Conflict Management in Occupational Therapy Education: Process Drama as a Teaching Strategy

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Abstract

The stressful and demanding environment of a healthcare facility can lead to interpersonal conflict. As a result of working in these environments, occupational therapy students may experience such conflict during Level II fieldwork. Research has shown that effective conflict management is an important component of success on Level II fieldwork; however, occupational therapy students often self-report a lack of confidence, comfort, and competence with managing conflict. Forty Master of Occupational Therapy students took part in a 2-day conflict management workshop. The workshop consisted of didactic training of conflict management concepts; large group process drama activities that introduced relevant role-play concepts; and small groups process drama activities that applied role-play concepts specific to fieldwork conflict scenarios. Evaluation was conducted through pre- and post-surveys before and after the training. Pre- and post-surveys both gauged students' self-perceptions of confidence, competence, and comfort around conflict management. The mean average of students' self-perceptions of comfort, confidence, and competence with regard to conflict management improved after participation in the workshop. An independent samples t-test was completed for each self-perception question (confidence, comfort, and competence). There was significant difference in the scores for two questions: confidence pre-survey (M=2.95) and confidence post-survey (M=3.31); t(78)=3.46, p

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Conflict Management in Occupational Therapy Education:

Process Drama as a Teaching Strategy

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ABSTRACT

The stressful and demanding environment of a healthcare facility can lead to interpersonal conflict. As a result of working in these environments, occupational therapy students may experience such conflict during Level II fieldwork. Research has shown that effective conflict management is an important component of success on Level II fieldwork; however, occupational therapy students often self-report a lack of confidence, comfort, and competence with managing conflict. Forty Master of Occupational Therapy students took part in a 2-day conflict management workshop. The workshop consisted of didactic training of conflict management concepts; large group process drama activities that introduced relevant role-play concepts; and small groups process drama activities that applied role-play concepts specific to fieldwork conflict scenarios. Evaluation was conducted through pre- and post-surveys before and after the training. Pre- and post-surveys both gauged students' self-perceptions of confidence, competence, and comfort around conflict management. The mean average of students' self-perceptions of comfort, confidence, and competence with regard to conflict management improved after participation in the workshop. An independent samples t-test was completed for each self-perception question (confidence, comfort, and competence). There was significant difference in the scores for two questions: confidence pre-survey (M=2.95) and confidence post-survey (M=3.31); t(78)=3.46, p<.001, d=0.78; comfort pre-survey (M=2.5) and comfort post-survey (M=3.23) t(78)=6.23, p=.011, d=1.40. One question did not show statistical significance: competence pre-survey (M=2.73) and competence post-survey (M=3.31); t(78)=5.31, p=.855. These results may inform curriculum around occupational therapy conflict management education prior to Level II fieldwork experiences.

INTRODUCTION
Healthcare environments often involve high productivity and increased specialization, combined with a demanding need for critical thinking and decision making, which often leads to conflicts (Landa-Gonzalez, 2008). The impact of conflict in the healthcare environment has been well documented with evidence of lower-quality patient care (Baldwin & Daugherty, 2008), decreased patient satisfaction (Overton & Lowry, 2013), staff burnout or turnover (Baldwin & Daugherty, 2008), and decreased staff satisfaction (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003).

Conflict Management
Conflict management is an important aspect of preparation for Level II Fieldwork, and the skill of engaging in effective conflict management is needed for successful clinical practice (Landa-Gonzalez, 2008). Conflict management can be thought of in terms of competence, which encompasses both appropriateness and effectiveness of a response to conflict (Suppiah & Rose, 2006). Conflict competence can be defined as the "ability to develop and use cognitive, emotional and behavioral skills that enhance productive outcomes of conflict while reducing the likelihood of escalation or harm" (Runde & Flanagan, 2010, p. 2). Landa-Gonzalez (2008) recognized that conflict management training benefits occupational therapy students and sets them up to be more effective entry-level therapists. The importance of self-awareness of one's own responses to conflict is a foundational piece needed in conflict management education (Landa-Gonzalez, 2008; Overton & Lowry, 2013). Self-awareness of one's perceptions of a situation -- as well as flexibility in responding to the situation -- can vastly improve the effectiveness of managing the conflict and preserving the relationship between conflicting parties (Dierdorff, Fisher, & Rubin, 2018).

