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Teaching and learning preferences of 'Generation Y' occupational therapy students in practice education

Abstract

Background/Aims: Practice education is integral to health professional curricula. There is emerging evidence that student generational attributes may be impacting on practice education. Students born between 1982 and 2000, termed 'Generation Y', are said to have a different outlook on learning to those students from other generational groups. However, there is little research from student perspectives to investigate these claims. This study aimed to identify 'Generation Y' occupational therapy students' preferred teaching and learning approaches in practice education. **Methods:** Using a qualitative descriptive approach and purposive sampling, 22 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with third and fourth year 'Generation Y' occupational therapy students from one Australian university. Interview transcripts were analysed thematically. **Findings:** Four themes emerged from the data: developing practice skills and confidence; essential communication; valued educational approaches; and the supervisory relationship and the team. **Conclusion:** Findings relate to 'Generation Y' characteristics. Practice educators may need to consider that these students have unique learning preferences. Students prefer 'doing' to observing, they want to be given clear expectations and responsibility for their own work tasks, they want to work in a team, they prefer to self-evaluate prior to feedback and access to the internet is essential for their learning.

Keywords

learning, students, education, therapy, teaching, occupational, y', 'generation, preferences, practice

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ABSTRACT

Background/Aims: Practice education is integral to health professional curricula. There is emerging evidence that student generational attributes may be impacting on practice education. Students born between 1982 and 2000, termed 'Generation Y', are said to have a different outlook on learning to those students from other generational groups. However, there is little research from student perspectives to investigate these claims. This study aimed to identify 'Generation Y' occupational therapy students' preferred teaching and learning approaches in practice education.

Methods: Using a qualitative descriptive approach and purposive sampling, 22 semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 3rd and 4th year 'Generation Y' occupational therapy students from one Australian University. Interview transcripts were analysed thematically.

Findings: Four themes emerged from the data: 1. Developing practice skills and confidence; 2. Essential communication; 3. Valued educational approaches; and 4. The supervisory relationship and the team.

Conclusion: Findings relate to 'Generation Y' characteristics. Practice educators may need to consider that these students have unique learning preferences. Students prefer 'doing' to observing, they want to be given clear expectations and responsibility for their own work tasks, they want to work in a team, they prefer to self-evaluate prior to feedback and access to the internet is essential for their learning.

Key words: Millennials, Fieldwork, Clinical Placement, Teaching and Learning preferences, Feedback, Supervision, Technology, Belonginess.

Key phrases

'Generation Y' students need access to the internet.

'Generation Y' students' want a 'student centred' approach from their educator

'Generation Y' students don't just want praise they want immediate feedback that targets areas for improvement.

'Generation Y' students like clear expectations and want to self-evaluate prior to educator feedback.

'Generation Y' students want to be treated as colleagues rather than students and want to feel they 'belong' in the team.

'Generation Y' students want to be given tasks that they are responsible to complete autonomously

'Generation Y' students prefer educators who share their own personal experiences as students.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of health professional education is to produce graduates who are safe and competent to practice upon graduation. Practice education is a core component in the attainment of this goal as it provides occupational therapy students with the opportunity to apply the skills and values learned in the classroom while further developing their knowledge and skills within an authentic and dynamic clinical setting (Holmes et al., 2010). Practice experiences depend upon a tripartite relationship between students, educators, and universities. Students retain a central role in maximising the benefits and overcoming the barriers to learning during practice placements and their personal and generational attributes may impact on this teaching and learning experience (Larkin & Hamilton, 2010). Consequentially, this study investigated the preferred teaching and learning preferences of a group of 'Generation Y' occupational therapy students, in relation to practice education.

