

Developing cultural awareness in
occupational therapy education:
A pilot study of student learning
in two parallel
rehabilitation cases



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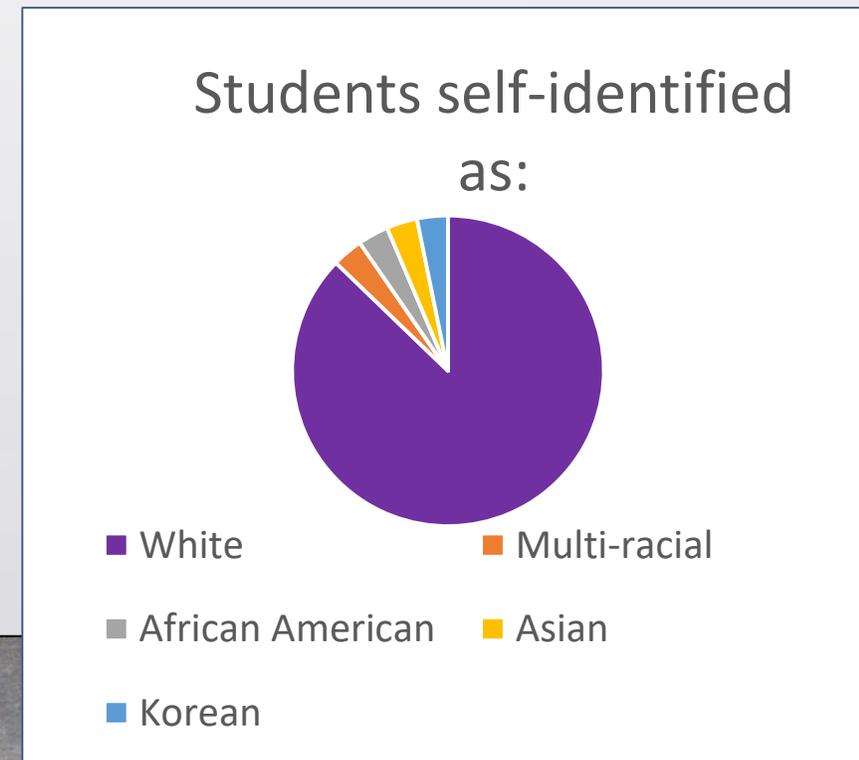
Background and Research Question



- **Problem-Based Learning** (PBL) as an educational method
 - Complex, realistic cases with student-directed learning opportunities
 - Promotes critical thinking and problem solving (Kong et al., 2014)
 - Promotes group dynamics and collaboration (Hommes et al., 2014)
- **Preparation to work** with diverse communities
 - Health disparities and inequities in the USA (Weinstein et al., 2017)
 - Limited diversity in occupational therapy workforce
- **Research Question: How does the cultural background of a PBL case influence students' development of cultural awareness and reflection?**

Method

- **Participants:** 34 students, most self-identified as white, 4 small groups with an OT educator or clinician as facilitator.
- **PBL Case:** Two parallel PBL cases; differing only in whether the client was from the majority or minority culture; two day case.
- **IRB approval**
- **Measures:** Post-case survey (Likert scale and open ended questions); discussion of other version of case
- **Analysis:** Themes and descriptive statistics



Two Parallel PBL Cases

Tom

(majority culture)

White (assumed);
Catholic; uses both
contemporary
medicine and herbal
supplements