Occupational Therapy Education
Very little evidence-based trainings specific to conflict management currently exist in the health science professions (Kim et al., 2017; Sexton & Orchard, 2016). Some examples of conflict management trainings include simulation-based training models (Kim et al., 2017), didactic instruction and role-play models (Zweibel, Goldstein, Manwaring, & Marks, 2013), and discussion-based models (Haraway & Haraway, 2005). Occupational therapy students could benefit from any of these models prior to going on Level II fieldwork. One possible avenue for implementing these models within the occupational therapy curriculum is in a Level II Fieldwork Seminar (Spiliotopoulou, 2007). Seminars provide the opportunity to practice, reflect on, and work through skills needed in fieldwork settings. Evidence suggests as their skills improve, students feel more confident, and this confidence decreases their anxiety, thus making them more receptive to the learning process (Martin, Morris, Moore, Sadlo, & Crouch, 2004; Spiliotopoulou, 2007; Tan, Meredith, & McKenna, 2004). Spiliotopoulou's (2007) evaluation of the impact of a seminar preparation class on student fieldwork performance indicated that it helped students meet fieldwork demands. The relationship

between the student and fieldwork educator(s) has been identified as a common source of student stress (Llorens, Burton, & Still,1999), and this relationship can be indicative of student performance on the fieldwork placement (Best, 1994). While students identified they were made aware of issues around the relationship with their fieldwork educator(s), they self-reported a need to continually practice coping with difficult clients and staff (Spiliotopoulou, 2007).

Process Drama as a Teaching Strategy
Typically applied in arts and humanities-based contexts, process drama is relatively unknown in the scholarship of occupational therapy education. Process drama is an interactive, dialogic, transformative, teaching strategy (Heathcote & Bolton, 2010) that allows students to explore, discuss, and reflect on conflicts in role within a fictional, safe environment. One specific type of process drama is called Forum Theatre. In Forum Theater, the facilitator, as well as observers, can start and stop the action, while the observer takes notes about the different responses and resolutions (if any) to the conflict (Boal, 1979). This active teaching and learning strategy naturally aligns with the goals of a Level II Fieldwork Seminar because it allows students to rehearse appropriate and effective responses to conflict. Via this active learning strategy, students practice and develop conflict management skills in both the cognitive and affective domains of Bloom's Taxonomy (Rao & Stupans, 2012). The technique of being in role, or playing a character, also creates space for students to develop individual thought on the conflict in parallel with larger group reflection. Hertel and Millis (2002) used the terminology *simulations*, identifying that this adds a deeper social component that is not evident in a case discussion alone. Nilson (2016) further expanded this concept of simulations, pointing out that students can test a "hypothesis" of a theoretical situation and "live out […] intense emotional, cognitive, and behavioral experiences" (p. 149). Seiler et al. (2011) incorporated the idea of negotiation within a simulation, focusing on the other individual, and their unique point of view, in an interpersonal communication.

The aim of this article is to discuss the use of process drama technique as a teaching strategy for conflict management during a Level II Fieldwork Seminar. This article will explore the effectiveness of a pilot of this process drama approach in promoting learning and self-perceived skill acquisition/competence and increasing self-perceived comfort and confidence with conflict management.

PROCESS DRAMA ROLE PLAY DEVELOPMENT

Participants
During the fourth semester of the didactic portion of the curriculum, 40 entry level Master of Occupational Therapy students participated in a seminar course designed to prepare them for Level II fieldwork. The participants included four males and 36 females ranging in age from 22 to 35, with a mean age of 24.5. All participants were enrolled in a Level II Fieldwork Seminar course that met weekly throughout the semester. This seminar covered content areas such as professionalism, conflict management, licensure information, and NBCOT preparation. The conflict management training occurred during weeks nine and ten in the 14-week semester.

Description
The conflict management process drama session took place over two one-hour long class periods over consecutive weeks in a large lab space. The two authors served as lead facilitators for both sessions. The same cohort of students attended both sessions, with 40 students present at the first session and 39 present at the second. The first session occurred in the large group with the authors acting as the facilitators. The second session occurred with small groups, each with its own student facilitator.

At the beginning of the first class period of the process drama sessions, students were asked to write down their biggest concerns about fieldwork conflict on index cards, which were collected for later. Following this activity, conflict management as it relates to Level II fieldwork was introduced. Then, via PowerPoint presentation, the facilitator defined the concept of conflict competence. The presentation also discussed common causes of and appropriate responses to conflict, and guiding principles of conflict management (see Table 1).

Table 1

Guiding Principles of Conflict Management

1.	Conflict is inevitable and both positive and negative consequences may occur depending on how the conflict is managed
2.	The results are likely to be better with active engagement rather than avoidance
3.	People must be motivated to address conflict
4.	Behavioral, cognitive, and emotional skills can be acquired
5.	Emotional skills require self-awareness
6.	The environment must be neutral and feel safe

Note. Data for guiding principles of conflict management from Overton & Lowry, 2013, p. 260.