BACKGROUND

Defining differences in generational groups was first proposed by the German sociologist Karl Mannheim in the 1950s. Mannheim (1952) postulated that each generation has a similar worldview due to exposure to common historical and social events during their formative years. While members of a specific generation will not have experienced identical life events, it is suggested that their shared awareness creates a 'generational personality' (Mannheim, 1952). Subsequently, generational groupings have been developed by social commentators in westernised countries. These include

the “GI Generation” born 1901-1924; the “Silent Generation” (1925-1942); the “Baby Boomers” (1943-1960); “Generation X” (1961-1981); “Generation Y” or “Millennials” (1982-2002) and “Generation Z” from 2003 onwards (Prendergast, 2009).

Supporters of generational perspectives have argued that each generation’s personality has a unique set of characteristics made up of beliefs, values, attitudes and expectations, which impact on their behaviour generally, as well as in educational and work settings (Boudreau, 2009; Lavoie-Tremblay, Leclerc, Marchionni, & Drevniok, 2010; Walker et al., 2006). ‘Generation Y’ individuals grew up in prosperous times and have experienced the introduction and wide dissemination of technology. This is claimed to have resulted in a generation of people that are independent, techno-savvy, entrepreneurial, flexible and hard-working (Tulgan & Martin, 2001). Also known as the ‘Trophy Generation’ (no one loses and everyone receives a trophy just for participating), they have become a confident generation due to the constant feedback and praise they have received (Crampton & Hodge, 2009). Due to these generational characteristics, ‘Generation Y’ students have been identified as having different expectations and learning styles to those of previous generations (Oblinger, 2003; Twenge, 2009b; Walker et al., 2006). Indeed, Prensky (2001) argued that significant changes are required to tertiary education as “today’s students are no longer the people our educational systems were designed to teach” (p. 1).

In occupational therapy, in Canada, generational differences were reported by Boudreau (2009) who suggested that there is a need for acknowledgement and respect between generations to reduce workplace conflict due to differing generational values and work ethics. Gray (2008) in the UK, related this issue to practice education and argued that changes are required to accommodate the needs of ‘Generation Y’ occupational therapy students. In Australia, Hills, Ryan, Smith & Warren-Forward (2012) investigated occupational therapy practice educator’s views and found that most considered that ‘Generation Y’ students exhibited many of the classic generational personality traits. These included being techno-savvy, over confident, easily bored, in need of constant feedback and praise, and having a different communication style which was sometimes interpreted as a lack of professionalism. Educators praise their technological ability and consider this will benefit the future of the profession but are

concerned that their over confidence results in a skimming approach to clinical reasoning to get to the end point as well as difficulty in accepting negative feedback (Hills et al., 2012).

Whilst arguments have been made that the 'Generation Y' label is just another inappropriate stereotype that is not helpful in addressing the needs of contemporary students there appears to be a growing recognition of generational differences in higher education (Bennett et al., 2008; Sternberg, 2012). Indeed, the Australian Teaching and Learning Council funded a resource entitled "Educating the Net Generation: A Toolkit of Resources for Educators in Australian Universities" (Gray et al., 2009). The project developed, technology-based resources specifically aimed at enhancing the learning experiences of 'Generation Y' students in higher education. Unfortunately, these resources are not easily applied in practice education as the main focus is the application of various technological media in teaching and learning.

Whilst no recipe exists for the ideal model, format or content of occupational therapy practice education, several studies have researched the components of a 'quality' placement (Bonello, 2001). Kirke, Layton & Sim (2007) reported that availability of competent practice educators, capable students and clear university expectations are essential to quality placements. Whereas Rodger, Fitzgerald, Davila, Millar & Allison (2011) revealed that both students and practice educators considered that a combination of a welcoming learning environment, detailed orientation with clear expectations, a graded program of learning experiences, quality role modelling, quality feedback, open and honest relationships, and supervisor experience and skills, to be the key attributes of quality placements.

