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## Faculty Perspectives: Understanding And Responding To Stress Management Needs In The Occupational Therapy Doctorate

Alyson Rae Wilhelmi Downs

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FACULTY PERSPECTIVES: UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO STRESS  
MANAGEMENT NEEDS IN THE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY DOCTORATE

by

Alyson Rae Wilhelmi Downs  
Master of Occupational Therapy, University of North Dakota, 2007

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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for the degree of

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August  
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This dissertation, submitted by Alyson Rae Wilhelmi Downs in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Foundations and Research from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

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Alyson Rae Wilhelmi Downs  
August 2020

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## **Abstract**

Occupational therapy programs are currently pursuing the transition to an entry-level occupational therapy doctorate (OTD). Due to the novel change with this population, minimal research exists on how faculty are understanding and constructing a process to manage stress, promote wellbeing, and foster self-efficacy for themselves and the benefit of students during this time of transition. The concepts of habituation and social cognitive theory frame inquiry and understanding of the research problem for the development of a constructivist grounded theory study. A total of nine faculty and staff members at a Midwest OT program in the midst of programmatic change to an entry-level OTD consented to partake in data collection involving the New General Self-Efficacy Scale, semi-structured interviews, anonymous online focus groups, and program documents of policies, procedures, and syllabi. Categorical construction from three cycles of coding yielded a theorized process along with implications and recommendations. The participants asserted promoting self-care occupations are essential not just during programmatic change or distress but should be pervasive throughout the OTD program culture. Through communication of personal and professional identities, faculty are to be consciously considering what they are role modeling to students who are expected to enter the profession as self-efficacious practitioners making a difference in their communities. Therefore, in the midst of implementing educational programmatic change, a culture of communication and emphasis on self-care occupations may tend to empower faculty habituation for role modeling occupational balance for students. This study provides a model for faculty to consider when implementing programmatic change to an OTD.

## **Faculty Perspectives: Understanding and Responding to Stress Management Needs in the Occupational Therapy Doctorate**

Promotion of wellbeing opportunities involving habitual stress management strategies is known to be beneficial for faculty as well as students in higher education (Baghurst & Kelley, 2014; Bland et al., 2012; Cox & Steiner, 2013; Perlmutter, 2010; Pfeifer et al., 2008). With mounting responsibilities and expectations, the importance of self-efficacy for fostering the belief in personal capabilities is also vital for personal and professional success in academia and beyond. Accordingly, stress management with a focus on self-efficacy is recognized as valuable for faculty in higher education.

Having an intentional plan to address stress through these means is helpful with anticipated changes for some occupational therapy (OT) programs transitioning to an entry-level doctoral degree, also known as an occupational therapy doctorate (OTD). As a profession, OT has formally been in existence since 1917; its implications of holistic, meaningful, occupation-based treatment for people to achieve personal goals related to health and wellbeing has been far reaching across all ages. Academic content for OT students covers information across the lifespan, making coursework both varied and intense for faculty to present and students to learn.

Many OT programs consisting of professors, instructors, and administrative staff are currently transitioning to offer OTD programs perhaps without full awareness about how stress is being managed during programmatic change. Acknowledging the choice faculty had regarding their OT programs is important in how change is ultimately received; it is often easier to view change by choice as eustress (described as positive stress or a challenge). This perspective feeds into enhanced motivation to frame the change as worthwhile, and faculty may actually look forward to increased workload and new responsibilities for the anticipated benefit of themselves

academically and clinically as well as their students (Eagan & Garvey, 2015). Grounded theory methodology with its focus on theory development from data collection and subsequent analysis is poised as a logical way in which to design research concerning the interactive change process happening with OT faculty undergoing an implementation of programmatic change to an OTD.

## **Background**

With change occurring, the opportunity to research the processes and implications presented itself: Essentially, the recent unfolding of events within the OT profession had offered itself as a context and population not previously studied due to the novelty of this programmatic change. Within the OT profession, low levels of research activity has been identified as a problem (Pighills et al., 2013). New areas of interest are likely to have little or no reference in created evidence, especially when studying a recent change involving higher education processes in OT academia. To be explained in the literature review, research exists on why implementation of programmatic change to an OTD would be beneficial for students but not ramifications of how this level of education impacts faculty with respect to stress management for wellbeing and self-efficacy. The intentional focus of this grounded theory study addressed this unique aspect.

Reviewing the history of how dual entry-level OT programs were established was helpful in understanding why there exists minimal literature on the topic. Discussion on entry-level educational requirements had been debated for years as advances in healthcare seemed to dictate more clinical education. The Accreditation Council of Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) believed increased education to an OTD would assist in fulfilling the vision to best meet the needs of patients with more complex issues in addition to elevating the status of the profession. According to an expert-opinion article by Brown et al. (2015), an OTD would also

ensure competitiveness with other healthcare disciplines that require doctoral degrees (e.g., physical therapy and pharmacy).

After many years of planning, the 2017 mandate for entry-level OTD degree attainment was met with an abeyance being issued the following year. An expressed request for further inquiry, survey feedback, and research on this dictated change was soon sought. As a result of this information gathering, the ruling in April 2019 permitted OT programs to remain at a master's level or transition to an entry-level doctoral degree; either degree is accepted to enter the profession. This allowed the faculty at each OT program to decide their programmatic level: either remain at the current educational attainment status of a master's degree or increase requirements for students to achieve a doctoral degree.

Although other allied health professions have experienced increased clinical education transitions and OT already did transition to a comprehensive entry-level master's degree in 2007, minimal information exists on the experienced and/or anticipated change process specifically for OT programs throughout and following these changes. Furthermore, it is not known how wellbeing and self-efficacy opportunities factor into this transition with the specific population of OT faculty. Thus, research occurred involving how stress management has been understood and constructed by faculty amidst the new OTD and how faculty perceive their impact on students (and thus, impact on the future of the OT profession).

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to research the understanding and constructing of processes assumed by OT faculty in creating wellbeing opportunities for stress management within the context of implemented programmatic change at a Midwest OTD program. Additionally, there was an examination on the connection of self-efficacy between

faculty and students due to anticipated positive impacts cited via existing literature (Artino, 2012; Bandura, 1977; Cox & Steiner, 2013; Perlmutter, 2010). Possessing research involving this change was recognized as beneficial if and when faculty at other OT programs decide to embark on implementation of programmatic change to a doctoral degree. It may also be beneficial to other health profession faculty members working through changes in degree offerings or merely seeking a shift in how elements of wellbeing and self-efficacy are incorporated implicitly or explicitly into the program for the enrichment of faculty and students.

As a century-old profession with roots in mental health domains, OT is characterized by its implications for holistic, meaningful, occupation-based treatment for people to achieve personal goals related to health and wellbeing across the lifespan. Implementing programmatic change to an OTD was believed to be necessary for OT students to be better equipped for work in diverse or new settings with people of varied needs. However, after a series of feasibility studies, task forces, educational committees, and OT survey of students and professionals, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) issued the current resolution of rescinding the mandate of an entry-level doctoral degree for OT. Instead, AOTA determined that faculty at OT programs could select their entry-level degree of master's or doctorate.

Ahead of the initially proposed mandate in 2017, many faculty at OT programs in the upper Midwest had already started the transition to an entry-level doctoral degree. These programs have admitted students who are now pursuing their OTD. Because of the recency of revised coursework to match the required accreditation standards of practice and active involvement of faculty in the change process, it was anticipated that study participants would be able to articulate their experience of the implemented programmatic change transition and be able to discuss their levels of stress management and value placed upon wellbeing and self-

efficacy. Capturing the understood and constructed change process and resultant impact via grounded theory research methodology was the intent of this study involving faculty at one Midwest OTD program.

Recognizing and highlighting the promotion of wellbeing opportunities for stress management and focusing on the connection of self-efficacy between faculty and students were the paramount components of this grounded theory study. Being able to articulate a theorized change process based on analyzed data is of great interest to OT faculty for two primary reasons. First, students are recognized as an extension of a faculty member's brand; faculty are to be mindful of their influence on students by modeling the type of person they would want to have potentially replicated and promoted personally and/or professionally. In a qualitative study of OT faculty members, two themes emerged from the data highlighting this point: "Educators teach who they are and personify an implicit curriculum" (Hooper, 2007, p. 237). Who faculty are matters to students in shaping their life trajectory.

The second reason behind faculty devoting time to studying the anticipated results is to gain a better understanding of how OT faculty can incorporate wellbeing opportunities for stress management and self-efficacy into their explicit and implicit interactions for the overall betterment of the OTD program. For the continued positive impact on people receiving therapy services, OT needs to position itself as a viable profession. This is especially true for programs transitioning to the OTD as the implementation of programmatic change presents with added stressors in the form of requiring more time, energy, and financial resources to accomplish. The promoting of faculty wellbeing facilitates faculty self-efficacy to flourish, fostering an increased likelihood of goal attainment for faculty as well as students. Students who experience this type



of conducive learning environment graduate as competent and confident professionals, making a difference in their communities.

### **Significance**

It is advantageous for faculty to be experienced in how they engage in wellbeing opportunities for habitual stress management and foster increased reserves of self-efficacy to be successful in their academic pursuits as well as their overall lifestyle. The significance of this study involved constructing understanding around how faculty in the newly transitioned OTD program have developed a process of creating, sustaining, and promoting techniques of wellbeing and self-efficacy. For the benefit of the profession, their programs, themselves, and their students, OT faculty ideally need to be invested in understanding the impact of promoting these techniques explicitly and implicitly to ultimately move the OT profession forward, shaping confident practitioners who are making a difference in their communities.

### **Research Question**

Research questions from a grounded theory methodology are best characterized by their focus on developing theoretical ideas from the emergence of data into categories, utilization of theoretical sensitivity while examining the data, and analyzation via a constant comparative research process (Kelle, 2007). Based on the purpose, the research question for this study is listed as such:

How do occupational therapy faculty understand and construct a process to manage stress, promote wellbeing, and foster self-efficacy for themselves and their students during a period of programmatic change?

## Conceptual Ideas

*Stress* is described as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change” (The American Institute of Stress, 2018, para. 1). Stress is commonly conceptualized as a negative response known as distress, but the positive connotation of eustress is realized as a challenge or motivator. In addition to existing roles and responsibilities, faculty members are now undergoing a programmatic change to the OTD. Poor management of stress can result in physical and/or mental health problems which is what OT as a profession tries to prevent or rehabilitate. A focus on stress in this study recognized stress management skill acquisition in higher education by students via faculty in the explicit and implicit curriculum translated to continuing these skills as practitioners, encouraging future patients to also develop stress management skills.

*Occupations* are everyday activities with meaning and purpose for individuals. The eight areas of occupation included the categories of self-care, independent living skills, rest/sleep, education, work productivity, play, leisure, and social participation (AOTA, 2014). Speaking about occupations was shared language between the researcher and study participants in how time was spent in daily activities.

*Wellbeing* for stress management from an OT perspective is described as encompassing physical, mental, social, and spiritual health while also addressing participation in occupational engagement (Pizzi & Richards, 2017). Partaking in wellbeing tasks helps buffer effects of stress and boost self-efficacy. Wellbeing tasks also included some of the occupations previously discussed. This study sought to understand faculty wellbeing engagement and its impact.

*Model of Human Occupation (MOHO)* (specifically applying the component of *Habituation* for the purpose of this study) was developed by OT’s to conceptualize OT practice

(O'Brien, 2017). Habituation consists of both habits and roles which simultaneously work together in creating patterns of behavior. It was logical to include an OT model in this study specifically for applicability regarding habituation. Habitual engagement in healthy wellbeing tasks increased the likelihood of developed self-efficacy; this is why the researcher was attentive to identifying the intensity of its presence with study participants.

*Self-efficacy Theory* was developed by psychologist Albert Bandura (1977); self-efficacy was defined as the personal belief in the capability to successfully use skills to achieve goals. Improving self-efficacy depended upon the implementation of these four sources: performance accomplishment (i.e., mastery experience), vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Within the context of this study, self-efficacy informed the use of effective coping skills to deal with the stressors. With mounting responsibilities and expectations for faculty, the importance of fostering self-efficacy was vital for personal and professional success in academia and beyond.

*Paulo Freire* was a prominent educator, philosopher, and activist who advocated for the humanness faculty are to possess in their democratic authority with students. Ideological concepts for this study included knowing how to listen when confronted with diverse views, caring for the wellbeing of students, and faculty professional competence (Freire, 1998). Since the goal of OT programs is to graduate competent future clinicians, it was important to recognize the process and context in which this occurs. Freire's democratic viewpoint was especially beneficial in fostering critical thinking skills, applying evidence-based practice, and developing the necessary communication skills to be effective in relating to others. Recognizing these noteworthy elements was of interest to the researcher due to the impact on stress management, wellbeing engagement, and self-efficacy.

Tying the above concepts and educational viewpoints together, the implementation of programmatic change to an OTD was projected to increase stress for faculty. With a projected intentional promotion of habitual wellbeing opportunities, it was anticipated that embodied self-efficacy possessed by faculty positively influences students in applicable areas of occupation. Competence and confidence with respect to self-efficacy are required of faculty in how they possess ownership of the learning environment. Expectedly, it is easiest to enhance self-efficacy in those a person interacts with when they themselves have a healthy sense of self-efficacy.

Keeping in mind these concepts, studying the faculty perspective process of change that has transpired in developing OTD programs was the intent of this study. Applying Freire's (1998) implications for instruction and learning, it was expected that faculty care about their own sense of wellbeing and that of their students. Through this sense of devotion to the quality and holistic education of future OT practitioners, faculty play a vital role in their students' lives.

## **Methodology**

The researcher is a practicing OT with over a decade of experience in various adult settings and previous teaching experience in Midwest OT programs that were previously offering master's entry-level degrees but have since started transiting to the OTD. This grounded theory research study lends itself to a constructionism orientation epistemologically in that meanings are constructed out of the engagement of people with their world. Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory subtype which was primarily evoked through the methodological design of this study encompassed the involvement of the researcher in the data. Defined as reflexivity, it was recommended from the viewpoint of how the research was conducted, researcher relation to participants, and representation of participants in the written reports (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory involves an interpretive approach to qualitative research that

included flexibility in research design; learning about experience within obscured networks, situations, and relationships; exposing hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity; and a focusing on theory development with influence of the researcher's view (Charmaz, 2006).

The participants in this constructivist grounded theory study included faculty and staff members of a Midwest OT program that had recently transitioned to offering an entry-level OTD and are in Candidacy Status for eventual Accreditation. The number of participants was obtained via theoretical sampling and resulted in nine participants. The following data collection methods were utilized: semi-structured interviews, focus groups via anonymous discussion board postings, interactions with participants, and collected documents (Charmaz, 2006; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Schwandt, 2008). Theoretical memoing (both descriptive and analytical) was paramount in this study since it enhanced increased understanding of the topic by recording thoughts on paper to help the researcher make sense of the entire embarked research process (Maxwell, 2013). Quality data reaching the point of theoretical saturation was the intended outcome as a result of theoretical sampling of participants. Saturation was experienced as seeking more information to add until no more can be found that adds anything new to the process (Schwandt, 2007). Saturation is similar in resolve to the constant comparative method of analysis in grounded theory, moving in and out of data collection and analysis which occurred in this research study.

As data was collected from Midwest OTD program study participants, data analysis also occurred. First cycle coding for this study was initial coding as it remains the preferred analytic technique for breaking down the data into parts to examine them for similarities and differences. Regarding reflexivity, the researcher determined relationships between categories, keeping in mind what Charmaz described as the properties and dimensions (contexts, conditions,

interactions, and consequences of a process) of a category (Saldana, 2016). For second cycle coding, the focused coding method was applied to determine the most frequently occurring first cycle codes to develop categories. The final coding cycle from a constructivist perspective involved theoretical coding which created a theory of the process being studied. It resulted in the theory literally being grounded in the collected and analyzed data. Theoretical coding from Charmaz's viewpoint also included examining relationships between the categories and "moves the analytic story in a theoretical direction" (Saldana, 2016, p. 251).

Since the researcher had experience as an adjunct faculty member instructing on psychosocial topics of stress management, validity was addressed through three primary strategies to mitigate the potential for bias. The engagement in reflexivity writings occurred frequently, member checking during the emerging design was implemented to avoid misunderstandings, and triangulation of data from the standpoint of methods used and conceptual frameworks referenced were the techniques utilized. More information about grounded theory methodology as well as the specific grounded theory design components for this study is explicitly discussed in chapter three.

## **Summary**

The above information creates an outline foreshadowing the following chapters with respect to answering the research question involving the context of faculty experiencing implementation of a programmatic change to an entry-level OTD program. Chapter two includes a review of pertinent literature involving the conceptual ideas which are investigated for the defined population in the phenomenon of change; gaps in literature to highlight the need for this specific grounded theory study are included. Chapter two content informs the in-depth analysis on the methodological selection of constructivist grounded theory in chapter three.

Understanding the methodological selections is necessary to then experience the research through the findings. From this, analysis of collected data occurs in chapter four. Study participants provide information for constructing the outcome of how a theorized process develops during a period of programmatic change, along with its real and perceived impacts on faculty as well as students. Chapter five includes implications for practice and research, further recommendations, and conclusions from the research study.

## **Literature Review**

Because of heightened faculty responsibilities and expectations, the promotion of wellbeing opportunities involving habitual stress management strategies and self-efficacy is beneficial. Having an intentional plan to address stress may be helpful for faculty in occupational therapy (OT) programs that are deciding to implement programmatic change with a transition to an entry-level doctoral degree. However, it is not well-established how OT faculty are managing this novel change. The purpose of this study aimed to answer the research question:

How do occupational therapy faculty understand and construct a process to manage stress, promote well-being, and foster self-efficacy for themselves and their students during a period of programmatic change?

According to the ensuing literature, it is advantageous for faculty to be knowledgeable in how they can foster increased reserves of self-efficacy to be successful in their academic careers as well as their overall lifestyle. Promoting wellbeing opportunities for habitual stress management is known to be valuable as well. The literature review first provides information about stress and identified stressors in the population to be studied. This includes an in-depth analysis of stressors for faculty in the higher education context, OT-specific stressors, and stressors of faculty implementing a programmatic change. Next, information is presented on how stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy techniques can be beneficial for faculty. The study's intent had to do with constructing understanding around how faculty in the OTD program have developed a process of creating, sustaining, and promoting techniques of stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy for the benefit of the profession, their programs,



themselves, and their students. The culmination of this review involves constructing connections between these concepts, informing the creation of this study.

### **Defining Stress and Stressors**

Stress is a feeling everyone encounters at some point; it is a response provoked by various negative, positive, or neutral stimuli called stressors which include people, places, things, situations, or ideas. Current use of the terms stress and stressors can be attributed to the research of Dr. Hans Selye, a Hungarian-Canadian endocrinologist, who in 1936 described stress as “the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change” (The American Institute of Stress, 2018, para. 1). Thus, stress is the response felt when encountering the stimuli stressor.

Expanding upon stress, its impact can be experienced throughout every organ system in the body. Sympathetic nervous system activation is responsible for the classic fight-or-flight nervous system response to stressors which impacts the endocrine system releasing cortisol and epinephrine, cardiovascular system increasing heart rate and blood pressure, respiratory system provoking rapid breathing known as hyperventilation, and gastrointestinal system causing nausea and/or changes in digestion (The American Institute of Stress, 2018). These physiological changes can provoke a wide variety of signs and symptoms involving the feeling of stress: headaches, grinding teeth, anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, troubles concentrating, muscle tension, tiredness, substance use, etc.

