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## **Focusing on ability beyond disability: Experiential learning from persons with disability**

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**Introduction:** The use of experiential learning in occupational therapy (OT) education has been found to be effective in inculcating a more holistic understanding of disability and empathy towards persons with disabilities (PWDs).

**Objectives:** In Singapore, fieldwork typically happens in clinical settings where therapists may not get to see how PWDs live independently in the community. The present study is aimed at examining the effectiveness of an experiential learning project through learning from PWDs.

**Method:** In the 2016 cohort of 58 students, small groups comprising of three first year OT students were paired with a PWD. The students met with a PWD for three visits to observe and participate alongside in daily living tasks, work and leisure within community. Students were required to complete reflective journal and a report integrating OT theory, time use and other modules in the semester. Focus groups were conducted with PWDs and students.

**Results:** From the focus groups (n= 14) and reflective journal analysis, the students reported changes in their perceptions as they discovered what PWDs were capable of doing, such as taking on leadership positions. Other themes emerged including emotions experienced, and developing professional relevant attributes such as empathy and listening skills. An unexpected learning outcome reported was personal growth such as being more appreciative and dealing with challenges in their own lives.

**Conclusion:** Students can get to learn from PWDs beyond clinical settings, through active engagement in the community. The presenter will also share the steps taken to prepare stakeholders for the project.