One central component of a quality placement is the student- supervisor relationship. Hummell (1997) was the first to explore Australian occupational therapy students' perspectives on the preferred qualities of a practice educator and reported that students valued supervisors who had well developed interpersonal skills and time to facilitate teaching and learning. More recently, Rodger et al., (2014) completed an analysis of student commendations for excellent practice educators and reported that students preferred educators who were student-centred and who balanced support with the 'just

right' challenge. In this study students also valued educators who facilitated learning experiences and encouraged autonomy and independence. Brown et al (2011) investigated the perceived and preferred expectations of practice education learning environments of 548 occupational therapy, physiotherapy, nursing, midwifery, pharmacy, nutrition and dietetics, paramedic, pharmacy, social work and medical radiation science) students from one Australian university. One of the compelling findings in this study was that significant differences were revealed between health science students' perceptions of their 'actual' and 'preferred' learning environments. The authors suggested that students commonly preferred a more positive clinical environment. More significantly student satisfaction was reported to be greater in students who highly valued task orientation, student involvement, personalisation, and innovation. Brown et al (2011) concluded that, in consideration of student preferences, changes to learning environments may make them more harmonious and lead to an enhanced experience and better learning outcomes for the students.

Paterson and Ryan (2010) identified that "little research has been completed so far into the observed changing expectations and behaviours of the health care student populations, in particular, 'Generation Y' students, as there are indications of changing student learning behaviours" (p. 24). It has also been acknowledged that adjustments are needed to practice education programs and educators to meet the needs of 'Generation Y' students (Ryan & Paterson, 2010). Despite this, little research on the topic of 'Generation Y' teaching and learning preferences in relation to practice education has been undertaken to date. Therefore, the aims of this study were to:

- i) explore 'Generation Y' occupational therapy students' perspectives of the value and appropriateness of teaching and learning strategies that they have experienced in practice education.
- ii) identify 'Generation Y' occupational therapy students' preferred teaching and learning approaches in practice education

METHOD

This study was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach using semi-structured interviews conducted face to face or via telephone or Skype. Sturges and

Hanrahan (2004) compared face-to-face interview transcripts with telephone interview transcripts and reported no significant differences, concluding that telephone interviews can be used productively in qualitative research. Participants in this study were therefore invited to choose their preferred method, face to face, telephone or Skype interview. This provided flexibility to participants whilst generating meaningful qualitative data about teaching and learning in practice education. Approval was granted from the university human research ethics committee. Approval number H-2014-0141.

Using purposive sampling, third and fourth year students in one Australian semi-metropolitan university were sent invitations to participate via email. These cohorts had experienced at least two eight-week blocks of practice education placements and were therefore well positioned to report on their practice learning experiences. An email was sent to all eligible students. This provided information about the study and outlined the inclusion criteria, noting that students who were born in or after 1982 could be classified as 'Generation Y' could only participate in the study. Students were asked to reflect on their placements and were asked the following interview questions

- a) On your placements to date can you tell me about what happened that really helped your learning?
- b) Were there any challenges to your learning whilst on placement, what were they and what strategies did you use to manage these challenges?
- c) In your placement who most supported your learning and what were the most effective strategies they used that met your learning needs and preferences?

RESULTS

Twenty-two interviews were completed; 10 were face- to-face, 11 were by phone interview and one was via Skype. Of these, 11 were third years (nine females and two male) and 11 fourth years (seven females and four males). Most participants were aged between 20 and 25 years (n =18). The remaining four participants were aged 25, 28, 29 and 32 years. All participants fitted the definition of a 'Generation Y' cohort.

Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by the interviewer and returned to participants for member checking to ensure credibility (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Transcripts were read repeatedly by the first author with cognisance of the research aims. A reflective journal was maintained to reduce author bias and this contributed towards the trustworthiness of the data analysis. This was particularly important as the author had previously been responsible for coordinating Occupational therapy students' practice education experiences. Confirmability was ensured by independent coding with a distinct analysis trail by the first author followed by discussion and consensus with the other authors. Where direct quotes have been used in reporting the findings the only amendments are for grammatical purposes.