Not surprisingly, stress is regularly associated with a negative connotation (i.e., distress), but eustress is positive, motivating stress which fosters productivity. Whether distress, eustress, or neutral stress occurs for an individual is dependent upon their perceptions and expectations of the situation, taking into conscious and subconscious consideration past experiential learning, metacognition, and self-efficacy about the management of stress. To expand upon

metacognition, self-assessment regarding knowledge about the experienced stress takes on a type of reflective appraisal about the situation (Seifert & Sutton, 2009).

Since Selye's research and prominent influence on stress as a worthwhile topic, more work has been done to both understand and address stress. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2010) that developed an evidence-based practice curriculum for stress management, the ability to cope effectively with stress allowed individuals to continue goal attainment and lifestyle enjoyment. However, even though this resource was developed for those with mental illness and addiction, the research and concepts remained viable for the general well population: Stress is normal and actually necessary to pursue goals. This is especially true in the higher education setting where time-based goals exist for faculty, likely provoking feelings of both distress and eustress.

Depicting the phenomenon of both positive and negative stress on individuals was the Yerkes-Dodson Law, a bell-shaped curve diagram courtesy of work by psychologists Robert Yerkes and John Dodson over a century ago. It depicted the relationship between distress (negative stress) and eustress (positive stress) via the continuums of stress/arousal (x-axis) in relationship with learning performance (y-axis) (Shors, 2004). Poor performance on tasks was anticipated when there was either low or high stress levels present. On the contrary, striking a balance between the two likely yielded optimum results of achievement. When a person felt adequately challenged based on expectations and available resources, they were more likely to succeed. While the Yerkes-Dodson Law is applicable across a multitude of disciplines, it was extremely relevant in higher education for faculty as it related to the anticipated necessity to achieve goals and subsequent stress level present. Acknowledging the Yerkes-Dodson Law within this study informed the line of interview questions posed by the researcher to understand

perspectives. Stress revealed and described by study participants was important to comprehend regarding how it was being experienced by participants and from what source it was stemming. Understanding the stress and stressors was a crucial step in constructing the process of how they are subsequently being managed by faculty.

### ***General Faculty Stressors***

According to the American Psychological Association, overall job pressure was the top stressor in the United States in 2014 (The American Institute of Stress, 2018). University settings are teeming with high-stress situations leading to distress, burnout, and different types of physiological and psychological manifestations for faculty (Alves et al., 2019; Gmelch, 1993; Mountz, 2016; Tobin & Taff, 2020). Negative stressors involved conflicts and inadequacies in resources; however, positive stressors for faculty interestingly included increased workload and new responsibilities, contributing to enhanced motivation (Eagan & Garvey, 2015). Understanding the continuum of stressors experienced was necessary to realize the possible stress responses as well as optimal consequences and viable coping skills. Therefore, recognizing stressors is the first step in eventually developing effective stress management skills so it is important for a comprehensive examination of common faculty stressors.

In his book *Coping with Faculty Stress*, Walter Gmelch (1993) outlined what he described as “The Faculty Stress Cycle” (p. 16). In addition to the stimulus-response connection by Seyle, Gmelch inserted “perception” between the two variables and added “consequences” rendered from the selected response. Common faculty stressors included overly ambitious expectations from self or employer, conflicts/confrontations with other faculty members or students, minimal control over situations involving financial operations and overall decision making, and the pervasive lack of time to attend to the multitude of responsibilities (Cox &

Steiner, 2013; Eagan & Garvey, 2015; Gmelch, 1993; Perlmutter, 2010). Gmelch (1993) asserted that the extent to which these stressors impact faculty was dependent upon the individual perceptions held; the discrepancy between demand from the stressor and resources available to meet the demand dictated the actual stress felt. Physiological effects of stress (the fight-or-flight response) and behavioral consequences determine if the cycle of stress perpetuates or regulates instead (Cox & Steiner, 2013). The extent to which positive and effective stress management techniques are utilized was vital to developing a healthy, regulated response to stressors.

From a critical perspective, racial and ethnic tensions also add to unnecessary stress for faculty. Gmelch (1993) reported that professors of color are less likely to be tenured, are paid less, and feel unsupported in their careers; while this research was a quarter-century old, the situation has not vanished. The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA (Hurtado et al., 2012) reported in their Undergraduate Faculty Survey of nearly 24,000 faculty that faculty of color are more likely to experience subtle discrimination at upwards of 63%. Cox and Steiner (2013) added that work environments described as diverse but not inclusive can contribute to stress because those outside the dominant culture do not feel acceptance from their coworkers. The individual propriospect possessed by faculty members of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds may clash or be diminished in such situations. Naturally, faculty members may seek support and mentorship from others of similar race/ethnicity, but Perlmutter (2010) emphasized the value in seeking these types of relationships in contrasting groups to build understanding and respect within a department. However, without a critical voice highlighting these issues, little can or will be done within the culture of higher education to change divisiveness rooted in gender, race, and ethnicity.

### *Stressors in the Higher Education Context*

The higher education context encompasses various types of stressors from a plethora of sources. One such pervasive stressor for faculty had to do with the quest for tenure among assistant professors (Perlmutter, 2010). Research, teaching, and service are the three broad areas of necessary faculty excellence to be considered a viable candidate for promotion; this also included understanding what Perlmutter (2010) described as “the people and politics and personal conundrums of our business” (p. 3). As with any work culture, it is vital to understand overt functionalist or reproductive job expectations embedded in the culture. In addition to the work culture, faculty should be aware of the false promise of meritocracy; it is not merely work ethic that garners promotion and tenure. Being skilled in emotional intelligence to respond with emotional intellect based on the people and context allows a professional to succeed in social situations, essentially tipping the balance in favor of achieving tenure. Faculty members may also be fulfilling year-to-year contracts which are becoming more common in place of tenure-track positions. According to data analyzed from the American Association of University Professors (Flaherty, 2018), about two-thirds of faculty positions at four-year research-intensive universities were not on a tenure track. Faculty can reasonably expect renewal of their contract if the educational demand for instruction continues and they are fulfilling their contract requirements, but it is not guaranteed. Faculty members in this study undergoing promotions, experiencing year-to-year contracts, and/or working towards advanced academic degrees as part of their job requirements who are also dealing with program changes may have amplified pressures within their professional responsibilities.

According to Hurtado et al. (2012), feelings of stress continued to be precipitated by stressors of self-imposed high expectations and lack of personal time. Regarding stressors

outside a faculty member's locus of control, budget cuts and procedures at public universities were also rated as high stress among Hurtado et al.'s (2012) survey participants. Yordy (2018) emphasized, "Higher education leaders must attend to the needs of the professoriate as the faculty, in turn, attend to the educational needs of students" (p. 8). Even if decisions are outside a faculty member's locus of control, this statement highlights the importance of making sure faculty are supported and equipped to do the best job possible in educating their students. Because stress within the upper levels of higher education influences faculty interactions with students, stress can negatively impact self-efficacy and ultimately, student achievement. Considering that the research study site had been undergoing some issues related to tightening budgets and procedures informed the researcher on potential stressors for study participants.

Not all stressors experienced in academia are experienced as distress though. An intersectional study of faculty work and stress by Eagan and Garvey (2015) indicated that family-related stressors experienced by faculty members actually influenced their instructional methods in a positive way, including more student-centered teaching while yielding increased productivity. On the other hand, studies such as Yordy's (2018) research using data from the 2013-2014 Higher Education Research Institute Faculty Survey indicated that family-related stressors involving spouse and children negatively impacted faculty ability to achieve a healthy work-life balance. With conflicting research results, one must take individual perspective as well as specific worksites and even time-of-year into consideration. Furthermore, how a stressor may be cognitively framed likely makes a difference on if it is categorized as distress, eustress, or simply neutral.

From an occupational perspective, faculty members partake in seven of the eight areas of occupation; overt and covert expectations exist for success in self-care, independent living skills,

rest/sleep, education, work productivity, leisure, and social participation (AOTA, 2014). As noted in Yordy's (2018) research, work-life balance in higher education was challenging to define, multifactorial in explanation, and even harder to come by. Cox and Steiner (2013) asserted the impossibility that work life and home life can ever truly separate, especially with the rise of technology. While smart phones can foster social participation connectedness with people outside of work, it can hinder productivity as well as complicate boundaries that are necessary for a possible work-life balance. Lack of balance between simultaneously occurring roles was one of the main stressors reported and described by faculty, leading to feelings of burnout in existing current research on the topic (Alves et al., 2019; LaPan et al., 2013; Mountz, 2016; Tobin and Taff, 2020).

A quantitative study examining quality of life uncovered that female faculty reported more imbalance in their management of identified roles and also felt more tired with a decreased quality of life when compared to male faculty (Alves et al., 2019). Imbalance may also be experienced because females may have additional mounting home-life responsibilities centered around childcare, care of elderly parents, and domestic tasks (Hurtado et al., 2012) which deplete necessary time available for routines for engagement in stress management and wellbeing techniques. With a sense of role overload or imbalance coupled with minimal time for wellbeing, it is projected that faculty are not as self-efficacious. The intersectionality notion of female-specific impacts are further discussed because of the high percentage of female OT faculty within the profession.

### ***Stressors for Occupational Therapy Faculty***

While the aforementioned stressors may commonly and expectantly be found in the academic setting, other obscure stressors may be even more detrimental to certain faculty

member groups. Females in OT constitute an overwhelming majority at around 90% (AOTA, 2018). While there is a higher occurrence of women in OT, it does not signify the female faculty voice is represented on campus though. Women do not have equal representation and involvement in leadership within higher education despite receiving higher education degrees more frequently than men (Cook, 2014); their degree attainment does not carry as much cultural capital in higher education when compared to the identical degree attainment of a male. Touted as the great equalizer among the genders, higher education credentials in America have shifted to being not as valuable in society while women are excelling at achieving them; there exists an erroneous concern of a female advantage conjuring power and privilege (Niemi, 2017). Gender inequality undercurrents and outright conflicts add to an already stressful higher education environment for faculty in underrepresented groups.

Another stress concern involving females was the persistent presence of the pay gap and job security; females earn around three-quarters to every one dollar a male earns (Cook, 2014) and are less likely to achieve full professor when compared to males (Hurtado et al., 2012). According to data compiled by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA, 2018), doctoral degree programs were three times more likely to utilize part-time faculty in their instruction versus master's level programs; use of adjuncts (though popular) was unfortunately deemed insignificant in the data reported. With levels of instruction below the full-time equivalent of professor, faculty may not be eligible for benefits or health care insurance but still have an expectation of uncompensated office hours and time spent outside of the classroom grading papers and responding to requests, little influence/involvement in the program, and minimal commitment beyond the semester (Cook, 2013). With the lack of job security, high



expectations in instruction, and little control over program affairs, distress may be commonly felt by adjunct or part-time faculty members.

Possessing information on OT faculty stressors allowed the researcher to be attuned and prepared for them to possibly surface during the study. If these faculty stressors were not specifically noted by study participants, it was still important to recognize them as possible subconscious stressors embedded within the culture. Novel stressors may have also surfaced so vigilance to identify these was imperative.

### ***Stressors from Implementation of Programmatic Change***

One of the stressors occurring in higher education clinical programs is the shift to entry-level doctoral degrees. In 2007, OT programs in America were mandated to be offering an entry-level master's degree; the quest for the entry-level doctoral degree soon followed. Despite a statement in 2015 to have both entry-level master's and doctoral degree options for OT students, the plan was thwarted within two years. In 2017, the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) declared all OT programs must be offering the doctoral level degree by 2027. Overall, current and projected changes in healthcare had influenced decision making within the OT profession as it related to necessitating additional education. Discussion on entry-level educational requirements had been debated for years prior to the mandate as changes in healthcare seemed to dictate more clinical education. ACOTE believed the additional education would assist in fulfilling the vision to best meet the needs of patients with more complex issues in addition to elevating the status of the profession. According to Brown et al. (2015), an OTD would ensure competitiveness with other healthcare disciplines that require doctoral degrees (e.g., physical therapy and pharmacy). If OT wanted to

be recognized as a necessity in healthcare, a doctoral degree must be attained for equivalence to those assembled at the multidisciplinary team meeting.

The benefits of an OTD from a professional standpoint had been considered with this mandate (AOTA, 2017), but reservations about the change included more personal reasons for faculty and students, leading to dissent in the profession. Identified issues with the mandate ultimately led to its abeyance in September 2018, citing the need to enact a Special Task Force to investigate the external issues affecting entry-level education. Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative data collection, the following main points surfaced from OT stakeholders: concerns with reimbursement, salary adjustment, student debt; decreased diversity; and consumer value regarding practitioners (AOTA, 2019). Ultimately as a result of research and feedback gleaned through the Special Task Force, AOTA ruled in April 2019 to have two points of entry into the profession: the master's degree and OTD.

Stress is already quite common in healthcare professions, but financial stress of debt and insufficient academic support due to a shortage in effectively prepared faculty may compound the situation (Brown et al., 2015). Decreased cultural/racial/ethnic diversity, concern over lowered student numbers, and limited fieldwork options were also potential issues identified with a move to the OTD. Questions surfaced on how an OTD requirement would impact students of underrepresented groups who may have stress from other miscellaneous sources, different from their single, White classmates. Brown et al. (2015) would likely anticipate a decline in OTD enrollment of students of underrepresented groups because of additional financial, time, and occupational role stressors.

A benefit of transitioning to a professional program such as the OTD was that students may be entering the program having already earned a bachelor's degree which would have

required more time as an undergraduate student; additional time in this role may translate to increased maturity and realization of responsibility for learning. Students who have completed more education prior to starting the OTD would possibly have higher expectations placed upon them by faculty as a result of their prior experiential learning (Dewey, 1938). This may enable students to display increased readiness to respond to the necessary demands of a professional graduate OTD program and feel more responsibility for heightened engagement in their learning.

Comparing physical therapy (PT) with OT, PT completed degree advancement across all programs to a clinical doctorate in a condensed amount of time so lessons are to be learned with these changes that may be applicable to OT. As the program shifted to an entry-level doctoral degree ahead of the 2020 goal set by the American Physical Therapy Association, PT practitioners were enthusiastic about opportunities for increased autonomy in practice and earning respect from other healthcare disciplines with a doctoral degree (Plack, 2002). Yet, the hurried degree advancement from an entry-level master's degree to doctoral degree was questioned by some as degree inflation: Is this level of education necessary to care for future patients with respect to the necessary time and energy to earn a doctoral degree? Furthermore, faculty questioned who is now best suited to instruct students at a doctoral level.

### ***Stress from OTD Academia Impact***

Clinical doctoral degrees like the OTD are not synonymous to an academic doctoral degree. Future faculty need not obtain only their OTD, but they also may be required to earn a PhD to instruct full-time as a professor at research universities—increasing the time and resources required. Academic doctoral-prepared faculty are necessary to evaluate the efficacy of tests and interventions as well as develop curriculum; this expectation highlights the notion on why this degree was required to obtain faculty positions for the majority of OT programs (Plack,

2002). Opportunely, ACOTE (2017) had been following the likelihood of possible faculty shortages to actively alleviate this issue by recruiting and supporting OT's who would be excellent future instructors. A recommended way to help aspiring faculty achieve an academic doctoral degree is through mentorship from more experienced faculty (Tobin & Taff, 2020).

Perlmutter (2010) declared that mentors are the most important relationship faculty have to be successful in academia. A study examining the importance of faculty mentorship in an OT program uncovered a moderate correlation between mentorship and both research productivity and support factors from the university (Paul et al., 2006). Goal setting and periodic evaluation were also recommended in a mentorship relationship to feel productive while meeting the demands of academia. With respect to newer faculty, Gmelch (1993) recommended mentoring for "guidance and collegial support needed to gain understanding and acceptance of one's contribution to his or her profession" (p. 38). The Protégé Advancement Theory of advocating, protecting, and mentoring to succeed in higher education by building negotiation skills and seeking sponsors is gaining popularity with female faculty (Johnson, 2017). Therefore, seeking support through faculty-to-faculty mentorship was promoted as a valuable way to manage stress in academia.

The AOTA (2018) *Academic Programs Annual Data Report* included data on accredited OT programs; as of the previous academic year, there are 20 accredited OTD programs (with many in the candidate and applicant stages) and 162 accredited master's OT programs. With changes in curriculum and increased course and fieldwork expectations arises potential stress. As noted by Eagan and Garvey (2015), stress that allows for growth through challenge is eustress so if perception is framed positively, faculty members experience excitement with the move to an OTD. However, due the original mandate followed by abeyance, little to no research exists

for developing understanding and adequately planning for the phenomenon of this transition to an OTD. Furthermore, since this change was initially precipitated in the form of a mandate versus an individual OT program decision as believed in 2015, distress may be experienced since the change is perceived as a threat to existing cultural norms within the OT program.

### ***Stress from Organizational Change***

Although mandated changes may involve heightened feelings of distress, any change impacting people may provoke stress. However, intentionality in initiating and navigating change makes a difference in the perception of the process as well as the final outcome. Planned changes within an organization or program are recognized as structured, linear, and logical in how they are constructed and implemented (Hodges, 2016). Communicating planned changes and actively involving faculty in the change process fostered the likelihood of boosting morale among the people impacted by the change as they felt connected to each other and the change itself. Also known as proactive change, planned change is carefully thought-out and seeks to anticipate issues or even capitalize on opportunities (Kinicki & Williams, 2013). This is reminiscent of eustress and can be motivating for faculty.

Unfortunately, if organizational change is enacted in a reactive manner, it has the propensity to negatively trigger faculty in various emotional and behavioral ways: anxiety, lowered morale, burnout, uncertainty, and stress symptoms (Hodges, 2016; Kinicki & Williams, 2013; Stanford University, n.d.). According to work and wellbeing survey results released by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2017), employees who reported experiencing recent organizational change were also correlated with reports of chronic work stress, decreased trust of their employer, and increased frequency to resign in the near future. Although this survey did not specifically recruit and exclusively include faculty members, the results were still important

to consider because organizational change is inevitable across all work place environments. Not utilizing a planned organizational change process may undermine the original efforts to produce positive change, yielding additional problems instead. Leaders of change must be aware of the need to respond to the emotional and behavioral impacts of their employees through building supportive relationships.

Delineating the organizational change process to transition from a MOT to OTD was important to outline for enhanced understanding of this rigorous process which takes many years to adequately plan for as well as complete the necessary steps to achieve Accreditation status. ACOTE manages this three-step process involving OT program faculty first sending a Letter of Intent and Eligibility Data to ACOTE before submitting the Candidacy Application. According to ACOTE (2020), “The Candidacy Application must be electronically signed by the occupational therapy program director, the dean or administrator overseeing the proposed program, and the chief executive officer of the sponsoring institution” (p. 2). Based on a review of the Candidacy Application, ACOTE either grants, defers action on, or denies the request. It is after successful completion of this step that students can be admitted into the OTD program. Step two is the Preaccreditation Review where the transitioning OTD program faculty must self-assess their compliance with the ACOTE Standards and submit an initial Report of Self-Study. Based on the appraisal of this report, ACOTE grants, defers action on, or denies Preaccreditation Status. After successful completion of step two, the final step of the process involves an initial on-site evaluation involving a team who “prepares a Report of On-Site Evaluation, upon which ACOTE bases its decision to either grant or withhold accreditation” (ACOTE, 2020, p. 2). This must take place before the first class of OTD students graduate. Once Accreditation status has been granted, the OTD program faculty can expect a return visit within five to seven years from

ACOTE to check on continued compliance with ACOTE Standards and accreditation renewal. In addition to these specific steps taken by faculty to achieve Accreditation status through ACOTE, faculty must also ready the OT program for this programmatic change process internally; this specific process is to be discussed in a future section where faculty and staff roles are further delineated.