Process drama, and specifically Forum Theatre as described above, was then introduced as a teaching method. After the process drama rules were presented, the facilitator shifted to the creative portion of the session. First, students were asked to generate the setting and characters (including the fieldwork educator, fieldwork students, and patients) of an imagined fieldwork scenario. The facilitators had generated sample conflict situations ahead of time, and revealed the situations after a warm-up activity leading to the main activity.

For the warm-up activity, improvisation and role-play concepts were applied to healthcare-related activities. For example, the game of charades was adapted such that students would role-play transferring a patient to a chair or taking a patient's blood pressure.

Students were placed in groups of 4-5 with the following roles represented: fieldwork student, fieldwork educator, patient, observer, and facilitator. Each group received a different scenario created by the facilitators that consisted of conflict between the fieldwork student and fieldwork educator and/or patient. The group then role-played the scenario using Forum Theater concepts. The students used the remainder of the first session time to role-play different approaches to their conflicts. Students were allowed to choose their roles and remained in that role throughout that activity. During this time, the facilitators observed each group and provided feedback as needed.

At the beginning of week two's session, representatives from each group shared results of the group activity. This allowed the students to hear different conflict scenarios and their peers' responses to those conflicts. It also allowed members from different groups to provide suggestions for another group's scenario.

Students then engaged in an improvisation warm-up activity related to healthcare settings that introduced the concept of tactics, a common improvisation technique. For example, students were asked to individually attempt to convince a non-compliant patient to come to therapy using different tactics such as tone of voice, body language, appeals to reason, and so on.

Students then returned to their small groups from the day one session to engage in the Forum Theater role-play activity. This time, the scenarios were drawn from the self-identified concerns they had written down on the first day. The groups worked through their scenarios and once again returned as a whole class to share responses to the different conflicts.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The effects of the process drama conflict management class were assessed using a pre- and post-survey created by the authors. Exempt status by the IRB at the University was received. The pre- and post-survey included a four-point Likert scale regarding agreement with three statements about self-perception of conflict management qualities: confidence, comfort, and competence (see Table 2). These were chosen in line with Bandura's social cognitive theory and construct of self-efficacy in that one's self perception of aptitude impacts self-perception of performance (Lunenburg, 2011). The post-survey also included three open ended questions asking about student satisfaction with the training (see Table 3). An instrument measuring self-perceptions of occupational therapy students regarding conflict confidence, comfort, and competence, as well as satisfaction toward process drama as a teaching and learning strategy could not be found, so the survey was developed by the authors. This was supported with the notion that "scales of perceived self-efficacy must be tailored to the particular domain of functioning that is the object of interest" (Bandura, 2005, p. 308).

The pre- and post-surveys were administered on paper and students' responses were anonymous. Forty students took the pre-survey. Thirty-nine took the post-survey because one student was absent the second day. Responses to the Likert scale questions were compiled in the aggregate only. A mixed methods approach was used for analysis. Quantitative analysis included inferential statistics completed on the Likert scale survey responses. Qualitative analysis included a deductive descriptive analysis of the open ended responses. The two authors independently identified common categories of responses. Categorical patterns emerged quickly upon the independent first passes of reading student responses. Based on this pattern coding, these common categories were compared, and differences, if any, in the exact language of the categories were reconciled. Frequency of common categories in the responses to each question were addressed.

RESULTS

Self-Perception of Confidence, Comfort, and Competence with Conflict Management

Inferential statistics were used to analyze responses to pre- and post-surveys. The survey results reflect responses from 40 students on the pre-survey and 39 students on the post-survey. An independent samples t-test was completed for each self-perception question (confidence, comfort, and competence) with the pre- and post-survey responses as the categorical variable and each question as the group/test variable (see Table 2). Cohen's *d* was also calculated for each statistically significant result in order to obtain the effect size. There was significant difference in the scores for two questions: confidence pre-survey (M=2.95) and confidence post-survey (M=3.31); t(78)=3.46,

p<.001, *d*=0.78; comfort pre-survey (M=2.5) and comfort post-survey (M=3.23) t(78)=6.23, p=.011, *d*=1.40. One question did not show statistical significance: competence pre-survey (M=2.73) and competence post-survey (M=3.31); t(78)=5.31, p=.855.