FINDINGS

Four themes emerged from the data (See Table 1).

Table 1: Subthemes and themes generated from the data

Theme One	Subtheme
	Show me the steps so I can learn the ropes
	I learn best by doing not observing so let me have a go
	Nurture my confidence but let me develop my own style
Theme Two	Subtheme
	I want to develop so be clear about what you want me to achieve
	Give me honest feedback
	Make time to reflect, discuss, share, and give direction
Theme Three	Subtheme
	Take time to get to know me and where I am at

	It's my learning and so I encourage me to be self-directed and that includes using the internet
	I want to develop my clinical reasoning so talk me through your thinking and decision making
Theme Four	Subtheme
	Trust me and give me autonomy
	I want a good relationship with you
	Help me feel like I belong

Theme 1: Developing practice skills and competence:

Students identified that participation and involvement in all areas of practice has the greatest impact on the development of both their confidence and competence. Whilst they do like to observe in the first instance, they are eager to learn and really want to do it for themselves rather than just watching or observing their educator. For example, when asked what was most helpful in term of developing competence one student said:

The first few interviews I did he [the educator] supervised me very closely. The second time he just watched me from afar away. Afterwards he said, "you can do this" (R10).

Students valued this graded approach to competency development. Other strategies valued by students included a trial run, for example, the student might complete an assessment on the therapist prior to assessing a client followed by a discussion where the educator checked the students understanding of key information. This approach made students feel supported and prepared. Conversely, students reported that they did not like educators to continually 'jump in' and take over unless the patient/client was at risk or distressed because they wanted to learn from their mistakes. This preference for participation was highlighted by one participant who stated that:

I don't learn from being told how to do something. I learn from actually doing it myself (R14).

Participants reported that this active role is important as they want to be given responsibility. They did not want to 'tag along' be given 'jobs' just because educators needed something for them to do. Participants wanted to worthwhile experiences such as co-leading sessions and then progressing to taking the lead role with allocated clients. One participant described this graded process as follows:

We've sort of switched roles so now, instead of me 'tagging' along with my supervisor, she somewhat 'tags' along with me. So, I have to plan for the session. I do have the responsibility and I feel as though I learn a lot out of the doing, rather than just the observing, although the observing is very handy to learn how to do the doing (R5).

Participants reported that this approach allowed them to develop their own style, for example one participant said:

I sort of picked up my own style of doing it just from watching a couple of different people performing initial assessments (R1).

Theme Two: Essential communication

Participants reported that they have high expectations of themselves and therefore it was important for the educator to set clear expectations on what they needed to achieve during their placement. Whilst in some way national competency assessment forms provide a structure to this, the setting of specific expectations in relation to each setting was also important. For example:

The one [placement] I am on currently is really good because they have taken the information provided by the university and adapted it to the specific setting. So, there was clear identification of what I should be doing on what week, considering the year of study as well (R18).

Participants reported that setting of expectations was particularly relevant when two educators were co-supervising as this caused challenges for some students. They suggested that educators should consider what behaviours should be awarded the

highest mark on each competency statement so that they could set appropriate goals for the placement.

Feedback on goal attainment and performance was reported as key to participants' learning and development and they preferred it to be given immediately after a particular session or behaviour. Participants reported that feedback was highly valued and whilst they did not like criticism they craved feedback given in a manner that helped them to identify their strengths and limitations.

I thrive on feedback and any feedback I will take. So, whenever they had a positive comment or an area of strength or an area of improvement, I would really hold onto those comments and I would often go and write them down and summarise them for myself so that I could think back on some of the areas to work on, and note some of my key strengths and areas for improvement and develop a plan to target those areas more specifically(R17).