### **The Role of Self-Efficacy in Shaping Faculty Stress**

Self-efficacy is the belief in our ability to be successful when it comes to meeting challenges and completing tasks (Ackerman, 2020). Cox and Steiner (2013) added, “It [Self-efficacy] is a key component of our power to make things happen in the various domains of our lives” (p. 77). Possessing this skill is significant when it comes to encountering distress, threats, or hindrances by influencing faculty to perceive these stressors in a more positive way. Because self-efficacy involves the personal belief in the capability to use skills to achieve, it likely inspires the use of effective coping skills to deal with stressors.

In order to better understand self-efficacy as a theory, its primary sources of information must be explored. As the founder of psychological self-efficacy as well as what has become social cognitive theory, Stanford psychologist Albert Bandura (1977) described these four sources of self-efficacy as performance accomplishment (i.e., mastery experience), vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Improving self-efficacy depended upon the utilization of these sources. Optimal mastery experiences occur when practice of a skill allows for success to occur (Ackerman, 2020). Accepting challenges (positive stressors) in learning builds self-efficacy skills in what may be viewed a self-fulfilling prophesy: If a person believes they can tackle the stressor and do, it reinforces belief in capabilities—likely increasing the odds of accepting similar challenges again in the future. Of the four sources, mastery

experiences are typically the most profound at enhancing self-efficacy because of the direct, authentic impact on individuals (Artino, 2012). In this study, faculty self-report of opportunities to engage in mastery experiences were sought to understand this self-efficacy source.

Vicarious experiences transpire when learning occurs by observing those around us, which may involve the support of mentors. Cox and Steiner (2013) reported the modeling of skills by mentors also provides opportunities to use encouraging words to communicate confidence in abilities to mentees. This is a prime example of how verbal persuasion can easily be implemented to enhance self-efficacy. However, Bandura (1977) cautioned relying solely on verbal persuasion as a means of building self-efficacy due to the lack of experiential learning present; it was best used in conjunction with mastery experiences to help foster self-efficacy in meeting challenges.

The final self-efficacy source was psychological states (termed emotional arousal by Bandura, 1977) which takes into consideration both context and health/wellbeing of individuals while they pursue increased self-efficacy. Relating this source back to stress, intense stressors and/or heightened emotional responses make it less likely to anticipate success and therefore, less likely achieve success as a result of this belief (Cox & Steiner, 2013). With respect to the Yerkes-Dodson Law, situations where high amounts of negative stress are present yield less effectiveness in performance due to occurring psychological (depression, anxiety) and physiological responses (fatigue, pain, etc.) that may be counterproductive. Bandura (1977) eloquently described,

People rely partly on their state of physiological arousal in judging their anxiety and vulnerability to stress. Because high arousal usually debilitates performance, individuals are more likely to expect success when they are not beset by aversive arousal than if they



are tense and viscerally agitated. Fear reactions generate further fear of impending stressful situations through anticipatory self-arousal. (pp. 198-199).

Therefore, self-efficacy through experience with psychological states with either too little impact or overwhelming impact may contribute to depression or respectively, anxiety/fear which could end up being cyclical in nature.

Based on this information, the presence of distress contributed to a lowered sense of self-efficacy and therefore, achievement; increasing amounts of negative stress experienced by faculty or students decreased their effectiveness in higher education settings. On the other hand, people encountering positive stressors framed as motivating likely possess high levels of self-efficacy which allows them to also recover from set-backs and failures quicker, demonstrating resilience (Ackerman, 2020). With respect to these concepts based on decades of research, it would be advantageous for faculty to be informed in how they can foster increased reserves of self-efficacy to be successful in their academic pursuits as well as their overall lifestyle.

### ***Benefits of Self-Efficacy***

Indubitably, self-efficacy was one of the most critical components for learners to possess for necessary motivation to achieve (Artino, 2012). A longitudinal study by Chemers et al. (2001) uncovered that people with high self-efficacy also possessed high optimism which yielded better academic performance, improved personal adjustment abilities, fostered more effective coping skills, enhanced overall health, and produced higher overall satisfaction and commitment to school. This is especially important research for disciplines like OT due to the transition to implementation of programmatic change which may contribute to increased stress. If self-efficacy can be weaved into classroom experiences, the likelihood of decreased attrition

and eventual degree accomplishment follows. Therefore, it is vital to consider garnering the right amount of eustress in order to achieve goals to continue to foster self-efficacy.

Regarding engagement in coping skills to combat stressful situations, Bandura (1977) asserted, “The strength of people's convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try to cope with given situations” (p. 193). This is a poignant statement to consider with regard to answering the question on how self-efficacy theory influenced the habitual engagement of wellbeing opportunities to manage stress. For an individual to cope with stress effectively, they need to possess self-efficacy regarding their ability to do so. Taking Bandura’s four sources of self-efficacy into consideration, people who have little self-efficacy regarding regular use of positive coping skills would benefit from opportunities to engage in such skills where they can experience mastery over set goals on stress management, partake in vicarious learning, hear words of encouragement, and improve their psychological state via the incorporation of positive coping skills. Incorporation of all these aspects requires intentionality and effort on behalf of faculty, but it is aligned with what educational philosopher Nel Noddings (2005) would argue as the ideal: care to educate the whole person to be primed for an active life in a democratic society. When faculty members foster learning beyond the required skills to pass examinations, future OT practitioners enter the profession as ready to holistically care for their patients. Inquiring about how faculty promote self-efficacy elements overtly and covertly helped construct understanding around the process of stress management and wellbeing for the study.

### **Wellbeing in Occupational Therapy**

Health and wellbeing is a practice area of priority within the profession of OT, and according to occupational therapists Pizzi and Richards (2017), participation in wellbeing tasks aimed to optimize quality of life and satisfaction. Often a difficult term to define, OT’s

recognize wellbeing as encompassing physical, mental, social, and spiritual health while also addressing participation (and perhaps productivity) in occupational engagement (Pizzi & Richards, 2017). Physical health and mental health are intricately connected; robust levels of self-efficacy have a positive impact on health, including implementation of stress management techniques (Ackerman, 2020). Bandura (1977) mentioned the importance of social support in the form of mentors as boosting self-efficacy, and from a wellbeing perspective, social health incorporated many environments consisting of relationships between people, organizations, and populations. Descriptions of spirituality may include religious rituals and explorations about the meaning of life (ACOTE, 2017). Pizzi and Richards (2017) made a distinction between occupational participation and performance (productivity), declaring performance to be more goal-directed yet participation (involvement) to be most essential for fostering wellbeing. This distinction was intriguing because seminal research on self-efficacy promoted goal setting for achievement; the researchers declared that mere participation was preferred with wellbeing opportunities so individual partialities and context influences must be considered.

Now that the constructs have been operationally defined through an OT lens, the most prominent wellbeing tasks OT faculty should partake in to buffer effects of stress and essentially boost self-efficacy are described. Exercise was mentioned as both a spontaneous coping skill and stress management prevention technique within the SAMHSA (2010) evidence-based program curriculum on coping with stress. Exercise has value for being incorporated into daily lifestyle habits and routines to help ward off potential stressors and lessen the effects of stress (Stanford University, n.d.). A barrier to faculty engagement in exercise had to do with scheduling time to prioritize its inclusion in daily routines. From a survey study of female faculty, some participants cited forgoing self-care occupations such as exercise and even sleep

when faced with mounting stress from academic responsibilities (LaPan et al., 2013). Expanding that notion, a qualitative study recognized the exclusion of physical activity was actually replaced with unhealthy behaviors of binge eating, smoking, and isolation which developed into bigger health problems (Mountz, 2016). While most studies that address a wide variety of coping skills mentioned physical activity, a qualitative study comparing different modes of activity discovered significantly lower scores on perceived stress and personal burnout when involved in either a psychological stress management group (including equal time in cognitive-behavioral education and practice) or physical activity group (Baghurst & Kelley, 2014). Although this study's participants were students, the results are still appreciated with the indication of physical and mental health wellbeing interventions seen as effective.

Mental health wellbeing involves emotional and cognitive components; an example is reframing which is a coping skill involving the conscious replacement of negative self-talk with words of affirmation to boost healthy emotional functioning (Hughes et al., 2011; Tobin & Taff, 2020). Reframing is a type of redirection of thought; other types of emotional stabilization strategies include relaxation/mindfulness and a balanced use of empathy (Cox & Steiner, 2013). Relaxation techniques are numerous: deep breathing, visualization, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, reading, napping—to name a few (SAMHSA, 2010; Stanford, n.d.). Mindfulness has been receiving increased attention for its benefits juxtaposed with a busy lifestyle. With intentional practice of bringing awareness to the present moment through attention to the senses without judgement, mindfulness allowed for adaptive coping to take place (Cox & Steiner, 2013). From an educational and philosophical standpoint regarding mindfulness, Maxine Greene (1978) was adamant about what she termed *wide-awakeness* in life.

Being fully attentive to our world allowed conscious awareness of the present to be mentally and cognitively directed in morality during decision-making.

Wellbeing from a social perspective may encompass some of the previously mentioned qualities of mentors in higher education amid fellow faculty as well as relationships between faculty and students. Using the Brief COPE survey, a study of OT faculty indicated various ways they preferred social support as wellbeing: enjoying friendships, seeking professional help, and implementing a small group on stress management (Tobin & Taff, 2020). Personal and professional support was heavily relied upon to meet the demands of academia in a study exclusively involving female faculty (LaPan et al., 2013). Clearly, social wellbeing in higher education was vital with respect to managing stress. From a student-perspective, OT students progress through the program together in a cohort so a social milieu developed around the shared experience (Stout et al., 1994). Spending time in and out of the classroom with supportive people, venting to trusted individuals or groups, consulting with others in similar situations, and even self-talk out loud or internally are established strategies for social wellbeing (Gmelch, 1993). Faculty should acknowledge and make an effort to promote intentionally chosen strategies within their faculty groups as well as within the classroom with students.

Finally, spiritual health helped people “maintain a positive worldview and cope with the demands of their work” (Cox & Steiner, 2013, p. 71). From traditional religious practices to spiritual activities involving connection with a higher power or purpose, this area of wellbeing is as unique as the person who incorporated such ideas into their lifestyle. Although a dated study on coping skills with OT students, Stout et al. (1994) reported divorced and older students tended to use strategies such as meditation and prayer significantly more often than single, younger

students. The results indicated variances in the coping skills utilized for wellbeing during situations and various stages of life.

In summary, possessing a comprehensive understanding of possible wellbeing occupations to manage stress was imperative prior to engagement with study participants. It provided the researcher with existing ideas of stress management techniques already in use as well as opportunities for inclusion, if found to be lacking. This information helped provide insight particularly with respect to self-care occupations in answering the research question.

### **Stress Management Habituation**

A plethora of positive coping skills are available to manage stress. However, none of them will be effective for faculty if they are not implemented. Habitual engagement involves patterns of behavior which constitute routines (O'Brien, 2017). As part of the Model of Human Occupation developed by OT's (Mary Reilly and expanded upon by Gary Kielhofner) to conceptualize OT practice, the concept of habituation consists of both habits and roles which simultaneously work together in creating patterns of behavior. Use of positive coping skills over time fosters the development of habits within roles and eventual routines incorporating these skills; some skills are described as prevention strategies due to the foresight of how their implementation reduced stress overall or kept other stressors low (SAMHSA, 2010). Connecting the concept of habituation to self-efficacy, habitual engagement in healthy wellbeing tasks increases self-efficacy. Therefore, stress management techniques allow an individual to reassess their stress level (either decreasing distress or reframing it at eustress) so they can be more efficient in the goals they have set out to accomplish. With the numerous stressors and resultant stress recognized by faculty, it is apparent why understanding this connection is vital.

Hence, stress management habituation is beneficial, and it should be promoted by the faculty who are also implementing educational standards. Regarding course content within OTD programs, the revised 2018 ACOTE Standards go into effect July 31, 2020. According to the standards, graduates must be able to implement interventions to “support engagement in everyday life activities that affect health, well-being, and quality of life” (ACOTE, 2018, p. 2). While the content outcomes did not dictate specific course learning activities of a psychosocial focus to meet this standard, the outcomes did require course content on psychology and sociology or anthropology (Standard B.1.2.). Additionally, Standard B.3.4. stated coursework must help the student develop the ability to explain the importance of balancing areas of occupation in health and the role of occupation in the promotion of health (ACOTE, 2018, p. 27). Connecting these guidelines to concepts being examined (i.e., stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy), faculty did have some leeway in how salient these concepts should be felt within the implicit and explicit course content. Each OTD program inevitably has some palpable similarities due to the standards but flexibility as well as creativity in how they are exemplified.

The ACOTE standards described possessed a level of connection with the profession’s roots in psychological interventions and habit-training that occurred during the mental hygiene movement after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Castaneda et al., 2013). Therefore, based on the identified stressors, the benefits of stress management, and the recognition of OT origins in mental health concepts, wellbeing opportunities encompassing stress management techniques would be logically well-situated in the higher education culture with intentional planning by faculty. Faculty roles are numerous; their responsibilities extend upwards with demands from the higher education system and outwards, encompassing the students whose lives they impact. The research goal was to understand and construct a process surrounding stress management

techniques and habitual wellbeing occupations to increase self-efficacy for faculty and their students during the transition of implementing programmatic change to an OTD.

### **Connecting Wellbeing and Self-Efficacy for Stress Management**

In summary, the literature suggested a significant connection between habitual wellbeing occupations and self-efficacy to manage stress. Understanding the process of how this was embedded and promoted by OT faculty was an aim of this study. Educator, philosopher, and activist Paulo Freire (1998) described the humanness faculty are to possess in their democratic authority with students; knowing how to listen when confronted with diverse views and caring for the wellbeing of students are two of the ideological concepts discussed. Freire (1998) also believed in both the professional competence and seriousness required of educators, stating, “[Teachers] who do not study, who make little effort to keep abreast of events have no moral authority to coordinate the activities of the classroom” (p. 85). This bold statement of both competence and confidence related to the needed sense of self-efficacy required of faculty. It is easier to enhance self-efficacy in others when faculty themselves have a healthy sense of self-efficacy (Ackerman, 2020). When faculty model what they teach, replication in behavior by students is more likely to occur due to the presence of social cognitive theory. Perlmutter (2010) was transparent with regard to the importance of building and maintaining constructive relationships with students: Good relations with students help mitigate overall stress. This study examined what was being understood and promoted by OT faculty during the implementation of programmatic change.

Student achievement and success are genuinely what faculty should consciously desire, fueling intrinsic motivation felt within the classroom. However, there are added benefits from an extrinsic motivation standpoint: Good relations with students yield positive teaching reviews that



are beneficial during the quest for promotion, tenure, and/or annual job evaluations (Perlmutter, 2010). Students are recognized as an extension of faculty members so faculty have an obligation to incorporate best-practice regarding skills and socializing aspects within the context of the classroom. Essentially, faculty ought to be mindful of their influence by modeling the type of person they would want to have potentially replicated. In a qualitative study of OT faculty members, two themes emerged from the data highlighting this point: “Educators teach who they are and personify an implicit curriculum” (Hooper, 2007, p. 237). For faculty members with reduced self-efficacy, the notion of influence may be daunting and contribute to increased distress or fear. This is a reason for faculty to work on increasing their self-efficacy via the sources mentioned by Bandura (1977) while also engaging in wellbeing opportunities to manage stress. The processes are cyclical and have a profound impact on students.

Within the profession of OT, implementing a programmatic change to an entry-level doctoral degree may be occurring but need not be distressing with robust organizational change planning in place to support faculty. Pizzi and Richards (2017) advocated for an increased focus on the inclusion of health and wellbeing in the academic context. Subsequently, this paradigm shift connecting occupations with participation in health and wellbeing opportunities can be promoted by OT faculty. Reframing distressing thoughts of change into opportunities needs to be realized as motivating eustress for faculty, providing them with renewed energy and commitment to their students. OT students become fellow OT practitioners who continue to shape the direction, focus, and legacy of this century-old profession.

## **Research Design and Methodology**

### **Connecting Qualitative Research to Stress**

For the purposes outlined in this study, qualitative methodology was best situated overall to research the connection between stress and self-efficacy with OT faculty as they undergo implementing programmatic change. According to the American Institute of Stress (2018), stress is difficult to both describe and define as it is a highly subjective phenomenon; without such specifics delineated, it becomes challenging to measure magnitude as well as impact. However, the 1930's research of Dr. Hans Selye, a Hungarian-Canadian endocrinologist, emphasized stress as something that could evoke pathological changes able to be quantifiably measured. His seminal research helped shape the meaning of the word stress and how it is characterized today, but the lived experience of stress is still unique to the individual within a specific context. This takes into consideration past experiential learning, metacognition, and self-efficacy surrounding the management of stress. Therefore, though stress has been measured quantitatively for many decades, less is known about the qualitative aspects when it comes to people in unique contexts. Qualitative methodologies are able to provide perspective on stress from various viewpoints encompassing matters involving the meaning, process, experience, personal storyline, etc. that are unable to be eloquently described via theoretically positivist quantitative methodologies.

Contrary to quantitative designs, qualitative research inquiry designs are characterized as being more flexible, inductive, and reflexive (Maxwell, 2013). Gay et al. (2012) expanded upon these terms, stating, "Qualitative research problems and methods tend to evolve as understanding of the research context and participants deepens" (p. 7). Qualitative research possesses a structure that is both conceptual with goals and a framework as well as operational, including

methods and validity; the interaction of these connected structural components center around the research question (Maxwell, 2013). Instead of stating hypotheses to be tested, qualitative research questions are formulated to be answered through rich, thick detailed data collected via a multitude of methods. Categorizing this data into patterns produces the descriptive, narrative synthesis characteristic of this type of inquiry.

Another key component that differentiates qualitative research from quantitative involves the avoidance of manipulation/control over the context. “The effort to understand the participants’ perspective requires researchers using qualitative methods to interact extensively and intimately with participants during the study” (Gay et al., 2012, p. 8). This assertion on seeking to understand perspective was why qualitative research methodology was utilized to examine the constructed understanding of processes surrounding stress and self-efficacy of faculty experiencing implemented programmatic change to an OTD: It is a unique context of people that must be studied within its own bound culture to understand the connections.

As more OT programs started the transition to offering an entry-level doctoral degree, stress had arrived initially in the form of a mandate to do so which was then rescinded; however, many programs had already started the transition to an OTD. According to the American Institute of Stress (2018), the sense of possessing little or no control over a situation often yields a feeling of stress or distress. Yet, the role of perspective described by Gmelch (1993) asserted that the magnitude to which stressors impact a person was dependent upon the individual perceptions held; the discrepancy between demand from the stressor and resources available to meet the demand dictated the actual stress felt. Positive stressors for faculty intriguingly included increased workload and new responsibilities, contributing to enhanced motivation (Eagan & Garvey, 2015). Therefore, it is plausible that even expectations from implementing

programmatic change may not be distressing for faculty since control is to be experienced in how the new program is created, organized, and established to meet standards for the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). Although the change to an OTD remains a significant shift, programs are given a choice. Additionally, resources exist in the form of training, education, and support from ACOTE. Understanding this process including stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy from a faculty perspective was the focus of inquiry; therefore, the research question as well as the data collection and subsequent analysis required qualitative methodology.