Table 2

Results from Independent Samples t-test for Confidence, Comfort, and Competence ("feel prepared") Related to Conflict Management

Self-Perception Questions	Average Survey scores (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree)		Average Survey Standard Deviation		Statistical Significance P=.05
	Pre-survey n = 40	Post-survey n = 39	Pre-survey n=40	Post-survey n=39	
I am confident I have the skills needed to handle conflict while on Level II fieldwork.	2.95	3.31	.389	.521	<.001
I feel comfortable with the idea of handling conflict while on Level II fieldwork.	2.50	3.23	.556	.485	.011
I feel prepared to handle conflict while on Level II fieldwork.	2.73	3.31	.498	.468	.855

The effect size for the confidence analysis (*d* = .78) was found to exceed Cohen's (1988) convention for a medium effect (*d*=.50). These results indicate that students reported experiencing higher levels of confidence following the workshop (M= 3.31, SD= .521). The effect size for the comfort analysis (*d* = 1.40) was found to exceed Cohen's (1988) convention for a large effect (*d*=.80). These results indicate students reported experiencing higher levels of comfort following the workshop (M=3.23, SD= .4.85).

Student Satisfaction with Training
Analysis of the open-ended satisfaction questions on the post-survey resulted in a collation of emerging categories of responses with the top three categories for each question identified, and frequency of those categories calculated (see Table 3). For

Question 1, which was regarding what worked well and what the students enjoyed from the workshop, the most common category was enjoyment of the teaching strategy (74%, n=29). In response to Question 2, what did not work well, the top category was anxiety about acting (28%, n=11). And with Question 3, recommendations for the workshop, the most common category involved group composition – whether to utilize more small group work or to engage only in large group work (18%, n=7). A variety of student quotations representative of each of the top three categories is included in Table 4. These quotations are tagged with the representative category from Table 3. These quotations represent the most common sentiment of all the quotations within that respective category.

Table 3

Collated Student Responses Related to Student Satisfaction of and Recommendations for Conflict Management Training

Post-Survey Open Ended Question	Top 3 Categories	Frequency of Category (N=39)	Number of students who identified category
What did you think worked well for your learning? What did you enjoy about this experience?	1. Enjoyed the teaching strategy	74%	29
	2. Teaching strategy was helpful to learning	44%	17
	3. Promoted problem solving	13%	5
What didn't work well? What didn't you like?	1. Anxiety about acting	28%	11
	2. Time management	15%	6
	3. Group composition	<10%	3
What recommendations do you have to make this better?	1. Group composition	18%	7
	2. Factors related to participation	15%	6
	3. Time management	13%	5

Table 4

Student Quotations Representative of Top Three Categories Related to Satisfaction of and Recommendations for Conflict Management Training

Student Quotations Representative of Top Three Categories of Each Question
What did you think worked well for your learning? What did you enjoy about this experience?   "I think that observing role playing was more beneficial than reading case studies because we were able to hear an active response to different tactics." [**Enjoyed the teaching strategy**]   "Participating in the role play- even though it was uncomfortable at times. I enjoyed having the opportunity to practice in a non-judgmental setting." [**Enjoyed the teaching strategy**]   "Role playing helped me visualize the situation. It also made the learning more fun." [**Teaching strategy was helpful to learning**]   "I liked being able to problem solve with my classmates, because they are able to provide insight that I may be unaware of." [**Promoted problem solving**]
What didn't work well? What didn't you like?   "Being put on the spot can be intimidating, though I realize this is going to be an element of the FW experience." [**Anxiety about acting**]   "I think it all went well. Being put on the spot is a little uncomfortable, but good for learning." [**Anxiety about acting**]   "It would have been nice to be the player in all the situation. Time is not on our side" [**Time management**]   "I found it more difficult to work in the smaller groups." [**Group composition**]   "I didn't like when we stood in a large circle. I prefer the small groups." [**Group composition**]
What recommendations do you have to make this better?   "Split into two groups so there is not such a large group and more people are able to participate." [**Group composition**]   "Assign roles- some students stayed in the same roles each class/time." [**Factors related to participation**]   "Make each of these two classes an hour and a half each." [**Time management**]

DISCUSSION

A comparison of the pre- and post-survey responses to the three self-perception questions (comfort, confidence, and competence) showed statistical significance in regards to the confidence and comfort categories, with medium and large effect sizes respectively. These results are meaningful for occupational therapy academicians, fieldwork educators, and students because research suggests conflict management skills are an important aspect of Level II Fieldwork and sets students up to be more effective entry-level therapists (Landa-Gonzalez, 2008).

With whole group and small group interaction, the process drama workshop exemplified an active learning technique in which the students explored fictional -- but probable -- scenarios, rehearsed resolutions with their peers, and reflected on each conflict as a party to it or an outsider observing it (Heathcote & Bolton, 2010). The results are consistent with other similar active learning techniques, such as those used by Jalgaonkar, Sarkate, and Tripathi (2012), which found that more students favored role play to discussion-based learning as a learning technique for skills needed in their clinical practice. This was also reflected in the student responses to the open ended satisfaction questions with a majority of students identifying they enjoyed the active teaching strategy. Within this workshop, the smaller mean increases in perceived competence versus comfort and confidence would be expected because the students engaged in fictional scenarios rather than real-world conflicts. It may be plausible that students' competence may not significantly change until after they engage in real-world experiences.