Participants considered supervision an important time for the provision of feedback and discussion on performance. They valued protected supervision time and feedback that was given regularly and not kept until a formal half way evaluation. Supervision took many forms; some participants reported how they were provided with supervision that allowed them to plan the week ahead. Others reported supervision at the end of the week to review their performance and progress. Participants reported supervision being a formal one-on-one sit-down session and also casuals chat in a coffee shop. Some reported impromptu supervision being fitted into the day when there was time. Participants reported they liked all of these types of supervision but that a mix was preferred.

I think the weekly supervision thing is really important because I know last year we kind of put it aside, we didn't make it a priority so after a few weeks of not having that weekly catch up I thought I was getting a little bit lost in terms of where I was going with the placement. So, I think it is really important to set aside a specific time each week and if that changes for some reason, to reschedule the time for that week. Having that time to clear things up and redirect in terms of learning objectives is really important (R3).

Participants reported that effective supervision involved educators creating a 'risk free' environment where students could ask questions and voice their opinion. They valued encouragement to explore their own style through self-evaluation and preferred a more collaborative approach. Participants appreciated being asked how they were feeling as well as questions about their performance. They reported that educators seem to have different expectations of supervision but participants wanted supervisors who made expectations explicit. In all its forms, supervision was reported as a time for overall feedback, reflection, direction, evaluation, and sharing of knowledge and was valued by all participants.

Theme Three: Valued educational approaches

Participants reported that they had more effective learning experiences when educators took time to get to know them and adapted their approach to meet their individual needs. For example:

It's about what works for the student rather than being really set on their ways (R1).

Participants valued educators who considered their learning style, personal learning goals and needs. Conversely, they became frustrated when educators failed to change their educational approach in response to the student's learning needs:

A good relationship with the student, taking the time to understand them, their perspective, the experiences they have had previously, their level of knowledge ... just being aware of those things from the start so that they [the educators] can cater their approach to that (R17).

Participants reported how they wanted to get to know their educator as a person as well as their teaching style so that the relationship was a reciprocal one. Within this relationship they also valued being supported to become self-directed learners. However, they were sometimes challenged by the lack of access to technological resources. Some students reported how they used the internet mostly in the evenings to source information of medical condition or medications for example. One student reported:

I struggled a bit on my last placement, not being able to get my phone out to Google it, because I don't think it is appropriate. I would much rather have a computer in an open environment rather than having to go and look things up on my lunch break on my phone, which I don't really like doing. I like to interact with other people on my lunch break (R1).

Nevertheless, the participants considered their educators to be greatest source of information they appreciated the educator 'talking through' their thinking and decision making. This was preferred in a conversational style where students were facilitated to explore their thinking without feeling 'examined'. For example:

The educator, who talked with me, asked me a lot of questions and who made me think about things ... as opposed to speaking at me. I can easily regurgitate what someone has told me but if they ask me to think for myself it's different. She [the educator] gave me time to think about it and then we'd talk about it. It only had to be for a few minutes but silence in a conversation is really interesting. One of my supervisors would talk at me, we talked a lot, but I don't think, upon reflection, she gave me as much as the other supervisor did (R13).

Theme 4: The supervisory relationship and the team

Participants valued feeling like a team member rather than a visiting student. This started from day one and included welcome morning teas and being introduced to team members. Spending time with other team members was also valued by participants. They felt this contributed to helping develop a sense of belonging and made them feel as if they were colleagues and they were at work.

We feel like we belong, and it's wasn't just my supervisor's doing, it's the entire team, the entire department, they're always asking us 'how you going? Did you find that was helpful? If there is anything I can do just let me know or if I think of anything for you I'll have you in.' It's been the whole team as well as the supervisors have been really supporting and welcoming (R21).

Participants reported how they appreciated educators who had faith in them and trusted them to be autonomous, particularly towards the end of their placement:

I think a mix of autonomy and recognising that will take a few weeks to get the hang of it. Then it might be advisable to step back (R2).

It goes a long way when you are trusted to take charge of something or at a case management meeting you are asked about your opinion. It sets the scene for including you as future therapist rather than simply a student on placement (R11).