### **Connecting Qualitative Research to Self-Efficacy**

Similar to stress, self-efficacy can be intriguing to study qualitatively since it is an individual belief in abilities to be successful when rising to meet challenges and complete tasks (Ackerman, 2020). While self-efficacy can be quantified via self-survey Likert scales or even influenced in randomized control trials, detailed understanding of it would not emerge from these methodologies because they fundamentally cannot produce such a result. In qualitative research, Maxwell (2013) advocated for a structured yet interconnected and interactive research design model that included the study goals, conceptual framework, methods, and validity all connected to the central research question. Connecting this research design model with self-efficacy and stress, it was important to note that research by Stanford psychologist Albert Bandura (1977) delineated four primary sources of self-efficacy while considering both context and health/wellbeing of individuals. These included performance accomplishment (i.e., mastery experience), vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Weighing in on this topic, social workers Cox and Steiner (2013) have indicated that intense stressors and/or

heightened emotional responses decreased anticipated success and therefore, fostered beliefs of inadequate self-efficacy.

Regarding its positive power, Cox and Steiner (2013) also asserted that self-efficacy was the primary catalyst necessary to spur action in the contexts of life. Self-efficacy is vital when encountering distress, threats, or hindrances because it actually influences positive perception of the stressors. Additionally, high levels of self-efficacy inspire the use of effective coping skills to deal with the stressors because self-efficacy encompasses the personal belief in the capability to use skills to achieve and succeed. With these concepts set within the context of a new OTD program, it was reasonable to explore this complexity qualitatively for understanding detailed meanings of experience, observing participants while interacting with the phenomenon, and perhaps even developing theories (Richards & Morse, 2007). These were the reasons for selecting a qualitative methodology for inquiry.

### **Stress Management in Occupational Therapy**

A conceptual framework must be presented to understand stress management within the context of academia for OT faculty. As one of the most salient frameworks used within OT, the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) was developed by OT's Mary Reilly and Gary Kielhofner to conceptualize OT practice; it includes the concept of habituation which encompasses habits and roles which concurrently work together in creating patterns of behavior to constitute routines (O'Brien, 2017). A grounded theory study by Charmaz (2002) further described habits as being rooted in modes of response to stimuli, seemingly automatic. Applying habituation to the utilization of positive coping skills, it is plausible that the incorporation and continued refinement of stress management habits within roles and eventual routines develop over time. Some stress management skills may also be described as prevention techniques due to

the foresight of how their enactment helps reduce stress overall and/or keeps other stressors lower (SAMHSA, 2010). Nonetheless, spontaneous coping skills and planned stress prevention techniques are recognized as beneficial for health and wellness in the overall response to stress.

Since health and wellness is a practice area within the profession of OT, exploring the connection between the concept of habituation with self-efficacy was valuable because habitual engagement in healthy wellbeing tasks are posed to increase self-efficacy. Furthermore, self-concepts like self-efficacy are rooted in habits constructed over time (Charmaz, 2002).

According to occupational therapists Pizzi and Richards (2017), participation in wellbeing tasks (encompassing physical, mental, social, and spiritual health) aimed to enhance quality of life while also addressing advantageous participation (and perhaps productivity) in occupational engagement. Thus, high levels of self-efficacy have a positive impact on health, including habitual implementation of stress management techniques (Ackerman, 2020). For faculty to be more efficient in goal achievement within the academic setting, intentional use of stress management techniques targeting mental and emotional wellbeing may allow an individual to develop insight to reassess and reframe stress levels (either reducing distress or reframing it as eustress). With the heightened level of stress recognized in OT faculty, the qualitative methodology of grounded theory was poised to help construct a theory on meaningful connection involving stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy within the context of implementing programmatic change.

### **Defining Grounded Theory**

Developed in 1967, the conception of grounded theory was thought to be a response to the sociological positivist approaches popular at the time (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). It was also described as an offspring of the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism which

“explores the understandings abroad in culture as the meaningful matrix that guides our lives” (Crotty, 1998, p. 71). Broadly stated, grounded theory methodology was best characterized by its focus on developing theoretical ideas from the emergence of data into categories, utilization of theoretical sensitivity while examining the data, and analyzation via what was known as a constant comparative research process (Kelle, 2007).

Misconstrued as a theory itself based on its name, grounded theory is a methodology to be utilized for the benefit of developing a theory grounded in data. To give meaning to the term grounded, data collected when using this methodology was rooted in actions, interactions, and social processes of study participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Generating new, contextualized theories empirically and reviving legitimate qualitative research were two of the early aims of developing grounded theory methodology. Grounded theory presented itself as a methodology especially valuable within medical communities where statistics tended to dominate. It is currently utilized frequently in health care settings, sociology, psychology, and education to gain understanding in substantive areas impacting a sampling of participants. This is accomplished by constructing a theory to address the main concern of the participants in a specific context. Richards and Morse (2007) added that grounded theory studies are popular among contexts in which understanding of process and change is vital.

Undoubtedly, a void is filled by using grounded theory, but its application must be true to methodological foundations. According to Glesne (2011), mere use of grounded theory terminology was not indicative of this type of methodology; the actual techniques must be delineated and incorporated throughout the research process. A central strength involving utilization of the methodology renders what Bryant and Charmaz (2007) described as “process and procedures of qualitative investigation visible, comprehensible, and replicable” (p. 33). The

conception of grounded theory offered qualitative researchers an option with reliability and validity by means of structure for systematic inquiry. Nevertheless, it was almost two decades after its commencement that grounded theory started to take hold and frequently be utilized widespread among researchers (Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

While examining the influences present at the time of its development as a methodology, there was a noticeable influence via interactionist and pragmatist thinking on grounded theory (Dillon, 2012). Known as the philosopher of education, John Dewey expanded the term pragmatism and contributed to its understanding greatly. Concepts included understanding experience through active fieldwork in context, perspectives possessed from interactions, and theory generation established in reality (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Dewey, 1938; Dillon, 2012). According to Bryant and Charmaz (2007), grounded theory had proliferated to the point of being the qualitative methodology of choice for the majority of published papers written. However, for a study to be an authentic and respected grounded theory methodology, the researcher must explicitly explain the processes of choice and subscribe to its utilization.

While many research methodologies begin with a theory, the intent of grounded theory is to develop theory from the data collected and analyzed. This may be particularly intriguing to qualitative researchers wanting to delve into a substantive area while keeping an open mind to what may be eventually gathered and investigated. Grounded theorists strive to carefully and systematically create new theories from the contexts they study to enhance understanding within the studied population. Per the Grounded Theory Institute (2014), the employed research procedures produced conceptual categories which help construct a theory to address the main concern of the participants in a specific context. According to Gay et al. (2012), an effort existed to “link actions of participants to general social science theory or work inductively to arrive at a



theory that describes a particular phenomenon” (p. 13). Not to be confused with the methodology of phenomenology, grounded theory seeks to understand what is happening with respect to a developed theorized process.

### ***Epistemological and Theoretical Perspectives***

In order to fully appreciate the methodological design of a grounded theory study, it is vital to explain both the commonly evoked epistemological viewpoint as well as the theoretical orientation unique to this methodology. Described as a way of both understanding and explaining how we know what we know, epistemology is a philosophical basis regarding the theory of knowledge (Crotty, 1998). Glesne (2011) expanded, “What you believe knowledge to be, in turn, shapes and serves to justify the methodology you choose to answer your questions” (p. 5). Due to the historical context in which grounded theory was developed, it has undergone shifts in its epistemological and theoretical perspectives; remnants of each shift by the major philosophers who contributed to the delineation of grounded theory subtypes still remain within the methodology.

Currently, the epistemological stance generally accepted of grounded theory is constructionism, which had been described by Crotty (1998) as a meaningful reality “being constructed in and out of interaction between human being and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social culture” (p. 42). It is the most popular epistemological philosophy of qualitative researchers. Therefore, this grounded theory research study lends itself to a constructionism orientation epistemologically in that meanings are not discovered. Instead, they are constructed out of the engagement of study participants with their contexts.

Despite its current popularity, constructionism has not always been the epistemological stance of choice, especially when examining the beginnings of this methodology in the 1960’s.

Founders Glaser and Strauss sought a qualitative research methodology that was systematic, straightforward, and even scientific in creating methods of data analysis and generation of theory. So as a result of their quest amidst the positivist theoretical orientation prevalent at the time, the epistemological viewpoint lent itself to objectivist in that reality was waiting to be discovered not constructed (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Objectivism as an epistemology declared, “things exist as meaningful entities independently of consciousness and experience, that they have truth and *meaning* residing in them as objects (‘objective truth and meaning, therefore), and that careful (scientific?) research can attain that objectivist truth and meaning” (Crotty, 1998, p. 5-6). As a result of their intentions, the epistemological and theoretical orientations Glaser and Strauss subscribed to with grounded theory conception were seen as more scientific, rigorous, and suited for upward mobility in academia and research (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007).

Additionally, grounded theory had also been described from a postpositivist theoretical perspective which was concerned with “probability rather than certainty, (...) a certain level of objectivity rather than absolute objectivity, and seeks to approximate the truth” (Crotty, 1998, p. 29). For some educational researchers, postpositivism was essentially just a current version of positivism with the understanding that there is always a chance something is not true. Within the context of qualitative research, it is logical to see how positivism has shifted to postpositivism as certainty is rarely guaranteed.

Examination of the world to make sense of it related to theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998), and even though grounded theory developed from a positivist (or postpositivist) stance, it was actually more readily categorized within interpretivism and specifically, symbolic interactionism. Recognized as a type of interpretivism, the symbolic interactionism theoretical

perspective was noted within research when there was a search of meaning from participants within processes (Crotty, 1998). Due to the interest in process and change, grounded theory research questions theoretically contained the perspective of reality being dynamically negotiated between people (Richards & Morse, 2007). With roots in pragmatist philosophy, symbolic interactionism involved actions and interactions steeped in meaning involving people, objects, contexts, etc. Schwandt (2007) explained further, “humans are purposive agents who confront a world that must be interpreted” (p. 284). For the development of meanings, this occurs by “becoming persons in the process” (Crotty, 1998, p. 8)

Postmodernism is the newest turn that grounded theory has encountered via theoretical influence. In addition to the sentiment regarding the rejection of lifestyles linked to industrialization, Crotty (1998) described postmodernism as one with “ambiguity, relativity, fragmentation, particularity, and discontinuity” (p. 185) with no unifying system but instead, possibilities to explain happenings. This theoretical framework is not as frequently evoked in the social sciences and is more salient in art and literature. However, its influence is felt in situational analysis and discourse analysis methodologies where multidimensional mapping aims to present lived situations, positionalities, activities of participants, and discourses between them all (Clarke, 2005).

### **Research Question**

In summary, the researcher’s connection with epistemological stance informed the theoretical perspective. Methodology was selected based on the research question informing the study design and methods utilized. With grounded theory, the end result is the constructed theory derived from the data collected with perhaps an eventual conclusion drawn about the application of the theoretical model. Research questions from a grounded theory methodology

are best characterized by their intent on developing theoretical ideas from the emergence of data into categories, utilization of theoretical sensitivity while examining the data, and analyzation via a constant comparative research process (Kelle, 2007). This study was epistemologically constructionism and has informed the following research question:

How do occupational therapy faculty understand and construct a process to manage stress, promote well-being, and foster self-efficacy for themselves and their students during a period of programmatic change?

### **Constructivist Grounded Theory**

The original understanding of grounded theory methodology has evolved since its inception over a half-century ago. Five primary subtypes of grounded theory have been noted and for this study, the constructivist subtype was the central focus. Constructivist grounded theory was developed by sociologist and occupational therapist Kathy Charmaz (who was a prior student of grounded theory founders Glaser and Strauss), articulating that theories do not simply emerge (i.e., they are not discovered) from the data collected and analyzed but are instead constructed through the interaction occurring between the researcher and the data—reminiscent of constant comparative analysis (Willig, 2013). This involvement of the researcher in the data (known as reflexivity) was recommended from the viewpoint of how the research was conducted, researcher relation to participants, and representation of participants in the reports written (Charmaz, 2006). Constructivist grounded theory involved an interpretive approach to qualitative research that incorporated flexibility in research design; learning about experience within obscured networks, situations, and relationships; exposing hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity; and a focusing on theory development with increased influence involving the researcher's view.

Throughout the 21st century, the initial description of grounded theory methodology has undergone some shifts in thought as evidenced by Charmaz's strong advocacy of constructivist grounded theory possessing less of an emphasis on structures imposed by Strauss (as described in the rejection of axial coding discussed below) and more focus on reflexivity and flexibility. Bryant and Charmaz (2007) asserted the constructivist subtype also aimed to encompass research contexts as well as researcher position, perspectives, priorities, and interactions. As noted by Saldana (2016), Charmaz was recognized for her analytic storylining in grounded theory to construct and describe process. Questions from the substantive area of study with an accompanying literature review are expected within constructivist grounded theory (Evans, 2013). Some of these features are recognized more often due to continued modifications as the methodology overall shifts to embodying an increasingly postmodern theoretical perspective.

The constructivist grounded theory methodology may be appealing to qualitative researchers since constructionism is an epistemology commonly evoked (Crotty, 1998) with strong influence on methodology that allows the researcher an active voice. However, it is worth analyzing the difference in terminology involving constructivist and constructionism. In a 2016 interview with sociology philosopher Reiner Keller, Charmaz divulged that her selection of the term constructivist to describe her subtype of grounded theory was the result of the rise in social constructionism that lacked a self-critical voice of the researcher. While a researcher applying constructivist grounded theory expectedly possesses constructionism as an epistemology, they actually are separate aspects to consider. Thus, constructivist grounded theory was expected to possess reflexivity as the researcher is involved in the data. This was utilized throughout the data collection and analysis for this particular study and depicted in reflexive writings.

### *Grounded Theory Methods*

To further the notion of grounded theory's acceptability for this research, it is worth describing both the methods and analytic techniques to be utilized, focusing on the unique movement between the data collected and the ensuing analysis. The participants in this constructivist grounded theory study included faculty and staff members of a Midwest OT program, recently transitioned to offering an entry-level OTD; the program had admitted around 40 students into their first class which started in Fall 2019. This OT program has been in existence for over 50 years, and typically most students are from the upper Midwest. It also has a satellite OTD program that employs additional faculty and staff for student groups of around 20 in each year of the program. Although the focus was exclusively on the OTD program, faculty were also teaching the MOT curriculum for the final group of students who will graduate in 2021. After this final class, only the OTD program will be offered. Access to the population was gained through the OT Program Chair; this person granted the researcher permission to individually recruit faculty in the program for partaking in the research study after the university's Institutional Review Board approved the study. The OT Program Chair served as the gatekeeper as needed throughout the duration of the study via email correspondence.

Initially, a total of thirteen faculty members (instructors and full-time professors) from the OTD program were emailed an invitation to partake in the research study. From this first tier of recruitment, a low number of participants consented to partake. Interestingly, four faculty members cited heightened stress levels related to personal and professional role overload as a reason to not partake in the study. Those who communicated a decline to partake varied in their years of experience in academia, but most had already earned their academic doctoral degree so that was not an identified stressor for them prompting non-participation. Instead, existing role

overload and shifting responsibilities were noted as impactful. After consultation with the research advisor and then committee, it was decided that the gatekeeper would be approached to seek permission to contact recently retired faculty as they would have been potentially involved with the curriculum change process and the administrative staff since they likely possessed insight on the impact of the change process in their supporting role. Employing theoretical sampling along with the quest for growing participant numbers to increase the likelihood of theoretical saturation, the research advisor and committee also approved inclusion of the OTD satellite program in tier three of recruitment efforts. This satellite program has existed for nearly thirty years. While faculty and staff are present at this location, they are employees of the main campus and partake in the same program components (i.e., expectations, coursework, etc.). From the three tiers combined, nine participants consented to be part of the research study. The salience of viewpoint in the data originated primarily from faculty at a rate of 8:1. Nonetheless, staff possessed a unique perspective of having regular interaction with faculty and students to comment on happenings outside the actual classroom. It was noted that participants in this study were identified by pseudonyms in the interest of confidentiality and anonymity.

A multitude of data collection methods exist and can be utilized with grounded theory; the following were applied within this study: semi-structured interviews, focus groups via anonymous discussion board postings, interactions with participants, and collected documents (Charmaz, 2006; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Schwandt, 2008). Prior to interviews, study participants were asked to complete the New General Self-Efficacy Scale which is an eight item self-report Likert-scale rating tool used to spur discussion and increase understanding about participant personal views on self-efficacy (Chen et al., 2001). As the primary source of data collected, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each

faculty and staff member participating in this study, lasting 30-75 minutes in duration depending upon the participant. Interview questions were formulated to stimulate discussion on topics related to the overall research question with an expectation of follow-up questions utilized for gaining additional insights. Interviews were recorded and transcribed via Zoom for analysis purposes. The typed transcripts edited by listening to the recording were stored and saved in Word along with the corresponding initial coding. The researcher took notes on key points and significant assertions communicated overtly or covertly during the interview. Written notes were also taken during the initial coding processes which also informed memoing.

Focus groups occurred via an anonymous text-based asynchronous discussion board format on Blackboard with the intent of having study participants contribute to discussion on concepts involving stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy. Documents pertaining to the OTD curriculum (course syllabi) and faculty/student content (manuals, policies) were sought and obtained for analysis with respect to the research question. These specifically included the OTD course syllabi for Culture and Occupation, Occupation and Analysis, OT Process and Contexts, and Professional Identity. The OTD Student Manual was reviewed as well as the information posted on the OTD program's website describing the curriculum design, sequence, and outcomes. The School of Medicine and Health Sciences policies were also reviewed for seeking understanding on the context.

An important aspect of consideration for grounded theory methods included the underlying expectations for quality data of details describing the process, implementation of the constant comparison method of analysis, and reflection/reflexivity within the researcher (Richards & Morse, 2007). A well-designed constructivist grounded theory study encompasses these aspects with the intent of gaining quality data reaching the point of theoretical saturation as



a result of theoretical sampling. These are key components as the research intent is to allow for the theory to emerge from the data collected, exemplified in constructed meanings through interactions between the researcher and data. Flexibility for the researcher to return to the participants or seek additional participants via theoretical sampling was unique to this methodology and accommodating when looking at a group structure with multiple influences. Reaching saturation of data in categories was described as finding more information to add until no more can be found that adds anything new to the process (Schwandt, 2007, p. 132). This was the intent of this study to comprehensively respond to the research question.

Another element within this study was the implementation of researcher theoretical descriptive and analytical memoing since it allowed increased understanding of the topic by putting thoughts on paper to make sense of the entire embarked research process (Maxwell, 2013). Grounded theory methodology anticipates time for triangulation of data and subsequently, more analysis followed by additional time with the selected methods; this process was the preferred application of the utilized methods (Willig, 2013). Handwritten theoretical memoing occurred during and immediately after individual interviews with participants to quickly capture ideas by the researcher following the interaction. Further analytical memoing occurred via typing as the researcher reviewed the data both initially and throughout the data analysis process.