Both

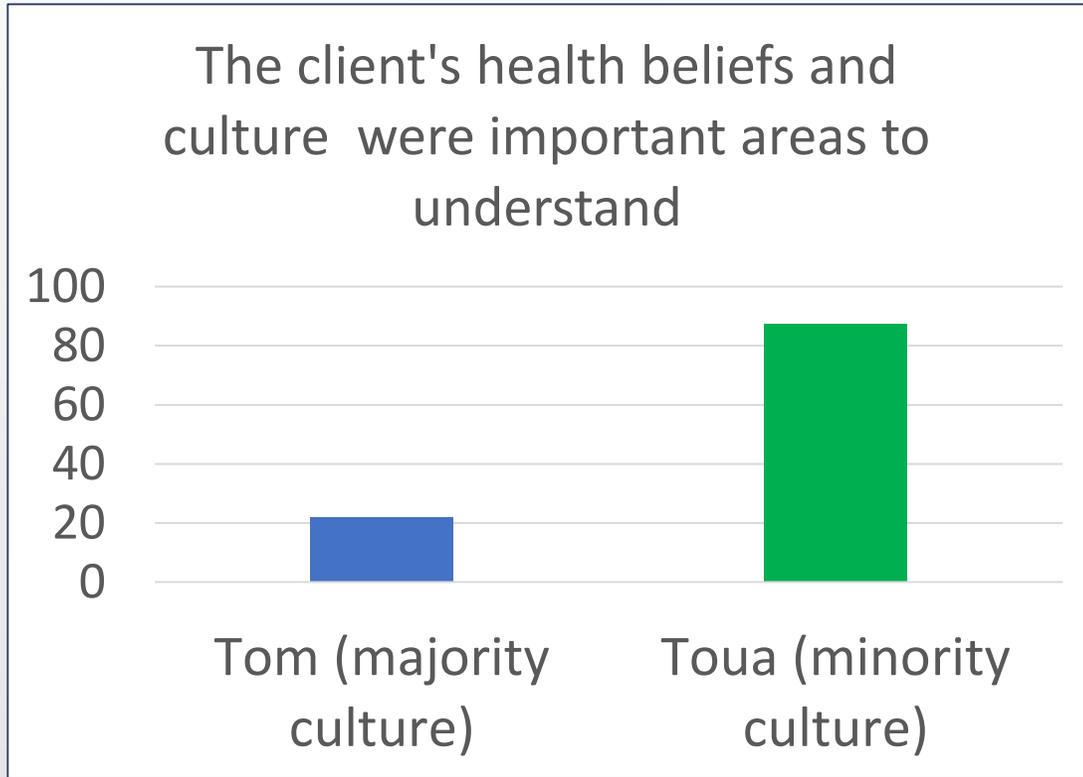
Brachial plexus injury,
hunting accident;
supportive families;
roles as spouse,
father, son; work as
butcher; local
resident

Toua

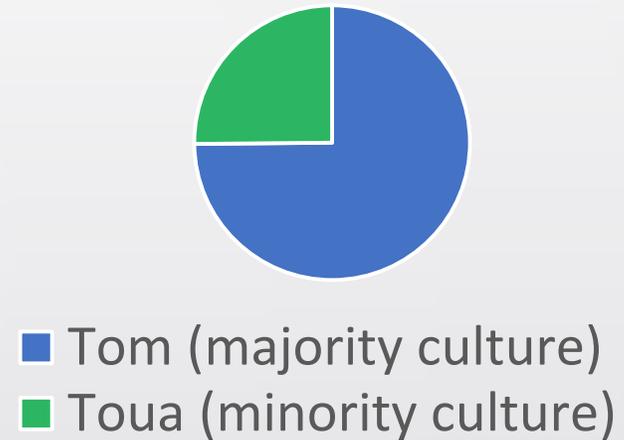
(minority culture)

Laotian/Hmong
ethnicity;
Shamanism; uses
both contemporary
medicine and
spiritual healing

Results



This case encouraged me to reflect on my beliefs and values



Tom: "...are alternative medicine approaches within the scope of OT?"

Toua: "...an opportunity to practice respect for clients with differing cultural views..."

Effective treatment requires:



• To best work with **Tom**, understand his:

- **Motivation**
- Priorities, goals
- Medical condition, pain

Majority culture

• To best work with **Toua**, understand his:

- **Values, beliefs, culture**
- Priorities, goals
- Medical condition, pain

Minority culture

How are your values & beliefs similar to this client's?



- **Tom (majority culture):** 89% identified similarity in health beliefs, values, spirituality
- **Toua (minority culture):** 94% identified similarity in spirituality, commitment to family, hard work

Students' predicted comparable levels of client motivation, compliance, and success in therapy for both **Tom** and **Toua**.

Summary and Practice Implications



- Assumptions of cultural similarity reduced reflection.
- Cultural unfamiliarity facilitated greater reflection on personal beliefs.
- Expectations of equal outcomes for both cases;
 - Does the anticipation of equal outcomes require additional consideration?
- Parallel cases appear to offer rich learning, but results suggest additional facilitator prompts and cues are required to focus and further depth of reflection.