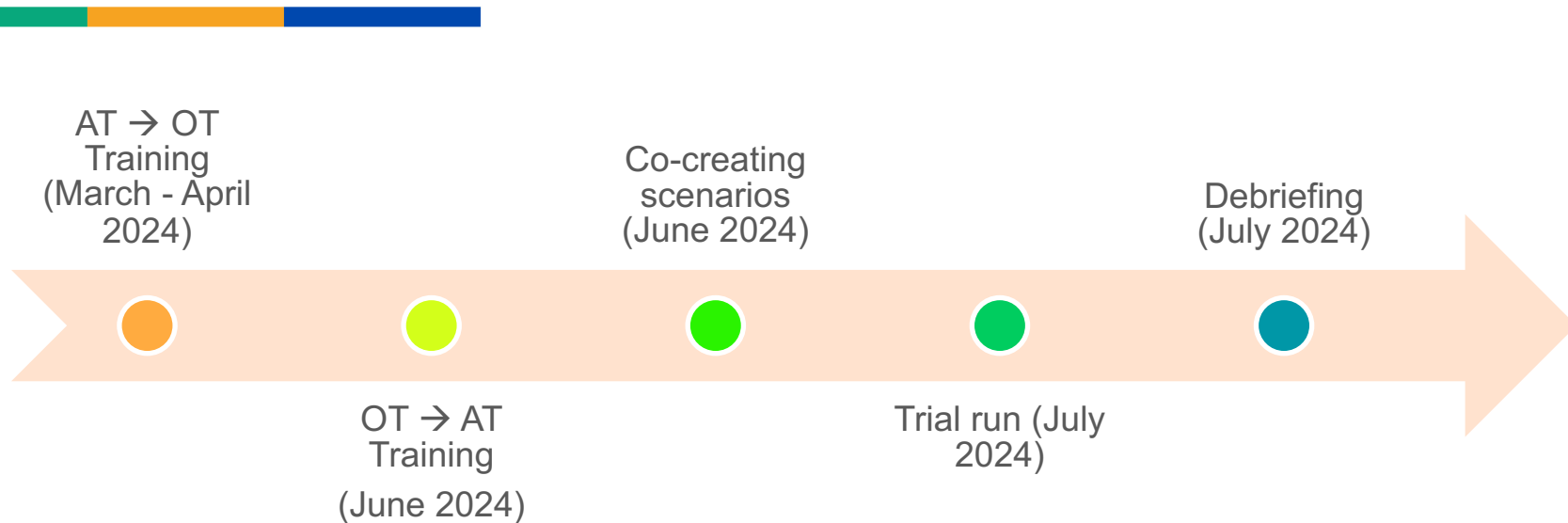
School Electives 選修科目

- Contemporary Performance Practice 當代表演實踐
- Devising Theatre: Theory and Practice 編作劇場：理論與實踐
- Modern Drama Theory 現代戲劇理論
- Theatre and Technology 劇場與科技
- Drama in Literature 文學中的戲劇
- New Script Workshop 創作劇工作坊
- Directed Study in Play Reading and Drama Theory
戲劇導研與理論
- Documentary Theatre 紀事劇場
- Independent Study 個人研習
- Theory of Dramaturgy 劇場構作理論

Note 註:

1. Some of the Electives may be offered in a two-year cycle. 部分選修科目或會每兩年開辦一次。
2. Courses may have pre-requisites and are subject to School approval. 如科目附有修讀條件，學生須獲批准才可選修。
3. Some courses are prioritised for relevant majors, and may have class size limitation. 部份主修學生將獲優先考慮，而每班亦有人數上限。
4. Courses are offered subject to sufficient enrolment, and may not be offered every year. 科目或會每年開辦，視與否視乎報讀人數而定。

Road map of Preparation of SP



AT → OT
Training
(March - April
2024)

Co-creating
scenarios
(June 2024)

Debriefing

Communication
and Observation
skills



Trial run

AT → OT
Training
(March - April
2024)

Co-creating
scenarios
(June 2024)

Debriefing

OT → AT
Training
(June 2024)

What is mental
illness? A mystery-
solving game



Training for
OT students
by AT
students
(March - April
2024)

Co-creating
scenarios
(June 2024)

OT → AT
Training
(June 2024)



Training for
OT students
by AT
students
(March - April
2024)

Co-creating
scenarios
(June 2024)

Debriefing



Trial run

- Mental state exam with 2 co-created cases



Trial run



Debriefing

- AT → OT providing comments on interviewing skills
- OT → AT comment on their portrayal of the case

Task 2: Intervention – Pilot with MOT 2025 Cohort



- Each group of students is assigned with a SP
 - Session 1: listen to SP's recovery stories
 - Session 2: intake interview and Mental State Exam with SP
- PBL tutorials before and after each SP encounter (faculty + part time OT)
 - Peer teaching (mini-presentation)
 - Preparation of interview
 - Case conceptualization
 - Treatment planning