### ***Grounded Theory Analytic Techniques***

Due to its inception during heightened interest in positivist theoretical perspectives, grounded theory has a more robust analytic technique implementation when compared to other qualitative research methodologies. Unique to this methodology is the constant comparative method of analysis which involves moving in and out of data collection and analysis (known as

iterations) until saturation occurs (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). It is comparative in the sense that new data collected is compared to the emerging categories being constructed. Due to the expectation of developing theories grounded in the data collected, grounded theory methodologists readily and keenly apply analytic techniques in the form of coding. Coding of the data analyzed for this study involved three levels: initial, focused, and theoretical. It is noted that the unit analyzed in grounded theory involves studying a process, action, interaction, or situation involving many individuals.

As the first level (or cycle) of coding, the goal of initial coding is to break the data into distinct parts of information while also being attentive to potential theoretical directions derived from the data. According to Saldana (2016), Charmaz elected to change the name of this first cycle of coding to initial coding from open coding; it remains the preferred analytic technique for breaking down data into parts to examine them for similarities and differences. Grounded theorists are attuned to processes present within the codes which exemplify actions, interactions, routines, and purposes aimed at reaching a goal (Saldana, 2016). The researcher broke down information into parts via labeling with words/phrases in the margin column of the Word document. Descriptive and analytic memo writing was especially beneficial to utilize during this first cycle to reflect on what is being read and analyzed, hopefully providing links between the data and emergent theory (Lempert, 2007). This was a vital aspect to consider when researching connections between concepts: Reflection increased understanding as well as promoted recall of information gleaned from the experience of analyzing collected data.

Second cycle coding was thought to be fairly straightforward, but novice researchers have struggled in its application which was why theorists have conflicting viewpoints on how to effectively use it (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher utilized second cycle

focused coding with attention given to most frequently occurring initial codes to develop categories (Saldana, 2016). It is the researcher's duty to determine relationships between categories, keeping in mind what Charmaz described as the properties and dimensions (contexts, conditions, interactions, and consequences of a process) of a category (Saldana, 2016, p. 244). Focused coding is appreciated for its applicability within other qualitative studies but is often selected with grounded theory as it helps categorize the data with an emphasis on process-oriented labeling of the interview data. The labeled codes were organized in an outline and represented categories that were then used in the third level of coding. The researcher selected the most salient focused codes for the writing of analytic memos.

Application of the third level known as theoretical coding finally created an understanding of the theory via a narrative and diagram visual (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Charmaz's take on a theoretical code included relationships between the categories and "moves the analytic story in a theoretical direction" (Saldana, 2016, p. 251). Glesne (2011) further summarized the process of theory development as a repeated development of categories from second cycle coding which prompts modification of theory when data is added, thanks to theoretical sampling. The end result was for a theory or storyline to emerge from the codes for it to be expectantly grounded in the collected data. Ultimately, this was accomplished via careful intentionality of the researcher regarding overall study design. Visuals in the form of diagrams and tables were constructed as well as a narrative storyline grounded in the data collected with threads of reflexivity from theoretical memoing and writings by the researcher.

### ***Validity***

Since the researcher had experience as an adjunct faculty member instructing on psychosocial topics such as stress management, validity was addressed through multiple

strategies to mitigate the potential for bias. Validity has to do with what Maxwell (2013) called, “the relationship of your conclusions to reality” (p. 121). Even the best designed qualitative research studies are required to address issues of validity due to the epistemological stances and theoretical perspectives commonly evoked as well.

The strategy of member checking involved seeking feedback about data and analysis conclusions emerging with the study participants (Maxwell, 2013). It was a poignant validity tool used with this study since the researcher was close to the topic content via experiential learning as a former adjunct. Member checking was exemplified through providing verbatim transcripts including initial coding for participants to review and respond with additional insights sought. An openness to feedback was communicated by the researcher verbally and nonverbally to foster and maintain rapport with participants.

Reflexivity to track reflections on a regular basis was utilized to enhance validity of this study by addressing possible researcher bias (Whitehead, 2002). Reflexivity utilization in grounded theory with this topic was of benefit to the researcher due to past experiential learning on the involvement in curriculum development in OT, specifically involving stress management along with other psychosocial topic areas. According to Schwandt (2007), reflexivity involved a critical self-reflection involving biases, preferences, and stance/voice involving the research that works its way into establishing validity for the entire research process. Clarke and Friese (2007) expanded upon this in stating, “Researchers need to make their own situatedness as individuals explicit as well as the situatedness of their research projects (e.g., funding, other sponsorship, etc.)” (p. 368). No longer are qualitative methodologists expected to be without a voice in their research studies. The reflexive writings examined questions raised throughout data collection and analysis, ideas forming, and plausible solutions to surfacing inquiries.

Triangulation of collected data was essential to best capture a more complete picture and understanding of the culture of change for faculty within the OTD program, along with ensuring validity in the data (Gay et al., 2012). Participants experienced an individual semi-structured interview in addition to anonymous online discussion focus groups; this allowed perspectives to be shared in two different formats which may highlight either consistency across interactions or discrepancies to be further explored. Document collection and analysis occurred to develop insight regarding the connection between participant verbalizations and actions. Possessing intentionality throughout the research process was vital. Saldana (2016) stressed the importance of being organized and rigorously ethical; both are closely related to a study's valid results.

### **Grounded Theory with Stress and Self-Efficacy**

This research topic of faculty stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy during the implementation of programmatic change to an OTD was explored through the qualitative research lens. Although various methodologies may have reasonable links to the topic, grounded theory presented as the superlative methodology because there was not an existing theory to understand this process of change for OT faculty due to its novelty. Not only did the research anticipate filling a gap in available literature on this topic with a particular population undergoing a specific phenomenon of change (Alston, 2014), it also was projected to provide insight on how stress management was being promoted implicitly and explicitly in the new OTD program. In connection to stress management, Perlmutter (2010) asserted that when faculty had good relations with students, it helped alleviate overall stress by building and maintaining constructive relationships. Recalling the concept of self-efficacy, it was important to note the ability to enhance self-efficacy in students was heightened when faculty possessed a healthy sense of self-efficacy (Ackerman, 2020). Subsequently, theoretical sampling utilization

exhibited in the three tiers of recruitment was advantageous to help understand relationships between concepts and individuals (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This understanding advanced the case for theoretical construction about the process occurring impacting faculty in the midst of OTD changes and its impact on the concepts of stress, self-efficacy, and stress management.

Constructivist grounded theory seeks to theoretically describe both meaning and process so it was well-suited to examine connections between stress and self-efficacy of faculty and staff as the OT faculty implements programmatic change. The change to an OTD encompassed overt procedural and process-oriented changes regarding curriculum, fieldwork, schedule, workload, ACOTE expectations, etc. as well as covert beliefs, thoughts, and feelings surrounding the changes. Meanings to be constructed from participants embedded within the process involving these changes helped describe the happenings and connections between stress, wellbeing, and self-efficacy.

With the intent on creating understanding and legitimacy on stress management incorporation, it was logical to address intersectionality with habituation. Charmaz (2002) highlighted the notion that while habits are viewed as individualistic, they also encompassed a social orientation in being derived from culture, patterned through routines, and impacted by other people (p. 32S). Applying the understanding behind Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory to this context, when faculty exemplified self-efficacy and the utilization of effective stress management techniques, students were more likely to also embody these characteristics. However, it was vital to acknowledge the impact situatedness had on this faculty influence as well as potential change process. Charmaz (2002) added,

Because habits are situated in daily life, changes within it may directly affect them.

Changes may disguise or reveal habits. Changes in locale, changes in the structure of life, changes in the daily round-all may affect a person's relative awareness of habits. (p. 38S).

It was through the grounded theory research design model that these connections were explored to help construct a theory behind the impact this change had on faculty and ultimately, the students they serve. In-depth understanding of this process helps other faculty that are anticipating implementing programmatic change to an OTD by allowing them to garner insight on not just the descriptive meanings but the process and impact on faculty.

### **Necessity for Study**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to research the understanding and constructing of processes assumed by OT faculty in creating wellbeing opportunities for stress management within the context of implementing programmatic change at a Midwest entry-level OTD program as well as investigate the connection of self-efficacy between faculty and students due to anticipated positive impacts cited via existing literature (Artino, 2012; Bandura, 1977; Cox & Steiner, 2013; Perlmutter, 2010). Possessing such research involving this change is beneficial if and when other OT programs decide to transition to an OTD as well. The study results may also be beneficial to other allied health profession faculty members working through changes in degree offerings or merely seeking a shift in how elements of wellbeing and self-efficacy are incorporated implicitly or explicitly into the program for the enrichment of faculty and students.

Implementing programmatic change equated to increased time, resources, energy, and ability expectations that contributed to heightened stress levels. Stress management technique promotion by faculty within the OTD program was necessary considering the positive impact it

had on building self-efficacy and producing quality therapists. When OT programs graduate exceptional students capable of a first-time test-taker pass rate for the national certification exam, this bodes well for program notoriety. Beyond the exam, knowledgeable and competent OT's are necessary to serve patients, clients, residents, or consumers of therapy services. OT's who possess a robust amount of self-efficacy and stress management skills are better able to handle the pressures involving role responsibilities professionally (billing insurance, productivity standards, continuing education expectations, etc.) and personally (work-life balance, family roles, need for self-care, etc.). Additionally, OT's motivated and/or encouraged to pursue academia are vital to continue educating future therapists. These individuals must possess the required skills and abilities to demonstrate proficiency in their curriculum content areas as well as the responsibilities placed upon them as faculty members.

In summary, grounded theory methodology was poised as the most logical way in which to frame research concerning an interactive change process ensuing. With an emphasis on grounding the data in a way that informs an interactive process for theory proposition with the study population, constructivist grounded theory offered a flexible yet structured and articulated option on how to design an impactful research study with substantive results. The following chapters provide comprehensive insight on data and analysis regarding how faculty and staff were understanding and constructing a process to promote stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy with the implementation of the new OTD program. Recognizing and highlighting the creation of wellbeing opportunities for stress management and focusing on the impact of self-efficacy were the paramount components of this grounded theory study.



## **Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation of Data**

This chapter is positioned to construct the answer to the constructivist grounded theory research question:

How do occupational therapy faculty understand and construct a process to manage stress, promote well-being, and foster self-efficacy for themselves and their students during a period of programmatic change?

This chapter primarily constructs meaning of the process from the viewpoint of faculty and staff in answering the research question and describes the systematic way the data analysis was conducted following the methodology outlined in chapter three. The three levels of data analysis that occurred included initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. A visual in the form of a diagram exemplifying the connections constructed from the collected and analyzed data using the constant comparative analysis is presented along with a narrative summary. Tables are also included throughout the chapter to present detailed initial and focused coding explanations.

### **Data Collection**

The participants in this constructivist grounded theory study included faculty and staff members of a Midwest OT program, recently transitioned to offering an entry-level OTD; the program had admitted around 40 students into the first OTD class that started in Fall 2019. It also has a satellite OTD program that employs additional faculty and staff for student groups of around 20 in each year of the program. This satellite program has existed for nearly thirty years. While faculty and staff are present at this location, they are employees of the main campus and partake in the same program components (i.e., expectations, coursework, etc.). Although the focus was exclusively on the OTD program, faculty were also teaching the MOT curriculum for the final group of students who will graduate in 2021. After this final class, only the OTD

program will be offered. Therefore, many faculty were teaching both MOT and OTD curriculum coursework at the time of this study. From the three tiers combined, nine participants consented to be in the research study (see Appendix A). The salience of viewpoint in the data originated primarily from faculty at a rate of 8:1. Nonetheless, staff possessed a unique perspective with regular interaction involving faculty and students to comment on actions outside the classroom.

**Table 1**

*Faculty Years of Experience in Academia*

<b>Years in Academia for Faculty</b>	<b>0-5 years</b>	<b>6-10 years</b>	<b>11-20 years</b>	<b>21-30 years</b>
Number of participants	3	3	1	1

Faculty participants represented various years of experience in academia, ranging from just three years up to nearly 30 (see Table 1). The clinical experience of faculty prior to joining academia included work in school systems, hospitals, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, and home health. The majority of participants received their OT education (either bachelor's or master's) at the program site in years past so they also had experience from the perspective of student learner. Most faculty participants had either earned or were in the process of earning an academic doctoral degree (PhD, EdD) or post-professional OTD.

Two-thirds of the faculty were actively involved in some aspect of the programmatic change process to the OTD. In 2014, faculty officially initiated the process of exploring whether to transition to an entry-level OTD or remain offering the master of occupational therapy (MOT) as the program's sole entry-level degree option. At that time, the appointed lead for the curriculum planning committee outlined a process that involved intentional and strategic tasks of assigned readings and follow-up meetings with faculty for evaluating the pros and cons of

offering the OTD. Four study participants were involved in this exploration and decision-making phase which translated into this OT program applying to seek Candidacy Status for an OTD from ACOTE. After the step-one documents were submitted to ACOTE, the curriculum planning committee comprised of more experienced faculty facilitated the creation of the OTD program structure involving methods to comply with ACOTE Standards and aspects of program philosophy. Upon meeting the step-one requirements from ACOTE to be granted Candidacy Status, faculty started working in small teams of two to four people to develop the coursework in anticipation of being able to admit students into the program in 2019. This vetted course development process is actually still occurring involving piloting coursework and applying feedback to make changes as requested by the curriculum lead. ACOTE plans an on-campus accreditation visit prior to the OTD student graduation in 2022 so the program has almost two years left to finish creating and disseminating coursework. It should be noted that none of the study participants divulged that they were part of the curriculum planning committee from its inception. Many of the faculty involved in that initial committee have either retired or resigned for other academic pursuits.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, focus groups via anonymous discussion board postings, interactions with participants, and collected documents. Prior to interviews, study participants completed the New General Self-Efficacy Scale (see Appendix B) used to spur discussion and increase understanding about participant personal views on self-efficacy. As the primary source of data collected, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each faculty and staff member participating in the study, lasting 30-75 minutes in duration depending upon the participant. Interview questions were formulated to stimulate discussion on topics related to the overall research question with an expectation of follow-up

questions utilized for gaining additional insights (see Appendix C). The researcher took notes on key points or significant assertions communicated overtly or covertly during the interview.

Written notes were also taken during the initial coding processes which also informed memoing.

Focus groups occurred via an anonymous text-based asynchronous discussion board format on Blackboard with the intent of having study participants contribute to discussion on concepts involving stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy (see Appendix D).

Documents pertaining to the OTD curriculum (course syllabi) and faculty/student content (manuals, policies) were sought and obtained for analysis with respect to the research question. These specifically included the OTD course syllabi for Culture and Occupation, Occupation and Analysis, OT Process and Contexts, and Professional Identity. The OTD Student Manual was reviewed as well as the information posted on the OTD program's website describing the curriculum design, sequence, and outcomes. The School of Medicine and Health Sciences policies were also reviewed for seeking understanding on the context.

### **Data Analysis**

Initial Coding commenced manually on the first two interviews half-way through the process of recruiting and interviewing participants; these interviews were before the global pandemic coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) had any noted impact on the OTD program and overall societal functioning. Interviews after this time had mention of COVID-19 impact, particularly on stress management and contextual changes. Initial coding of the other seven interviews occurred sequentially in the same manner as the first two. After transcripts and corresponding initial coding were sent out to participants, feedback on a single wording change was returned from one participant; all others had no changes identified. As the researcher reviewed and analyzed each transcript's initial codes, the most prevalent ones were identified by

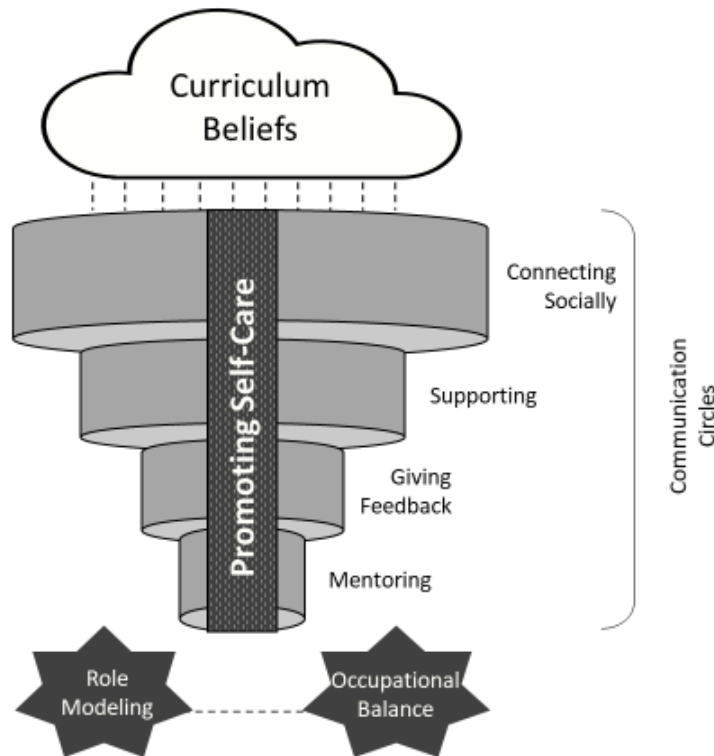
creating a written list. The identification consisted of searches in Word for frequently used words/phrases throughout the initial codes in relation to the transcript itself. From this list of five to 12 for each participant, an analytic memo was written about the most salient which informed the development of Focused Codes. In total, 34 analytic memos were written with three to five from each participant. From these writings, categories were developed; these included Curriculum Beliefs, Promoting Self-Care, and Communication Circles.

As an overview of Figure 1, faculty and staff in the OTD program have developed Curriculum Beliefs around the process and outcomes of implementing programmatic change to an entry-level OTD; this was depicted in the cloud structure. From the influence of Curriculum Beliefs, there was a strong assertion on the necessary habituation of Promoting Self-Care occupations by faculty and staff that are effective and actionable (located at the core of the diagram). Understanding the impact of explicitly and implicitly creating Communication Circles as a result of robust self-care occupations identified faculty and staff as Role Modeling Occupational Balance, which were the two primary discernable theoretical codes. Within the interviews, all faculty and staff expressed varied levels of awareness of codes which lent to their construction out of the categories. These two theoretical codes were also perceived as outcomes in the results they produce for the benefit of faculty and staff as well as the noted impact on students. Embodying what it means to be a role model in the quest of occupational balance ultimately moves the OT profession forward in the form of educated students who enter the profession as self-efficacious practitioners making a difference in their communities as agents of change. From this network of categorical construction, the following theorized process was described for OTD faculty and staff: *In the midst of programmatic change, an emphasis on self-*

care occupations and a culture of communication may tend to empower faculty habituation for role modeling occupational balance for students.

**Figure 1**

*Diagram of Categories from Initial and Focused Coding along with Theoretical Coding Outcomes*



***Curriculum Beliefs***

Understanding the systematic process of programmatic change to the OTD was vital to recognize the beliefs and assertions it had created for faculty and staff. These thoughts and feelings exemplified in the behavior of the faculty and staff surrounding the programmatic change process ultimately influenced the culture of the program; this effect was anticipated to be felt most certainly in the students but also beyond the classroom as it impacts the stakeholders inside and outside the medical school and university (e.g., fieldwork educators, patients,

community organizations, etc.). The first category of Curriculum Beliefs constructed from the data analysis was described through the following sub-categories: A Collaborative Process, An Opportunity for Students, and A Shift to Professional Identity.

