

Are We Ready For This?: Students' Introspection on Clinical Preparedness

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INTRODUCTION

Graduate students at Long Island University-Brooklyn complete a full year of foundation coursework and two semesters of in-house clinic prior to placement in an off-campus pediatric as well as an adult externship. Throughout the time leading up to their placements, students are exposed to theoretical knowledge as well as assessment and intervention strategies for a variety of speech and language disorders. While engaged in an off-campus practicum, students are concurrently enrolled in a clinical seminar class. The purpose of these seminar classes are to augment field placements. This setup is deemed necessary to support graduate clinicians' ability to diagnose and treat a variety of clinical disorders (articulation, fluency, voice, language, and feeding).

Despite the amount of time devoted to this endeavor, students still often feel unprepared for what they will encounter in the professional world. Students must be competent in administering and scoring standardized and non-standardized assessments, deriving goals from assessment procedures, selecting appropriate therapy materials, delivering services in a variety of settings, writing daily session and evaluation notes, and collaborating with allied health professionals in an interdisciplinary team approach. Students in off-campus placements must also have a strong knowledge base of evidence based clinical treatment programs.

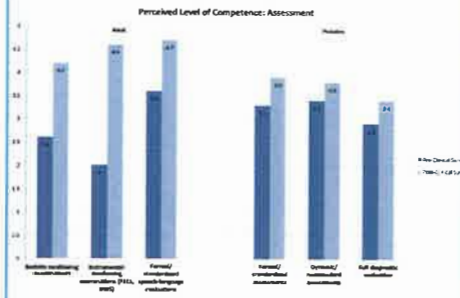
PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to determine, through the lens of the graduate student clinician, which aspects of their academic and clinical coursework were beneficial for preparing them for each of the aforementioned areas and which aspects should be adapted into the curriculum in order to better ensure competence and future success in the field.

METHODS

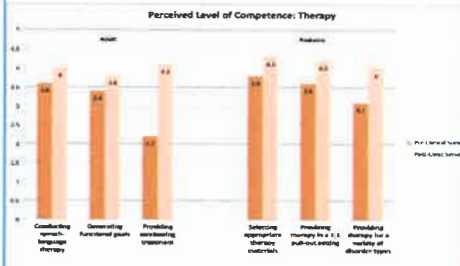
In order to assess the perceived competency of student clinicians, a pre and post survey was created and administered to graduate level students enrolled in SLP 611 Intermediate Clinical Practicum in the Treatment of Speech Language and Hearing Disorders Seminar and SLP 612 Advanced Clinical Practicum Seminar. The pre-survey consisted of 6 open ended questions and 22 Likert scale questions which asked students to evaluate their perceived level of competence in the areas of service delivery, providing therapy, diagnostics, and goal writing on a continuum from maximally prepared to minimally prepared. The students revisited these questions in the post survey questionnaire which analyzed the students' perceived level of preparedness after completing their pediatric and adult clinical rotations.

RESULTS



Perceived Level of Competence: Assessment

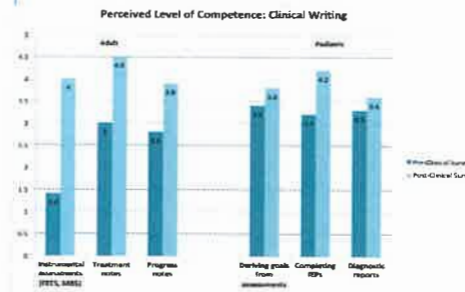
As illustrated in the above graph, students felt they were most competent in administering pediatric evaluations (formal/standardized, dynamic/nonstandard, full diagnostic evaluations), with respect to their pre-clinical experience. Students' competency ratings for conducting adult assessments (bedside swallowing examinations, formal/standardized speech-language assessments) followed the same trend as previous categories, significantly increasing after their clinical experience. The area where students felt they gained the most knowledge and skills was instrumental swallowing examinations (FEES, MBS).



Perceived Level of Competence: Therapy

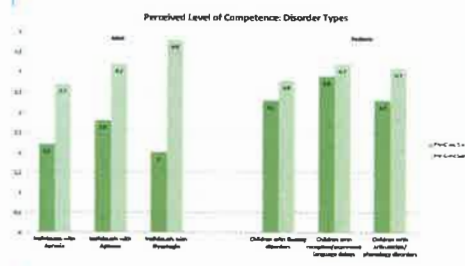
Students' self-ratings of pre- and post-clinical competency were overall comparable with respect to delivering both adult (conducting speech-language therapy, generating functional goals) and pediatric (selecting appropriate therapy materials, providing therapy in a 1:1 pull-out setting, providing therapy for a variety of disorder types) therapies. The students' greatest improvements were in providing swallowing treatment after completing practicum.

RESULTS



Perceived Level of Competence: Clinical Writing

With regards to clinician writing, students identified their greatest strengths to fall under pediatric clinical writing (deriving goals from assessments, completing IEPs, and writing diagnostic reports). Once again, the above graph reveals that self-rated competency levels prior to completing clinical practicums were lower for adult clinical writing (instrumental assessments MBS, FEES, treatment notes, progress notes). Although, students reported the most significant progress to be in adult clinical writing post adult externships.



Perceived Level of Competence: Disorder Types

As is shown in the above chart, students' self-ratings of pre-clinical competency were higher in the child speech and language category (fluency disorders, receptive/expressive language delays, articulation/phonological disorders), while their rating for pre-clinical competency in working with common adult disorders were much lower. However, the greatest increases in perceived competency levels were reported from students following their experience in an adult clinical setting, working with clients presenting with dysphagia, acquired apraxia, and aphasia.

CONCLUSIONS

A comprehensive, dynamic curriculum is essential to the success of any speech-language pathology graduate program in order to best prepare students for not only their clinical practicum but also for their future work in a school-based or medical setting. Through the use of pre and post surveys, programs can develop a more thorough understanding of their students' needs. The ultimate goal is that students should feel sufficiently confident to work in a variety of settings and with a wide array of clients by the time they graduate.

Based on the data collected and the individual feedback submitted by graduate student clinicians in our survey, it was noted that students made improvements in their perceived level of competence following their adult and pediatric clinical rotations.

DISCUSSION

Students expressed that their greatest challenge was to fill in educational gaps during their clinical practicum. Unquestionably, there is a degree of hands-on learning that will only happen once a student has begun their clinical placement. Though perhaps, a more solid foundation through increased mock case studies and diagnostic evaluations would be beneficial. A more extensive, involved curriculum involving evidence based treatment approaches could potentially expand students' clinical experience even further.

Examining the feedback of this study revealed the need for further research on this topic through the lens of the supervisors. Students' self-ratings provide a unique perspective and can serve as a basis for future curriculum development. Above all, incorporating the clinical supervisors' points of views regarding student pre- and post-clinical competencies will ultimately be the key to increased success in the field of speech language pathology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND CONTACTS

The presenters would like to thank the graduate students who offered their input in this poster. You can contact the authors at:

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REFERENCES

Pagano, G., Garcia, J. (2015, November) *Assessment of graduate clinicians' readiness for school based clinical rotations*. Poster session presented at the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association Convention, Denver, CO.