Participants identified that the characteristics they value in educators is organisation, availability, flexibility, adaptability, and a genuine interest in student education rather than taking students because they have been told to do so or because they want to add student education to their Curriculum Vitae (C.V.) Students also valued educators who were knowledgeable, approachable, and professional and who have a sense of humour:

The key is that relationship and that the supervisor is professional and approachable (R4).

Some educators told students of the challenges they had experienced as students in practice education. This reassured students that they can progress past challenges and encouraged them to try strategies that their educator had proven to be successful. The participants valued and respected these insights and said this openness was key to a successful learning experience. They also valued educators who were passionate about the profession, for example:

You felt that they just really understood Occupational therapy and were really passionate about it as well (R12).

DISCUSSION

The four themes generated in this study captured the teaching and learning strategies that 'Generation Y' students considered to positively contribute to their attainment of competence in practice education. Many aspects of these strategies can be related to adult learning theories and models of learning in work settings. For example, Knowles (1984) adult learning (androgogy) theory states that adults prefer to learn through

experience rather than learning passively and this includes making mistakes. Also graded approaches to competency development have been identified in Billet's (2001) model of learning in work settings which has the following four steps; 1. Movement from peripheral to workplace participation; 2. Access to goals of performance; 3. Direct guidance of experts and others; and 4. Indirect guidance provided by the workplace. Many of the findings of this study also echo previous studies in terms of what constitutes a quality placement and also what constitutes an effective practice educator (Hummell, 1997; Kirke et al., 2007; Rodger, Fitzgerald, et al., 2011; Rodger et al., 2014).

On the other hand, these students have provided some insights into their preferences in relation to their generational stereotype. As well as learning through active participation, participants in this study reported that they want to be given responsibility, trust and autonomy and want to feel more like a colleague than a student. Advocates of generational perspective have noted that this generation dislikes being micromanaged and prefers autonomy (Crampton & Hodge, 2009). As this generation have been raised being told to 'aim for the stars' when planning their future it may not be surprising that they want to both achieve and demonstrate their abilities by delivering on important work tasks (Twenge, 2009). This desire for 'more' may be considered as over confidence by some educators and this is one of the traits ascribed to 'Generation Y' but students in this study set high expectations for themselves. Martin (2005) interpreted this desire to achieve as students thriving on challenging work but added that they need a 'sense of accomplishment hourly' (p. 39). Managers concurred with this view and reported that one successful strategy they have applied to manage 'Generation Y' therapists is to provide them with challenging tasks (Hills, Ryan, Warren-Forward, & Smith, 2013). Conversely Twenge (2009) argued that 'Generation Y' students have high expectations and have more ambition than skills and argued that educators walk a fine line between encouraging and steering students in the right direction especially as there is growing evidence of increased stress, anxiety, and mental health difficulties in this cohort. This author has also suggested that the key to success with this group is to provide a structured learning environment, set realistic expectations, maximise experiential learning and give regular and explicit feedback. Learning contracts are one way of achieving these requirements and are used by many

universities to enable students to identify their learning needs with placements (Polglase & Treseder, 2012). The benefits of learning contracts have been reported by students as providing a framework for learning as they consider individual learning needs but they also enable the objectives to be set for the placement (Whitcombe, 2001). However, they have also been reported to be time consuming, difficult to use and dependant on the skills of the educator to facilitate the student in setting their own learning needs (Matheson, 2003; Whitcombe, 2001). The development of a detailed and explicit contract may therefore be an area for universities and practice educators to focus on for the 'Generation Y' student. A comprehensive learning contract may also facilitate the need for specific feedback on goal attainment (Kennedy-Jones, 2005).