**Table 2**

*Focused Coding Developed from Initial Coding to Construct Curriculum Beliefs*

<b>Focused Coding</b>	<b>A Collaborative Process</b>	<b>An Opportunity for Students</b>	<b>A Shift to Professional Identity</b>
Initial	Teamwork	Interwoven	Less on Mental Health
	Involvement	Intentional Curriculum	Student Stress
	Program Changes	Communicating	Self-Efficacy
	Developing Courses	Occupation-centered	Professionalism
	Preparing to Teach		

**A Collaborative Process.** The process for implementing programmatic change for the OTD has been collaborative: Faculty voices were heard throughout the change process, even though not all faculty were part of the ad hoc OTD curriculum planning committee. Faculty members are involved in coursework development, creating a sense of intentional investment and enhanced understanding of the new occupation-centered learning. A shared belief across most faculty participants (Kris, Pat, Jordan, Robin, Peyton, and Jo) emphasized that the curriculum development change has been a collaborative process which was appreciated as it involved active engagement of faculty in both campus locations (main and satellite).

In 2014, this OT program officially initiated the process of exploring whether to move to an entry-level OTD or remain offering the MOT as the program’s sole entry-level degree option. With a few new faculty and staff members recently hired at the time, the appointed lead for the curriculum planning committee outlined a process which involved intentional and strategic tasks of assigned readings and follow-up meetings for determining if offering the OTD would be advantageous. When the OT program actually decided to move to an entry-level OTD, the

intentional involvement and support from faculty was necessary to move forward as the decision to offer this entry-level degree option was not a professionally settled manner nationally. Jo recalled, “[Every faculty member] had their say; everybody was involved in the decision making about philosophical underpinnings and what the program was going to look like and that kind of thing.” Thus, the systematic process developed by the curriculum planning committee was appreciated by faculty.

Kris expressed high-regard of the curriculum development process and outcomes thus far due to involvement at various levels of the programmatic change. After the decision was made to transition to an entry-level OTD, readings and meetings were then geared toward deciphering how to structure and communicate the philosophy of the program including the beliefs about occupation, occupational therapy, teaching, learning, and contextual factors. The educational focus shifted from what many faculty members described as a “content-heavy” emphasis to what was known as “subject-centered learning” occurring through concept-based teaching utilizing experiential learning philosophy and transformational learning methods. With this newly developed curriculum touted as “pretty cutting edge in OT education” by Kris, occupation is what is subject-centered and at the core of what the OTD Student Manual declared as being able to “promote engagement and participation in personally valued occupations to improve health and wellbeing for a diverse society.”

Whereas the MOT was compartmentalized in its structure, the OTD attempted to connect the content together. The OTD curriculum’s course sequence and development were often described by study participants as being “interwoven” with evidence of scaffolding in how assignments build off each other and the courses also “trail each other,” according to Robin. In 2017, faculty started working in small teams of two to four people to develop the coursework;



through this experience, faculty then have an intimate familiarity of how the courses are connected with others in the curriculum sequence. Faculty recognized the team approach requires collaboration and allows for a more diverse perspective with more faculty involved in the development process. The notion of teamwork is something Pat appreciated, stating that through the past transition from the bachelor of OT degree to the offering of the MOT faculty “were able to agree to disagree and come to something that made everybody comfortable.” Working on a team is something vital across most areas of practice for OT’s. Pat described feeling comfortable on a team thanks to clinical experience involving working with coworkers, families, and people with disabilities. The experience gained as a clinician helped with developing coursework in collaboration with other faculty, drawing on each other’s strengths and weaknesses in order to work together to achieve outcomes.

According to most participants, the process of developing coursework seemed to be adequately vetted: Teams ideally pilot the content before it is delivered to students, and the curriculum lead is highly involved in the process to make sure what is developed meets the ACOTE Standards and is in-line with the program’s Philosophy. Anything not meeting standards is sent back for refinement until it is deemed as fulfilling requirements. Due to the coursework development progress made thus far, the ad hoc OTD curriculum planning committee ceased meeting in January 2020 as the major program decisions were already enacted. Faculty continue to work in teams to finish course development for the second and third year of the OTD, and the regular curriculum committee is the only committee meeting for curriculum matters. As of the time of the data collection and analysis, the faculty had finished only one of eight semesters in the OTD program for the first-year students.

In addition to course development, team teaching is also occurring in the OTD courses; it is noted by participant Pat that this may help decrease stress of delivering the course content but this statement is decidedly dependent on context. Faculty at the satellite program are the sole member assigned to deliver content to their students, even if they have support from the faculty teaching on the main campus. The prep time is more frequent for the single faculty member in comparison to the main campus where groups of two or three faculty teach the same content. This is a unique stressor of additional course prep time for the one faculty member at the satellite program; even if they have only half the number of students in a given OTD class, they still need to prep for the course which is what Jordan and Peyton experienced in semester one.

Because the OTD is a conceptually different and novel curriculum, faculty may be experiencing anxiety surrounding the questioning of if they are being effective in their teaching. Jo observed open communication occurring among faculty groups that there is a sense of “imposter syndrome” with the new curriculum because it is the first round of it being taught so faculty are not as confident as they were with the MOT curriculum that had been taught for many years. Regarding the motivation behind adjusting to the programmatic changes, Jo stated, “Everybody wants to do a good job. Everybody wants the students to get what they need to have; nobody wants to be thought of as having done a bad job.” Faculty want the students to succeed, and they want to do an excellent job in making sure that happens so quelling anxiety through the communication happening between faculty was experienced as helpful.

**An Opportunity for Students.** Based on the assertions of study participants on striving to foster optimal student learning, it was beneficial for students to be explicitly informed of connections within and between courses for them to appreciate how learning the foundational concepts allows them to employ critical thinking skills for eventual synthesizing throughout the

program. Obtaining an OTD through this program is thought of as an opportunity for students as they are to be engaging in student-driven learning that involves what Robin described as “less lecture and more application.” OTD students will never know about the experience of being in the MOT program; they will only know what they have been told about the programmatic change from others. However, faculty are well-aware of the major changes that brought about the new OTD. Although there exists an OTD Student Manual and clearly delineated summary online of the new concepts and structure, faculty beliefs about how the curriculum was designed needs to be communicated to the OTD students for their benefit of understanding the process and intended outcomes. For example, participant Rory believed students are irritated about repetition (which is part of performance accomplishment/mastery experience) so communication would be beneficial about how the curriculum was developed with interwoven components for content to build on itself.

Overall, faculty and staff believed communicating with students was a key component in enhancing understanding and cohesion throughout the program for the benefit of an optimal learning context for offering the OTD. Rory emphasized that this new curriculum was “intentionally created in order to challenge the students in a way that they should be challenged (...) they can be successful without overwhelming them.” This sentiment echoed true in this OTD Program’s Vision Statement (2019): “To prepare occupational therapists who engage in occupation-based, evidence-based and culturally relevant practice supporting client-centered participation in meaningful occupation that promotes health and well-being” (p. 8). Graduating well-prepared future OT’s that are able to live this vision will likely need to be encountering just-right challenges in the curriculum in order to grow.

Faculty and staff beliefs around the programmatic change had many of them (as noted by participants Rory, Kris, Jordan, Robin, and Jo) expressing a positive orientation. Despite any challenges met along the way, Jo recognized the transition as mainly optimistic: “As far as transitioning to the OTD, it's new and it takes time. But it's also, I think, exciting because it is new. You know, breaking out of the rut is exciting.” Stressors have included changes in requirements with the switch to the OTD, but Jordan reported eustress with the process: “I'm able to more understand the importance of standards and, you know, making sure we're scaffolding. We're building on everything. That we're being purposeful.” Kris also asserted the programmatic change had been positive and “led me to think more in depth about what we believe as a profession and what our values are as a profession.” The goal for students at the end of the program is for synthesis of information through experiential learning philosophy. Faculty expect students to be initiators of change within the profession when they graduate, and this new curriculum design with a focus on occupation-centered learning is better suited to ensure that happens. Communicating this expectation and accompanying learning opportunities to students was important for study participants which is why it informed the construction of how the Communication Circles category and sub-categories are utilized.

**A Shift to Professional Identity Development.** Due to the focus on stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy in this study (recognized as self-skills and mental health topics in the curriculum), one of the changes in the curriculum design was how the faculty have shifted to understanding and promoting professional identity as an OT. It had been identified as a curricular thread that is anchored in semester one's foundational concepts and then continues to be present throughout the curriculum. According to Jo, “At least from the onset [semester one in the OTD program] we've shifted from development of the self-skills, including stress

management, to now embracing very—from day one—the identity of OT professional.” The new focus on Professional Identity in semester one through course OT 405 (OT Department, 2019d) is connected to self-efficacy as Rory described the importance of gaining self-efficacy as part of OT identity to be a “champion” for patients. Rory declared,

There's so much research that says that like if the patient or client believes—even just believes a little bit that they can—they have such a higher rate of being successful. And the therapist can help facilitate that. But they can only help facilitate that if they actually believe it, and they have to also believe in themselves in order to believe that for other people.

Though not specifically mentioned as a major change by all participants, Jordan and Jo believed faculty intentionally shifting the focus away from self-skill development to professional identity has been perceptible, and therefore, pondered the outcome this had on students.

Through their own unique lenses, Jo, Jordan, Peyton, and Robin recognized not as much emphasis occurs on the personal development of self-skills and mental health topics like there used to be in the MOT curriculum. This included the overt inclusion of stress management and wellbeing. Regarding the switch to occupation-centered and concept-based teaching taking the place of a content-heavy curriculum, psychosocial content was not its own chunk of exclusive time but instead, was experienced throughout the whole curriculum. Jordan stated, “I think, with who's on our faculty and their, you know, history in that area, it helps that it [psychosocial content] is still very deliberately put in each class.” Essentially, faculty are teaching who they are and what they know which increases the likelihood of psychosocial components being part of the coursework implicitly or explicitly because of the past focus on this from faculty (who had this experience as students and/or instructors in the MOT). However, the sustainability of

teaching implicit curriculum was questioned as it hinges upon faculty's experiential learning and actual value placed upon these topics.

Even if psychosocial self-skills are not an explicit part of the course content, they can still be weaved in through various ways via faculty and staff behaviors and interactions. Yet, how that should be optimally done was not clear. Jo highlighted how some stress is good (also known as eustress) and reframing this is key to harnessing motivation to produce quality work and display professionalism. It may be up to the faculty and staff to explicitly state opportunities to develop self-skills with the intent of tying it back into the curricular threads. The self-reflective coursework reminiscent of self-skill development was still noted in a course on culture (OT Department 2019a), but the intent was for developing therapeutic use of self for the promotion of culturally competent care (addressing ACOTE Standard B.1.2). Faculty have created semester self-evaluations with a focus on professional identity qualities, and personal development goals have a professional development focus instead.

Overall, the curriculum is anchored on the thread of professional identity that faculty are also to be embodying and expressing. Even with a shift to focusing on the professional identity of OT's, acknowledgement of the necessity of effective self-skills in that quest was noted by study participants. About half of the participants stated in their interviews this was not as pronounced as it used to be or should be in the OTD while all verbalized it being of high importance for faculty to embody. Is faculty and staff embodiment enough? Are faculty and staff aware of this need to embody these self-skills if the OTD does not explicitly contain this in the content? These are musings from the category of Curriculum Beliefs that inform the connection of the other categories and the constructed theoretical coding of this constructivist

grounded theory study. Faculty and staff believed personal self-skills are of heightened importance which leads to their placement at the core of the theorized process.

### ***Promoting Self-Care***

Connecting the category Curriculum Beliefs to Promoting Self-Care, the beliefs about the new OTD curriculum informed the actions of the faculty and staff; hence, thoughts and feelings informed behavior. The central tenant of actionable behavior has to do with what is within one's internal locus of control, and that is why self-care positioned itself in the middle of the Figure 1. Faculty and staff are in charge of their engagement in self-care occupations with all study participants noting that it is "extremely," "hugely," "really" important for embodiment of stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy. Self-care occupations are foundational but unfortunately may become neglected when people are experiencing stress. Participants Jordan, Robin, Sam, and Peyton spoke at-length about how self-care was paramount with respect to their roles, and all study participants shared how various self-care occupations have been important for them to manage stress, promote wellbeing, and foster self-efficacy. It was for these reasons that Promoting Self-Care took a central focus within the diagram. The category of Promoting Self-Care included sub-categories of Defining Self-Care, Communicating Self-Care, and Actionable Self-Care which are described below.

**Defining Self-Care.** A popular concept recently, self-care is not just activities of daily living (ADL's) which may be what OT's initially emphasized when hearing this phrase. Instead, self-care actually encompasses many other sub-types of occupation: sleep, exercise, nutrition, leisure, social participation, and techniques for stress reduction. Robin recognized self-care encouragement within the program at this time of COVID-19 involved such things as taking breaks, healthy/wellness habits, and social connections. Sam reported self-care as taking care of

oneself during the unprecedented time by trying to preserve usual routines and occupations. All study participants shared about healthy stress management techniques including exercise, time connecting with family and friends, handiwork, outside activities, etc. Undoubtedly, self-care involved many different occupations depending on the person and the environment.

As a result of implementing the new OTD curriculum, Robin believed it is vital to be practicing self-care for the benefit of self and others through the programmatic change process. Along with the concept of self-care, Robin highlighted throughout the interview the ideals of being “good” and “calm” in conjunction with stress managing. Times of change within a group of people may provoke increased feelings of distress which can certainly impact a program’s culture; subscribing to the mindset of consciously being kind was recognized as vital to help move forward in a positive manner for the benefit of all involved.

**Communicating Self-Care.** Some faculty and staff shared that reminders for self-care are appreciated right now (participants Jordan, Robin, Sam, and Peyton). With COVID-19 disrupting the anticipated routine of curriculum delivery, faculty and staff have noticed an increase in messaging that promoted self-care; these messages have occurred primarily through email which seemed to be the most prominent way of communicating during this time. The following tag lines or greetings have been recognized: Stay safe. Stay well. Take care of yourself. Do not forget to exercise. While the self-care reminders seemed to be increasing in frequency for faculty and staff especially during COVID-19, Robin and Peyton also believed this focus on mental health promotion should not be exclusive to increased times of stress and uncertainty. Peyton stated, “I feel like the focus should have been there before [COVID-19], too. (...) So I think there's actually been an increase in the emphasis on mental health since all of this.” The new curriculum sequence in the OTD program appeared to be constructed for the



threading of mental health topics throughout the curriculum in comparison with the MOT; due to the programmatic change, hearing mention of these types of topics more frequently in the curriculum would likely allow for a consideration of increased incorporation of self-care into routines.

However, both Robin and Peyton questioned if the environment was conducive to actually being able to follow-through with self-care ideas, relaying personal concerns with lack of occupational balance while teaching semester one and attempting to manage other occupational roles. The importance of promoting self-care comes from actually engaging in these self-care occupations, not just talking about them. Peyton received advice from a former colleague that resonated regarding both the importance of self-care and the action aspect: “We tell our patients that they need to do all these things to be healthy (...) We tell our students, you need to take care of yourself and you need to do something for you. But if you're not doing that, you're basically the pot calling the kettle black, right?” Jamie also echoed this sentiment in her observation that communicating self-care is a first step, but it was not enough to verbally profess self-care importance; one must take the time for actionable behavior to actually do it.

**Actionable Self-Care.** All faculty and staff were able to identify self-care occupations, whether they currently were or were not engaging in them. Sam described the benefit of explicit promotion of stress management and wellbeing techniques: “[Students] have that experience of hearing about [stress managing techniques] and knowing that there's a different way that they can possibly help their future patients.” Seemingly, what students learn from faculty and staff regarding stress management can benefit them currently as well as when they start working as OT’s. By faculty and staff promoting positive stress management, wellbeing, and self-care techniques, a likely correlation transpires between faculty and staff also doing these things

which, in turn, increases the likelihood that students consider doing these techniques as well. Jordan asserted faculty cannot properly care for their students if they are not caring for themselves, indicating students are perceptive enough to identify this. Connections made with these concepts relate to the outcome of helping students decrease the amount of stress and anxiety they feel.

When faculty have spent time working on their stress management, it makes it easier for them to help students with their stress management needs. Peyton saw this as a benefit to students reflecting on time in OT school:

You just get stuff done more easily when you're taking care of yourself. And I've seen too, my students who make the shift and make and try to be working out and or doing something for themselves do better, whereas, the ones that don't, you can just, you can just see... You can see it; they just aren't as well. So I think...focusing on stress management, I think, is a huge, huge predictor of success for students.

Faculty taking action to engage in self-care occupations while at the same time encouraging students in this pursuit as well translates to a shared sense of humanness for managing stress, especially during a period of programmatic change to the OTD.

Success by way of self-care occupations was also mentioned by Jamie with a connection to habituation. Jamie stated, "It is beneficial to help students acknowledge the daily roles, routines, and habits that they experience in their personal and social and educational contexts in a way that allows them to consider personal health and wellbeing strategies and ways to manage stress." Jamie cited how this ideal is part of the curriculum via coursework developed, including a course following ACOTE Standard B.1.2. on Culture and Occupation (OT Department, 2019a) as well as the OT Process and Contexts of Practice involving the intentional relationship model

(OT Department, 2019b). The OTD program had intentionally developed these connections in the new coursework with the outcome of faculty embracing actionable self-care occupations. With this recognized core emphasis on self-care occupations (especially during times of increased stress from COVID-19), Circles of Communication were positioned to enhance the effects felt from the promotion of self-care.

### ***Circles of Communication***

The Circles of Communication were noted throughout the OTD program and lent themselves to a variety of purposes and intentions. These circles included the sub-categories of Connecting Socially, Supporting, Giving Feedback, and Mentoring. All faculty and staff noted importance in at least one of these circles with examples given of situations in which these types of communication were important in developing and sustaining relationships. Communicating effectively is crucial in academia and occurs in many formats verbally and non-verbally: email, phone, online, in-person, written, spoken, demonstrated. With COVID-19 disrupting usual classroom and fieldwork activities abruptly after spring break in March 2020, communication shifted away from an in-person format to online options to follow physical distancing as students were no longer allowed on campus, and faculty commenced working remotely from home. Despite this significant disruption, study participant Jamie assessed faculty to be doing a “good job of staying in communication and just keeping up with the ball rolling as it is” with effective and frequent communication which was noted to be paramount within the program. Each circle is discussed below, starting with the outermost and working inward; Table 3 is also used as a guide in how the circles were constructed.

**Table 3***Focused Coding Developed from Initial Coding to Construct Communication Circles*

<b>Focused Coding</b>	<b>Connecting Socially</b>	<b>Supporting</b>	<b>Giving Feedback</b>	<b>Mentoring</b>
Initial	Communicating	Helping	Feedback	Coaching
	Talking with Students	Teamwork	Growth	Sharing
	Connecting for Retention	Celebrating	Encouraging	Verbal Persuasion
		Appreciating	Positive	Involving
			Constructive	Encouraging
				Role Modeling

**Connecting Socially.** It was recognized that communication served various purposes for faculty. At the outer circle level, the category Connecting Socially was constructed. Jamie recommended to reach out to others to experience a “real conversation” or stop by the office to touch-base and say ‘Hi’ to “refresh or recharge with a social contact or visit.” It seemed that in order to be effective as a faculty and staff member, one must possess and demonstrate consistent effective communication skills along with the initiation to actually form connections; these were helpful for retention within the program. Grand gestures were not mentioned, but value was placed upon the little moments of a conversation that resonated as supportive and appreciated. As constructed within the concept of self-care, partaking in opportunities for positive connections with others was a healthy stress management technique. Working in an environment where one can experience positive social connections likely results in improved program morale among faculty who are committed to the mission and vision of serving their students and the OT profession. Robin identified connecting well with others as a strength; this led to students trusting which boosted self-efficacy for the seeking and provision of new learning experiences. This was another benefit of taking time for connecting socially to build rapport.