Results



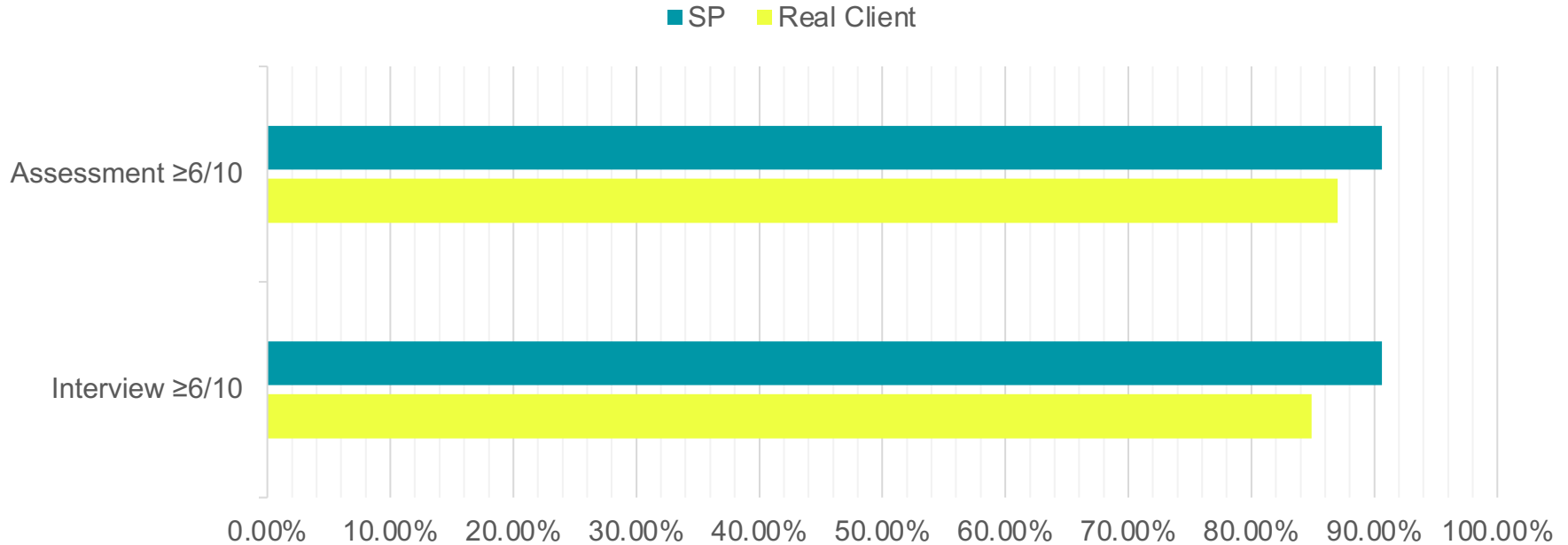
Results

SP model pre/post test result

Metric	Pre-Test (N=33)	Post-Test (N=32)	Change
Negative attitude	69.7% (23)	43.8% (14)	↓25.9%
Confidence in interview (≥6/10)	51.5% (17)	90.6% (29)	↑39.1%
Confidence in assessment (≥6/10)	54.5% (18)	90.6% (29)	↑36.1%

Strong positive changes in both attitude and confidence

Comparison of students' confidence level after RC vs SP intervention



The SP Pilot achieved *comparable* final confidence levels as the traditional real case model.

Discussion



Discussion

- The SP Pilot model is **equally effective** at building student confidence as the resource-heavy RC model
- The SP model achieves **comparable skills confidence** *while solving the core logistical problems* (sustainability, consistency, safety) of the RC model

Feedback from OT students



Authentic
experience,
can explore
with a variety
of symptoms



Feel safe and
confident

Instant
feedback
from teacher
and SP

Good
preparation
before
placement

Limitations & Future Research

Limitations:

- SP study is a *pilot* with a small sample (N=33)
- Quasi-experimental (non-randomized cohorts from different years)
- Self-report data

Future Research:

- Scale the SP model to BSc cohort and compare
- Use OSCEs to objectively measure skill gains from both models

Conclusion

- This project provides strong evidence that a **high-fidelity, interdisciplinary SP program** is a highly effective and **sustainable** pedagogical choice for foundational psychosocial education
- **Interdisciplinary** (OT x Applied Theatre) collaboration is a powerful, replicable model for building SP programs
- Institutions can confidently invest in SP programs as a primary, not "lesser," method

Acknowledgement

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Clinical collaborators

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Students and faculties from Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts

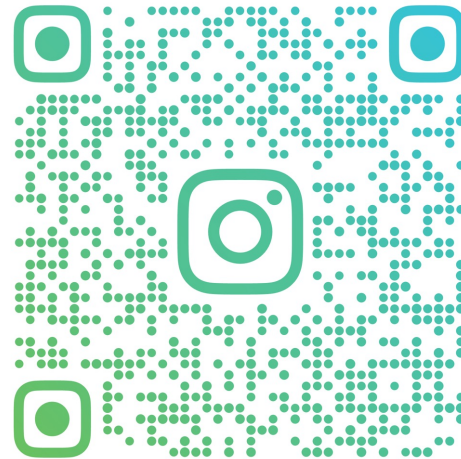
And all the PolyU OT students involved



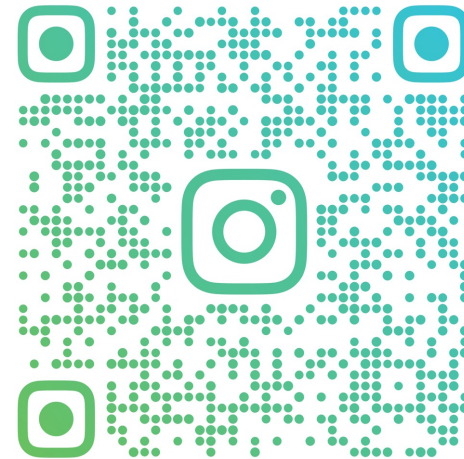
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The End
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