

Exploring the understanding of entry-level graduate OT students' perceptions of disability

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Introduction: Occupational therapy (OT) students receive countless hours of classroom and clinical education to become experts in working with people with disabilities (PWD). Students will begin their entry-level curriculum with past experiences and beliefs that are a foundation for conscious and unconscious attitudes toward disability. This foundation may impact how a student translates and incorporates curriculum knowledge and may reinforce bias or negative stereotyping found to contribute to health disparities of PWD. Understanding students' initial attitudes toward disability can inform curriculum design that might help counteract negative attitudes to build curriculum that attend to social justice concerns of PWD.

Objective: The aim of this study was to explore the understanding of entry-level graduate OT students' perceptions of disability.

Method: Students from three university entry-level graduate OT programs participated in 5 focus group semi-structured interview sessions. Focus groups were recorded, transcribed and analyzed using a theoretical thematic analysis to identify major themes from across groups.

Results/Implications: This presentation will describe the super-ordinate themes that emerged across groups as well as divergent themes of significance. Theoretical links to themes will be used to analyze and understand the findings. Implications of how students' entry-level disability attitudes might be influenced by curriculum design will be discussed.

Conclusion: Understanding the role different understandings of disability have on professional development will help OT be more social justice oriented – more clearly identify and meet the needs of the disability community. These findings can inform OT on curriculum design to ensure it promotes the equality of PWD.