**Supporting.** Recognized as more involved than Connecting Socially, the next sub-category circle of Supporting offered a sense of helpfulness. Faculty shared examples of how they offered to teach courses for others, volunteered to create continuing education opportunities, and agreed to be involved in new learning (participants Jordan and Jamie). Being helpful and supportive seemed to be part of the culture in the OT program between both faculty and staff. Throughout the OTD curriculum programmatic change process, staff provided support to the faculty working on the new OTD curriculum by editing documents, pulling information, and purchasing needed supplies and materials. When it came to times of increased stress caused by changes in course provision to online learning during COVID-19, staff helped with reformatting tests for faculty. Assuming a role of support was important as it moved the curriculum forward and increased synergy through involvement of all OTD program members.

Lending a helping hand and providing support between faculty and staff was not exclusive to duties within the academic setting as Sam described, “It’s not just support professionally, it’s personal. They care.” This type of caring amongst faculty and staff appeared to have a quite an impact on job satisfaction and motivation as staff were encouraged and able to do their best. When asked what was the catalyst in making this type of environment happen, Sam stated, “Personal connections: Looking at the person as a whole. (...) We have lives outside of work that are important to us. And having others feel value in what is important to you as well is great. You know? Just checking in.” The foundation of connecting socially was noted alongside recognizing the role supporting plays throughout interactions in the program.

As a definition, appreciation is to recognize the full worth and implications of something while being grateful. Encouragement and appreciation were often found paired together throughout Jamie’s interview in relation to the support received in the academic context.

Appreciating someone appeared to build a positive OTD program culture by expressing this sentiment. One of the unique ways to do this was through name-dropping other faculty in communication. Jamie stated that students “can see how we work together and (...) see how we bring our strengths to the table. Pointing out, you know, ‘Oh as Dr. Hoff would say’ or as ‘Professor so-and-so would say.’ When they hear that, they know that we appreciate each other.” Therefore, supporting can be experienced as hearing positive words about another or even celebrating successes, which Kris mentioned as something that faculty could easily and consistently do for furthering wellbeing and self-efficacy throughout the OTD program.

**Giving Feedback.** One circle in from Supporting was the experience of Giving Feedback. Feedback can be both positive and constructive, which is often given the misnomer of being negative feedback. However, when utilized properly, constructive feedback actually is intended to foster growth and improvement for the recipient. Peyton had received feedback self-described as “hard” when piloting developed coursework for the programmatic change to the OTD. However, the experience of teaching the material allowed reflection on why certain aspects did need improvement so this was validating to the experience of why the constructive feedback was necessary. During the course development process, faculty met weekly for feedback to be provided on work being accomplished. Peyton had shared insightful feedback on the course development process with a colleague who is now working with the course lead; this sharing of feedback was indicative of the value of conscious supporting of colleagues. Jamie felt strongly that the level of stress experienced when receiving feedback was actually perceived as the “pressure of that challenge to grow.” This sentiment was an example of reframing stress in a positive manner as motivating eustress.

In addition to the weekly feedback expected in OTD coursework development, faculty and staff provide feedback to each other in scheduled meetings which typically occur every-other week but had moved to weekly during COVID-19's push to online learning. Jamie expressed a keen sense of awareness of the impact feedback given in a positive sounding tone versus a negative tone had on those present. Communication through emails and online meetings meant to convey respect for occupational balance during COVID-19 was well-received, but feedback delivered with an irritated tone of voice "can actually carry a weight" which left others uncomfortable and disconcerted, according to Jamie. Once again, feedback delivered in a spirit of encouragement for growth seemed to be essential between faculty and staff who are perceptive to its lasting positive impact.

For Jo, embracing constructive feedback from others was necessary; this was discussed throughout the interview and specifically in response to verbal persuasion for building "very strong" self-efficacy. The possessed objectivity in viewing situations, assertive communication, and trustworthiness are some themes mentors have relayed over the years. This interview participant had much longevity in the program, having been present for the degree transitions and exposure to different faculty and staff over the years. This leads into how both positive and constructive feedback translated into mentorship relationships which are the innermost communication circle.

**Mentoring.** In consensus with the literature review, mentorship was the most important relationship for success in academia. Participants (Rory, Kris, Pat, Peyton, and Jo) were able to share comprehensive information leading to its closest placement in the communication circles. Although seasoned faculty mentoring newer faculty has existed for years in the OT program, study participants recognized its growing influence especially through the programmatic change

process. Kris spent a lengthy amount of time discussing what made her acquired faculty mentor so impactful in her academic career. First off, the mentor made sure to involve her in decisions and happenings which appeared to provide her with a sense of increased worth, seeming to foster self-efficacy. Sharing resources, connections, information, and knowledge was also noted. The act of sharing in this context possessed meaning: It signified trust and a profound belief in abilities by investing in a mentee. Verbal persuasion was noted through encouraging words honing in on strengths, insightfulness on areas for growth, and validation of contributions especially when speaking up about the new OTD curriculum or other contexts in which Kris would be viewed as a novice. Mentoring relationships of this caliber are expected to be long-lasting and pervasive in how they impact the mentee.

The communication structure used by mentors was noted to be important in how the message was received. Peyton's mentor provided two types of feedback (positive and constructive) to her which was noted to be effective in her growth in academia. Peyton stated, "[My mentor] points out the things that I really need to work on which can be hard to hear, but she also gives very descriptive feedback of what I did well. And what I didn't. And then ultimately, she does a really nice job of always closing the loop." This was reminiscent of a feedback sandwich approach of positive-improvement-summary. Critiques of the sandwich approach point to the muddying of the constructive feedback by highlighting the positive aspects too much at the end of the message, which may be what the listener more likely recalls. Finishing the feedback sandwich with a summary of positives and how those can be used to address the areas for improvement may be a more effective tactic.

Pat believed the process of mentoring involves quite a bit of "give and take" to strike a balance of encouragement and not being pushy with the ultimate intention of mentors being



supportive to their mentees. It appeared that communicating in a mentoring role was to be geared towards getting to know the mentee by helping them get to know themselves to foster their internal motivation towards their goals. Verbal persuasion was used by mentors to build self-efficacy; this occurred through the process of giving feedback positively in a discussion format to help mentees develop skills and become self-advocates.

Along the same lines of mentoring, Jo described a combination of giving feedback and mentorship in the term “coaching skills.” Jo believed that most faculty, staff, and students in the OT program “for the most part are not facing a lot of barriers” in accomplishing their goals. The coaching skills revolved around verbal persuasion and support of colleagues in their ability to handle difficult situations. Jo felt good about being able to help others in their quest for feeling increased self-efficacy. Jo stated, “I’m able to take my belief and what I can do and at least lend it to others.” Therefore, a mentoring relationship developed by building upon the other circles of communication and had the ability to foster self-efficacy skills in others.

**Communication Circles Impacting Students.** In connection with the communication circles, it was necessary to share some additional information on how these communication circles impacted students. In learning about the coursework students encounter, feedback was noted in the structure as the assignments built upon each other. Faculty provided feedback at times on course assignments so that improvements could be made along the way in completion of the overall project. Students were also afforded the opportunity to give feedback to each other which was a helpful way to learn this vital skill (reminiscent of performance accomplishment/mastery experiences in self-efficacy). Students assume responsibility of giving feedback to patients, families, team members, etc. in their future careers so they benefit from being able to practice these skills as students.

Peyton noted she uses herself as an example “a lot” when teaching, noting that this may help the learning process for students. Sharing real-life examples allow students to see faculty as real which may foster trust and highlight the notion of being a life-long learner even while teaching. Furthermore, Kris described how communication to students was necessary for them to understand that faculty live in a “real life” and are “human just like they are.” This notion of some healthy level of self-disclosure was used to foster rapport with students so they felt a sense of support and understanding.

Sam shared various examples of communication with students in a formal sense (which encompassed Supporting, Giving Feedback, and Mentoring). Students may be seeking reassurance and needing perspective on “looking at the big picture” which does include education but also should be focused on leisure and social participation. Beyond content of communication opportunities, Sam highlighted the importance of using active listening when working with students: “Sometimes that's all they really need is somebody to listen to them and maybe probe a little bit more so that they can come to some self-realization of what they want they want to pursue in their academic career or their personal things.” Promoting this belief in themselves was a key component of fostering self-efficacy.

Being able to increase self-efficacy in others is becoming gradually more important due to the nature of students displaying more anxiety. Jo asserted that the “coaching skills” have helped with processing and problem-solving student anxiety; this may include referring them for professional types of help on-campus or in the medical setting. Students seemingly are in need of increased supports that address psychosocial wellbeing; this includes techniques for managing stress to reduce anxiety. How this type of intervention is received has to do with the manner in which is it delivered. Stated Jo, “I am comfortable giving constructive feedback but with the

greatest hope that I can frame it in a way that it is understood to be for their wellbeing.” Not only is Jo focused on the content of the coaching skills but also the nonverbal communication aspects for a well-received message for students to then take action.

### ***Theoretical Coding Outcome Results***

From the influence of Curriculum Beliefs, the interplay of the Communication Circles surrounded the core of Promoting Self-Care by faculty and staff. This interactive process produced two primary discernable theoretical codes: Role Modeling and Occupational Balance. All faculty and staff expressed awareness of these within the interviews. These two theoretical codes were also perceived as outcomes in the results they produced for the benefit of faculty and staff as well as the noted impact on students. Each theoretical code is described in detail below with accompanying analysis regarding intersectionality with the study concepts of stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy along with ties back to the Figure 1 diagram categories and sub-categories.

**Intersectionality of Stress Management and Role Modeling.** Many study participants (namely, Rory, Kris, Pat, Jordan, and Peyton) noted that students are going to consciously and subconsciously observe faculty and staff; they are able to sense whether the faculty member is doing well with balancing time regarding their multiple responsibilities. Peyton described the importance of role modeling stress managing/wellbeing and its impact on student learning multiple times during the interview. The presence and impact of role modeling appeared to be something inherent within the OTD program due to the amount of time students spent with the same group of faculty, staff, and other students. With much time spent with the same group of people, it is more likely that exposure in this shared context influences thoughts, feelings, and behaviors on various topics both overtly and covertly. Peyton recognized that students “look up

to us [faculty and staff], and we're supposed to be teaching them in a variety of ways, not just in the classroom.” Students can sense stress in faculty and staff; therefore, faculty and staff preferably should be role models in how they are managing stress, both in and out of the classroom environment.

Pat tied the importance of role modeling stress management back to mentoring. Pat stated, “I think stress management is really important in order to work with students, especially when you're getting to the point where you're mentoring students one-on-one.” All OTD students have an assigned advisor when they start the program (and even before they enter the program with the pre-OT advisor) and then are reassigned an advisor for their scholarly project in conjunction with their doctoral experiential placement. Opportunities exist for faculty to develop mentoring relationships with students throughout their time in the OTD program, especially if students are actively seeking out these types of supportive connections and/or feedback. Through these relationships, students have increased opportunities to role model after faculty; therefore, this notion highlighted the importance of how faculty ideally should be managing stress not just for themselves but for the benefit of their students who are future fellow practitioners of OT.

**Intersectionality of Wellbeing and Role Modeling.** Along those same lines, the incorporation of role modeling should ideally be geared towards the ultimate goal of fostering future OT's to promote health and wellbeing; this was what the OTD program described in their 2019 Vision Statement. Peyton asserted, “I think it's important [for faculty and staff to role model stress managing and wellbeing] because for the most part, [students] look up to us to guide them.” Yet, with the balance and time managing challenges (especially with COVID-19's

negative impact on these aspects as well), ideal role modeling can be difficult. Peyton emphasized,

I think it's imperative that we set a good example for students. Do I think we're doing that? Not really. I try to be positive, and I try to support them and just tell them, you know, you still need to do the things that make you happy. But at the same time with everything have I've been to the gym lately? No, because it's closed. Do I have time to exercise? No, but I will. And so I think it's really important that we try to set a good example, but I don't know. I honestly don't know that we are collectively because we've got too much going on.

It appeared that faculty should take time to reflect on what they are role modeling to students through their actions and understand how they are internalizing that impact as it relates to the Vision Statement which mentions the promotion of occupations for health and wellbeing.

Additionally, as observed in the syllabus on coursework addressing Occupation and Analysis (OT Department, 2019c), objectives were established for the student to “articulate the importance balancing areas of occupation to achieve health and wellness for clients” and “analyze occupation and its influence on health and wellness and prevention of disease and disability in the examination of the occupational nature of humans.” These objectives addressed ACOTE Standard 3.4. which dictated helping the student develop the ability to explain the importance of balancing areas of occupation and the role of occupation in the promotion of health. A recognized professed connection between occupational balance and wellbeing in the examination of these two objectives exists. This was tied to role modeling because when faculty practice what they teach, replication by students is more likely to occur due to the existence of social cognitive theory.

**Intersectionality of Self-Efficacy and Role Modeling.** Through the Communication Circles, faculty and staff had multiple opportunities to convey self-efficacy among themselves and students. As one of the newer hires in the program, Rory appeared to possess pervasive high motivation for achievement, desires to strike a balance with roles and time management, utilizes research in how to frame possessed knowledge, and aims to be a role model for students. This study participant had one of the highest New General Self-Efficacy Scale Score self-ratings at 4.5/5 which indicates between *agreement* and *strong agreement* on statements of self-efficacy. Based on the study participant results, most faculty and staff scored within one point of each other on the rating scale (with an overall average of 4.2); this indicated moderately high self-efficacy. An anonymous statement on the discussion board contributed a voice to how self-efficacy was promoted by faculty within the OTD program and during the programmatic change; this perspective may contribute to the self-rating scores as well: “I feel supported by being provided with many opportunities. I also feel that the level of independence and trust are huge contributors as well.”

While confidence may be seen as an all-encompassing word for belief in abilities, self-efficacy is thought to be more focused on the belief in abilities when faced with a challenge regarding a specific situation to produce attainment of a goal. Positive feedback on evaluations and increasing roles in the OTD program have fostered Jordan’s confidence in roles assumed. With teaching in the new OTD program, faculty may not have all the answers or feel completely comfortable with the material, but Jordan believed one must exemplify a sense of confidence in knowledge for students to develop trust in what is being taught by faculty. Role modeling this confidence helps students also start to display this confidence. For authenticity purposes, faculty should be knowledgeable on the content if students are going to exemplify this quality through

role modeling because they will need to trust. Jordan voiced wanting to be knowledgeable and volunteering to learn when new opportunities become available. Relaying the importance of confidence to acquired faculty mentees was important because “that was such a huge piece for me.” Undoubtedly, Jordan was passing along information gained through experiential learning to mentees to help them in their new faculty roles.

In summary, even though the phrase role model was not part of the question set in the semi-structured interview, its presence was noted in the data collected and analyzed. Regardless of length of employment in the OTD program, most faculty and staff saw themselves as role models, recognizing that their peers as well as students are looking up to them. Role modeling was not exclusive to mentoring relationships; Rory had minimal experience with mentoring but shared many examples about being a role model. On the other hand, faculty with more experience mentoring (like Pat and Jo) did not use the term role model in their interviews but were noted to be doing just that in their interactions with other faculty, staff, and students. Role modeling was a prominent way in which the culture of the OTD program is shared and passed along to its members through the Communication Circles and Promoting of Self-Care.

**Avoiding Occupational Burnout Through Occupational Balance.** The quest for occupational balance was a relevant point brought up in interviews with most faculty and staff sharing ideas or perspectives around the notion (participants Kris, Jordan, Robin, Jamie, Sam, Peyton, and Jo). For Peyton, an assertion was made that there actually has been “no balance” through this process of OTD development because of the expectation to obtain an advanced degree at the same time (which is common for newer full-time faculty) in addition to teaching responsibilities—not to mention roles in other occupational contexts outside academia. Based on the stress level rating of 10/10 (scale 0-10, 10 highest), it would seem that Peyton was highly

stressed during semester one with roles and responsibilities in academia to the point of occupational burnout; additionally, she was receiving mixed messages in the form of feedback and mentoring regarding stress managing through the role overload. Peyton was able to identify the stressors and associated feelings of stress but was having a difficult time initiating plans for stress managing and prevention as time to do such things seemed scarce. According to posts on the anonymous blackboard discussion forum, COVID-19 caused a “significant increase” in stress and reduction in wellbeing in relation to role overload from familial responsibilities. As Jamie expressively added, “I worry about senior faculty burning out when their load is so great. We love them and we need them!” Faculty and staff seemed to realize that the risk of occupational burnout truly exists.

**Control of Time Management.** Faculty can avoid occupational burnout despite their numerous roles in what the OT program has noted as teaching effectiveness, scholarly/creative activity, and service activity. Noticing a connection with the theoretical code of role modeling, it is imperative for faculty and staff to role model effective time management skills for students to embrace and practice because the OTD program operates as if it were a full-time job for students. Added Sam emphatically, “It’s a full-time *plus* job.” Faculty and staff seemed to be quite busy. The notion of attempting to strike work-life balance was well-documented with continued exploration on its probability, especially for women who may have additional assumed domesticated/familial roles, and study participants offered some solutions on how to pursue occupational balance. Rory spoke about time within the contexts of being able to both control and manage it for the benefit of stress reduction. If managing time was difficult, that added stress decreased balance, creating a vicious cycle. Some stress was necessary for fostering



motivation if it is kept within a balance (which will be different for each person) so reframing it as positive eustress may assist in how it is perceived as well as how it is dealt with.

Possessing occupational balance, notably between work and other occupations outside of this, was important to reduce burnout. On occupational balance and time managing: “Get your work done [at the program] and then separate your home life,” offered Sam. Pat also spoke to this idea of separating home and work in the context of preparing to teach by adding,

I come in early [to the program] and I just make sure I'm preparing and I'm comfortable with the information. Rather than trying to do that at home, I use that time here [in the program]. When I'm here, I can make sure I've done the reading; I've prepped.

Since this was the first offering of the OTD, preparing to teach required added time in comparison to the MOT, which faculty had been more familiar with both as instructors and some also as students themselves. During the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 academic years, faculty are teaching MOT and OTD curriculums. Going forward, students are only being admitted into the program for an OTD; the MOT will no longer exist after the 2021 MOT students graduate.

Sam acknowledged busy seasons throughout the OTD program which required flexibility in time as well. Consequently, Jordan believed the stress level to be higher for faculty after COVID-19 surfaced because of the disruption in occupational balance of roles with necessitated changes (e.g., arranging childcare, homeschooling, new/different habituations in daily routines, etc.). Faculty and staff interviewed after COVID-19 restrictions were implemented rated their stress levels as changed in different ways; while Jordan believed it to be more stressful, Robin did not think it stressful, Jamie clarified the stress level as “we have a lot to do stressed,” and Peyton experienced the stress level as decreasing with semester two coming to a close and looking forward to summer. However, when compared with self-rated stress levels completed

with participants prior to COVID-19, the average rating was only .375 point lower on the 0-10 scale before the pandemic. Working from home during COVID-19 also prompted a unique structure to hours worked in a day; when there was no routine of leaving home and transporting to the work environment, chunking of time occurred more easily which actually was energizing and empowering for faculty and staff to accomplish more during the day. Overall, recognizing the control of time management and how it can help foster habituation for occupational balance was refreshing.