Whilst all learners expect and value feedback the students in this study used different terminology when describing feedback which may need to be noted by practice educators. They avoided using negative and positive descriptors preferring to use words like '*an area of strength or an area of improvement*'. Participants also valued consistent and immediate feedback, a preference attributed to 'Generation Y' who have grown up with constant praise and feedback (Crampton & Hodge, 2009). Supervision, as a protected time for reflection and discussion on learning activities was highly valued by the students in this study for both formal feedback and self-evaluation although they prefer to self-evaluate prior to been given feedback. Molloy (2009) in physiotherapy observed and analysed student supervision finding that despite being asked to self-evaluate at the start of sessions, most students did not respond to the invitation and had minimal input into the supervision discussion. And yet, student critical self-evaluation has been reported to be a key element in the development of clinical reasoning ability (Ajawi & Higgs, 2008). Cantillon and Sergeant (2008) discussed a range of models of feedback in clinical settings including the Pendleton model which may be relevant for practice educators to consider when providing feedback to this generational group. This four-step model begins with student self-evaluation of good performance, moves on to practice educator agreement or elaboration of good performance, and is then followed by the student self-evaluating their poor performance or what could be improved, and finishes with the educator stating what they think could be improved.

As well as feedback, participants valued self-disclosure by educators about the challenges they had encountered as learners. Self-disclosure has been found to be a vehicle for professional socialisation, empathy and encouragement; it has also been found to promote open communication within supervisory relationships (Molloy, 2009). Self-disclosure for 'Generation Y' students may also be a form of feedback, as this generation have been found to be motivated by achievement and hearing from those who are qualified that their journey had some challenges may reinforce that they are progressing appropriately towards competency attainment (Borges et al., 2010).

This disclosure may also contribute to feeling part of the team as they also want to be 'belong'. Belongingness is the need to be an accepted member of a group which nursing students have reported in one study as a prerequisite for clinical learning (Levett-Jones & Lathlean, 2008a). Being part of a team and working in groups has also been identified as a generational trait mainly due to this cohort use of technology being always connected via on line technologies such as gaming and social networking. Of course being part of a team is a contemporary reality in health care settings and whereas this cohort appear to be well placed to work collaboratively, generational conflict due to differing work values and behaviours has been reported within health care teams (Palese, Pantali, & Saiana, 2006). Practice educators may wish for students to be exposed to intergenerational collaborations on work tasks to facilitate both belonging, team collaboration and intergenerational respect.

The most universal generational characteristic of the 'Generation Y' cohort is their dependence on technology. Whilst technology has impacted on all generations, 'Generation Y' have been termed 'digital natives' as opposed to the 'digital immigrant' label of older generations (Prensky, 2001). They are said to be as dependant on technology as breathing and they prefer the internet as their main learning resource (Tapscott, 2009). Participants in this study identified that their ability to be self-directed but was undermined by a lack of access to appropriate technologies. Gray (2008) argued that the practice educators need to engage with students and to understand the potential of collaboration, advocating that one key role is to champion change by challenging

restrictions on blanket mobile phone use and develop protocols to facilitate safe and ethical use of technology to enhance learning in practice education.

STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This qualitative study is limited to the views of experiences of one group of students and whilst the results are not generalizable, the researchers are confident that the respondents were reliable and competent to answer the research question therefore the findings are relevant to the profession. Further research is indicated on use of technology in teaching and learning in practice education to meet the needs of 'Generation Y' students as well as what constitutes an effective and meaningful learning contract from both students and educators' perspectives.

CONCLUSION

As the occupational therapy profession focuses increasingly on evidenced-based practice there is also a professional requirement to investigate the kinds of learning environments and teaching methods that best support professional development of students (Burke & Harvison, 2014). This study has provided one group of 'Generation Y' occupational therapy students' perspectives of their teaching and learning preferences in practice education and found that students have identified educational approaches that relate to the 'Generation Y' personality. Practice educators should therefore be cognisant of the teaching and learning preferences of this group of students but also ensure that they maintain a customised approach to each individual student's needs in practice education.

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