The statistical significance in perception of confidence and comfort parallels Landa-Gonzalez's (2008) emphasis on self-awareness as an essential component within conflict management. Even though the simulation could not demonstrate actual responses to real-world situations, the safety of the environment provided students the encouragement to become confident and comfortable with demonstrating behavior and emotional responses that are reasonably appropriate in the real world. These gains from two hours of training show that it is possible to impact students' perceptions of confidence and comfort, and this perception may directly influence behavior. Research shows that the application of these skills leads to positive outcomes during conflict in Level II fieldwork experiences (Runde & Flanagan, 2010), so perhaps competence would become significantly impacted after skills are utilized in the real world.

In terms of process drama as a learning strategy, it was expected that students may be intimidated by the idea of acting out a conflict scenario in front of the group. As demonstrated in Jalgaonkar et al. (2012), pharmacology students similarly felt anxiety with the "idea of performing or acting in front of peers and teacher," noting that students were 4% less comfortable with role-play than case-based learning (p. e17). Because of

this expectation of intimidation, the workshop was scaffolded at the beginning of both days to prepare students for the type of role-play activities that would occur in front of an audience of their peers. The qualitative results are consistent with this expectation, showing that 28% of the students reported feeling anxiety about acting. However, a majority of the students (74%) reported enjoying the strategy nevertheless.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

This training was introduced prior to students going to Level II Fieldwork; however, further exploration of the most effective time frame within the curriculum may be beneficial, such as a single 2-hour workshop rather than two 1-hour workshops.

One limitation is the small sample size of this workshop which limits generalizability of the results. There was limited opportunity to implement the workshop with varying class sizes. For instance, it would be beneficial to test this workshop on a class size of less than 10 students to a large group of 100 students or more.

Since this was a pilot workshop, the survey created by the authors was not validated by external experts, and it acted as a piloted instrument during this process. In addition, due to the authors facilitating the sessions, there was a potential of bias in student responses on the pre- and post-survey; however, the authors tried to limit this by employing anonymity on the surveys.

In the future, a follow-up round of data collection of the workshop participants while on Level II fieldwork is recommended to solidify the relationship between training and real-world conflict resolution and determine if the training is generalizable. Additionally, identification of types of conflict and frequency of conflict while on Level II fieldwork could inform the development of future workshops specific to conflict within occupational therapy contexts. A student reflection piece modeled after the theoretical scenario and resolution structures from the original workshop may also be beneficial to demonstrate the application of the conflict management skills in the student's fieldwork placement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY EDUCATION

As a result of working in high-pressure healthcare environments, occupational therapy students may experience conflict while on Level II fieldwork. Level II fieldwork prepares students to be "competent, entry level, generalist occupational therapists" (Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education [ACOTE], 2012, p. S62), and this can be a very stressful time for students as they are testing and developing their critical thinking and decision-making skills under the supervision and guidance of a fieldwork educator. Conflict management training is an important skill needed for Level II fieldwork and successful clinical practice (Landa-Gonzalez, 2008) and a Level II Fieldwork Seminar class is an appropriate place within the curriculum to address this. The skills associated

with conflict management training are consistent with ACOTE standards for doctoral, master's, baccalaureate, and associate degree levels, which mandate that students must be able to demonstrate effective knowledge of interprofessional team dynamics principles, and to utilize effective interpersonal communication skills with patients, families, and others (ACOTE, 2012).

Furthermore, process drama was chosen as an active learning technique to highlight the cognitive and emotional domains of Bloom's Taxonomy (Rao & Stupans, 2012). It may be beneficial for occupational therapy programs intending to implement a conflict management workshop to develop training, based on the underpinnings of Bloom's Taxonomy, that addresses the components of conflict competence. The results of this study suggest the use of process drama as a teaching/learning strategy may have a positive impact on students' perceptions of confidence and comfort regarding conflict management.

CONCLUSION
The purpose of this pilot study was to determine the implications of process drama and similar role play activities on conflict management education in occupational therapy students preparing for Level II fieldwork. Results indicated that after participating in the process drama conflict management sessions, there was statistical significance in the students' self-reported higher levels of comfort and confidence. Despite the limitations of this pilot study, there is a potential for expanding this teaching strategy and identifying the benefits throughout Level II fieldwork.

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