**Empower Setting Goals.** Part of goal setting was being realistic in achievement (e.g., SMART goal setting); the same can be said regarding occupational balance and the realism surrounding what can feasibly be accomplished in a set amount of time in conjunction with other roles. Robin believed that in addition to focusing on the good that is happening, faculty and staff must also try “to be realistic with expectations.” She declared feeling that has been “intentionally built in and then people are intentional about trying to do that” during the programmatic change. However, it was not clear what exactly was built into the process that helped with realistic occupational balance for faculty. While the university has discontinued tenured faculty roles in the OT program, faculty must still meet responsibilities outlined in their Educator Scholar track via an annual evaluation as part of their year-to-year contract position. Feedback that informs this evaluation involving teaching effectiveness was to be sought via fellow faculty, students, and self-reflection. No faculty members identified their contract positions as a stressor, but Peyton recognized how there exists a sense that faculty are to be “justifying our positions” in light of COVID-19.

Faculty should feel a sense of empowerment in setting goals. The university site in this research study reported it “takes faculty development seriously (...) [providing] multiple

opportunities and resources that faculty can take advantage of as they enhance their teaching, research, and administrative skills” (School of Medicine and Health Sciences, 2020, para. 1).

Thus the goal of faculty development was stated as such: “To facilitate the personal and professional development of educators, clinicians, researchers and administrators so that we may continue to meet the mission of the School of Medicine & Health Sciences” (School of Medicine and Health Sciences, 2020, para. 3). Jamie relayed the importance of focusing on the goals established by the OTD program and university are helpful in keeping perspective with fostering occupational balance:

I think focusing on meeting goals and prioritizing what is needed for students and the program and university as a whole will help us establish balance, that inherently will promote reduced stress. As we work as a team and continue to encourage one another, this will serve to help facilitate well-being and self-efficacy for each of us.

In summation, focusing on the goals helps establish priorities to approximate occupational balance to reduce stress. Through teamwork and encouragement (as noted in the Communication Circles), wellbeing and self-efficacy are more likely to be enhanced. This should be an empowering feeling for faculty as they collaborate and work together to educate future OT professionals.

**Role Modeling Occupational Balance.** The OTD program faculty aims for their graduates to be “agents of change” so one must not be burned out upon graduation and entry into the workplace for that to happen. Kris believed that through efforts in the curriculum, if students have adequate stress management and wellbeing before they enter fieldwork settings, it would be to their advantage to be “more energized to take control of their career and what they want out of their career.” This related to the quest for modeling occupational balance for students. Even

with an emphasis on stress managing, OT's still experience stress and need to cope with it. Kris believed the crux is how the handling of stress is modeled for students. Transparency about handling challenges, higher education, and the role of a faculty member are topics Kris spoke about as salient in how students come to learn about occupational balance. She stated, "I think that we owe it to them to talk about it and make sure it's something that we don't just hide and pretend that we are managing so perfectly." This healthy self-disclosure may help break down barriers between students and faculty; not only do students feel supported, faculty feel heard and validated in their roles.

Understanding the process to manage stress, promote wellbeing, and foster self-efficacy in the programmatic change to the OTD, occupational balance was poised as an outcome from Promoting Self-Care occupations within the core of the Communication Circles. An anonymous post in the discussion board group added to the understanding on why incorporating stress management, wellbeing and self-efficacy into the OTD program was of benefit to students for being able to learn techniques, adding, "They will be able to later lead by example when working with future clients. Also it will hopefully help the students understand the importance, in order for them and their future patients to live happier and healthier lives." Faculty and staff are transmitting the experience of role modeling occupational balance to their students who then are role models for their clients. The benefit of being able to manage stress, promote wellbeing, and encourage self-efficacious behavior yields an improved quality of life. Table 4 showcased poignant data from study participants with researcher interpretation, constructing the code categories that have been discussed in the aforementioned analysis.

**Table 4**

*Code Categories with Supporting Data and Researcher Interpretation*

<b>Code Categories</b>	<b>Data Supporting the Code Categories</b>	<b>Researcher's Interpretive Summary</b>
Curriculum Beliefs	<i>“So conceptually, it is a completely different curriculum and it’s taught in a different way. And so if you’re not practicing self-care and being good to each other with all of that change, it’s a recipe for disaster, I think.” -Robin</i>	CURRICULUM BELIEFS drive faculty and staff actionable behavior on their PROMOTING OF SELF-CARE.
Self-Care	<i>“If you’re not taking care of yourself, you can’t properly take care of others and that’s included in teaching.” -Jordan</i>	SELF-CARE occupations include COMMUNICATION which is paramount in teaching effectiveness.
Communication Circles	<i>“With faculty mentoring (...) you want to be there, (...) you want to encourage, (...) you want to be there to answer questions, you want to be there to help.” -Pat</i>	Different types of COMMUNICATION are necessary as a ROLE MODEL for others.
Role Modeling Occupational Balance	<i>“I think it’s important for students to see that we’re human just like they are and you know, we all kind of have our own struggles going on. But we all, you know, come and do a good job and want to be there. So I think that it’s how we handle [stress] that is probably most important to the students.” -Kris</i>	How faculty and staff COMMUNICATE enables them to emerge as ROLE MODELING OCCUPATIONAL BALANCE for stress management.

**Conclusion**

In summary, it is advantageous for faculty to be knowledgeable in how they can foster engagement in wellbeing opportunities for habitual stress management and increased reserves of self-efficacy to be successful in their academic pursuits as well as their overall lifestyle. As the data has been constructed, faculty in the program have developed Curriculum Beliefs around the process and outcomes of implementing programmatic change to an entry-level OTD. From these

beliefs comes a strong assertion on the necessary habituation of Promoting Self-Care occupations that inform communication purposes throughout the OTD program. Understanding the impact of explicitly and implicitly creating Communication Circles of support recognized faculty and staff as Role Modeling Occupational Balance. Embodying this role ultimately moves the OT profession forward in the form of educated students who enter the profession as self-efficacious practitioners making a difference in their communities as agents of change. Chapter five further expands upon this outlined conclusion, offering implications of the data analysis and recommendations moving forward.

## **Implications, Recommendations, and Conclusions**

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to research the understanding and constructing of processes assumed by OT faculty in creating wellbeing opportunities for stress management within the context of implemented programmatic change at a Midwest OTD program. Additionally, there was an examination on the connection of self-efficacy between faculty and students due to anticipated positive impacts cited via existing literature (Artino, 2012; Bandura, 1977; Cox & Steiner, 2013; Perlmutter, 2010). Being able to articulate a theorized change process based on analyzed data should be of great interest to OT faculty for two principal reasons. First, students are recognized as an extension of a faculty member's brand; essentially, faculty are to be mindful of their influence on students by role modeling the type of person they would want to have potentially replicated personally and/or professionally.

The second reason for the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of how OT faculty incorporate wellbeing opportunities for stress management and self-efficacy into their explicit and implicit interactions for the betterment of the overall program for faculty, staff, and students. For the continued positive impact on people receiving therapy services, OT needs to position itself as a viable profession. This is especially true for programs transitioning to the OTD as the implementation of programmatic change presents with added stressors and thus, does require more time, energy, and financial resources to accomplish. The promotion of faculty wellbeing facilitates faculty self-efficacy to flourish, fostering an increased likelihood of goal attainment for faculty as well as students. Students who experience this type of conducive learning environment graduate as competent and confident professionals, making a difference in their communities. This cyclical nature boosts the legitimacy as OT as a profession and solidifies OT identity for practitioners.

Therefore, it is advantageous for faculty to be knowledgeable in how they can foster increased reserves of self-efficacy and engage in wellbeing opportunities for habitual stress management to be successful in their academic pursuits as well as their overall lifestyle. The significance of this study has to do with understanding how the faculty in the developing entry-level OTD program have constructed a process of creating, sustaining, and promoting these techniques of wellbeing and self-efficacy. For the benefit of the profession, the program, themselves, and their students, OT faculty need to be invested in the knowledge of the impact of promoting these techniques explicitly and implicitly to assuredly move the OT profession forward, shaping confident practitioners who are making a difference in their communities as agents of change.

### ***Research Question***

Based on the purpose, the research question for this study was listed as such:

How do occupational therapy faculty understand and construct a process to manage stress, promote well-being, and foster self-efficacy for themselves and their students during a period of programmatic change?

From the research question, this chapter includes the key findings from the data collection and analysis, presenting a theorized process. Following this description, implications for theory/research as well as practice are highlighted. Limitations are to be discussed prior to delving into recommendations beyond this study; final conclusions summarize the study.

### **Key Findings**

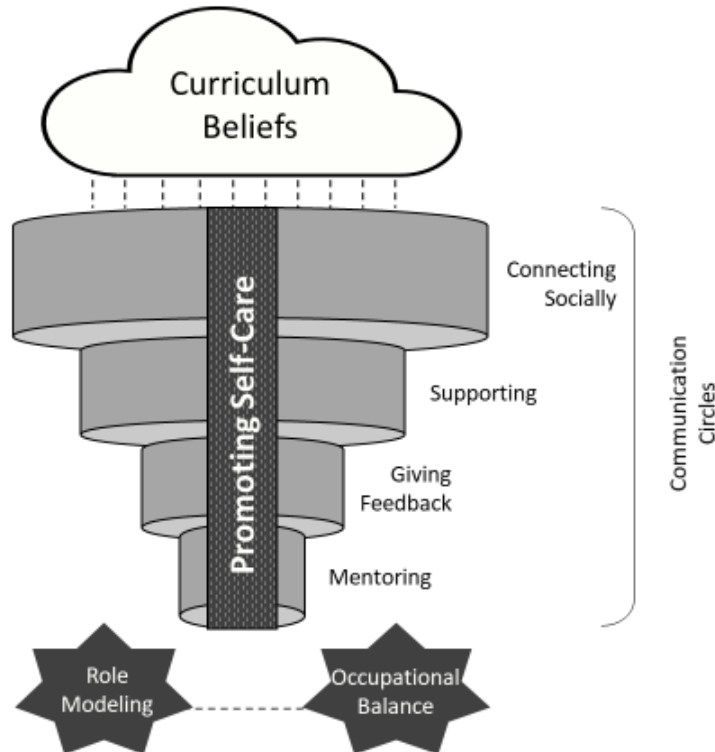
From the iterations of data collection and analysis, the constructed theorized process was initially informed by Curriculum Beliefs held by the faculty study participants who were involved in the programmatic change to the OTD (see Figure 1). Gaining understanding of this process described as A Collaborative Process, An Opportunity for Students, and A Shift to



Professional Identity was vital to how study participants related to the categories of Promoting Self-Care within the realms of Communication Circles. Communication was experienced as essential in the culture of the OTD program and noted in various ways to indicate interaction across contexts (Connecting Socially, Supporting, Giving Feedback, and Mentoring). Respectively, each circle constructed itself closer toward the center of Promoting Self-Care. Seen as both theoretical codes and outcomes, Role Modeling and Occupational Balance were constructed from the interaction of Curriculum Beliefs faculty hold and how these beliefs impact action seen in Promoting Self-Care and the proliferation of Communication.

**Figure 1**

*Diagram of Categories from Initial and Focused Coding along with Theoretical Coding Outcomes*



From this network of categorical construction, the following theorized process was stated: *In the midst of implementing educational programmatic change, a culture of communication and emphasis on self-care occupations may tend to empower faculty habituation for role modeling occupational balance for students.*

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The beliefs held by faculty about the programmatic change process to the entry-level OTD inform the research study quite poignantly as the beliefs influence actionable behavior recounted by participants. As described in the expert-opinion article by Brown et al. (2015), a transition to the entry-level OTD would warrant competitiveness with other healthcare disciplines that require doctoral degrees. Therefore, this programmatic change would logically enhance the sense of importance to earn an OTD. When change is viewed in this manner, it may provoke more eustress than distress because faculty feel positive and motivated about the process of developing coursework that is conceptually different and intentionally created in a spirit of teamwork and collaboration.

Regarding the Communication Circles, Mentoring was the closest ring to the influence felt on Promoting Self-Care. Perlmutter (2010) declared that peer faculty mentors are the most important relationship faculty possess in order to be successful in academia. Experienced faculty mentoring newer or more novice faculty was recognized as having a lasting impact by helping them effectively manage the increasing stressors in the programmatic change to the OTD (Tobin & Taff, 2020). Study participant Kris certainly echoed this sentiment in the multitude of examples given with the statement, "...a real mentor is somebody that continuously is somebody that you can go to and will always be your mentor." Through descriptions from the study participants, the outer circles of communication are present across multiple contexts in the OTD program, each serving a purpose of fostering Connecting Socially, Supporting, and Giving

Feedback. Acknowledging the different types of communication depicted as circles lends itself to an all-encompassing structure centered around each faculty member's core of Promoting Self-Care.

Though not explicitly described and connected in the literature review as self-care from a mental health informed perspective, this understanding was what study participants gravitated to when sharing about stress managing, wellbeing, and ways to foster self-efficacy. Overall, these concepts were touted as "incredibly valuable" by study participants. Incorporation of these self-care occupations over time promoted the development of habits within roles and eventual routines, known as habituation (O'Brien, 2017). Tying this concept of habituation to self-efficacy, habitual engagement in healthy wellbeing tasks increases self-efficacy. Therefore, stress management techniques enable faculty to reassess their stress level (i.e., either decreasing distress or reframing it as eustress) so that they can be more efficient in the goals they have set to accomplish. With the numerous stressors and resultant stress recognized by faculty and staff, it is apparent why understanding this connection is vital to success in OT academia.

Study participants articulated understanding of self-care promotion, but some recognized there were struggles with habitual engagement for themselves or even collectively at times based on the impacts felt from managing multiple roles in addition to programmatic change. OTD faculty are thought to have more exposure to the concepts of stress managing and wellbeing through the curriculum coursework and their own OT professional identity when compared with faculty across other departments that do not promote or educate on these topics. However, despite this advantage, study participants expressed faltering in the actual implementation of self-care during periods of distress and role overload leading to feel burned out.

From Role Modeling and Occupational Balance, the connection to the literature review was not as robust as these outcomes were not as overtly anticipated in the constructed analysis. As Hooper (2007) emphasized, faculty ought to be mindful of their influence by modeling the type of person they would want to have potentially replicated personally and/or professionally because students are an extension of a faculty member's brand. Perlmutter (2010) touted the sentiment of good faculty relations with students help mitigate overall stress. This related to the construction Role Modeling had to the Communication Circles and Promoting Self-Care. With effective communication and promotion of self-care occupations by faculty, students are being exposed to opportunities for role modeling. As students embody these behaviors within the context of faculty, it may reinforce these behaviors to faculty. The process is cyclical and relates to what is felt regarding occupational balance.

A study by Yazdani et al. (2018) sought to define occupational balance and its connection to wellbeing. The results informed this study's assertion that occupational balance was different for each person. This was also noted in the literature on balance with Yordy's (2018) research highlighting difficulties with balancing roles juxtaposed to Eagan and Garvey's (2015) on how difficulties with balance actually fostered productivity in roles. Some study participants confessed struggling with occupational balance for periods of time as a result of role overload: research, teaching, service, their own academic pursuits, academic advising, familial responsibilities, COVID-19 disruptions, etc. Additionally, four recruited participants opted to not partake in the research study due to their perception of role overload with accompanying heightened stress. Because faculty are not flawless in their ability to demonstrate occupational balance, their exposure of the humanness in managing stressors by utilizing the implementation of communication circles and promoting self-care is of benefit to students who role model after

them. Faculty should ideally understand their own propriospect regarding occupational balance embodiment and consider how that is role modeled to fellow faculty and students.

### **Implications for Theory and Research**

Habituation within the OT conceptual framework of the Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) consisted of both habits and roles which simultaneously work together in creating patterns of behavior (O'Brien, 2017). Habitual engagement in healthy wellbeing occupations was inherent in faculty engagement of self-care and stress reduction techniques. From the constructed theory, a recognized benefit for faculty to cultivate these patterns of behavior into their roles increased the likelihood of also developing self-efficacy since stress was being effectively managed.

Connecting habituation with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, for an individual to manage stress effectively, they need to possess some level of self-efficacy regarding their ability to do so. Taking Bandura's sources of self-efficacy into consideration, the engagement in mastery experiences to improve skills through a challenge to grow, communication in relation to vicarious learning (experienced as role modeling), and verbal persuasion (noted in giving feedback and mentoring) were integral categories constructed out of the participant data collected and analyzed. Psychological states (the fourth self-efficacy source) was recognized as engagement in healthy wellbeing occupations of faculty and staff while they simultaneously pursued the first three sources of self-efficacy. Relating psychological states back to stress, distress makes one less likely to anticipate success and therefore, less likely achieve success as a result of this belief (Cox & Steiner, 2013). Accordingly, there is a significant connection between habitual wellbeing occupations and self-efficacy in order to manage stress.

Educational philosopher Nel Noddings (2005) asserted that the ideal of educators was to care to educate the whole person to be primed for an active life in a democratic society. With this particular OTD program being studied, this was reflected throughout the curriculum design and philosophy. When faculty members foster learning beyond the required skills to pass examinations, future OT practitioners enter the profession as ready to holistically care for their patients. There exists a perception of student benefit from the constructed process faculty have created in the midst of implementing programmatic change to an OTD. The study results supported Freire's (1998) democratic viewpoint of developing the necessary communication skills to be effective in relating to others. This was noted in the process of programmatic change to the OTD and constructed as an intended outcome of faculty instruction. Freire's necessitation of faculty competence and confidence related to the required sense of faculty self-efficacy for the benefit of students.

### **Implications for Practice**

Because OT faculty beliefs influenced action in the interactive process diagram for this study (see Figure 1), it is plausible that implementing programmatic change may actually not be distressing for faculty as there was control to be harnessed in how the new program was created, organized, and established to meet ACOTE Standards. OT faculty and staff in this study self-reported average stress levels (with a slight increase due to COVID-19 restrictions) but generally experienced the programmatic change to be primarily positive and welcome as they were involved in developing it. Yet, each faculty member's propriospect on their perceived roles and responsibilities within the new OTD program as well as their personal lives factored into how occupational balance was experienced. Regardless of stress being framed as either distress or eustress, its presence can still be disruptive enough to cause role overload. A couple study

participants who have fieldwork duties that are less quantifiably measurable with respect to workload questioned how their roles could be better assessed and balanced. This has yet to be determined and warrants further inquiry for OTD programs, especially with the addition of another fieldwork placement for students requiring OT faculty oversight and coordination.

Pressures related to time management are difficult to remedy as time is finite, but faculty involvement in effectively structuring their day was appreciated by study participants. In a survey study by Tobin and Taff (2020), effective time management techniques noted by OTD faculty involved planning, organizing, working ahead, scheduling breaks, and developing routines. With an emphasis on collaboration, intentionality in curriculum design and coursework development, and an innovative focus on professional identity, most study participants appeared to frame their stress level as motivating eustress. However, there is a legitimate concern regarding role overload without enough time to realistically accomplish assigned tasks during programmatic change. Recognizing the crux of controlling time management and how it can help foster habituation for occupational balance is paramount. Additionally, it is important to comprehend that support from fellow faculty and staff (as described in the communication circles) can also provide a buffer with respect to managing time connected to role overload (Tobin & Taff, 2020). Possessing occupational balance, notably between work and other occupations outside of this, is important to reduce burnout for faculty and staff.

OT's Pizzi and Richards (2017) advocated for an increased focus on the inclusion of health and wellbeing in the academic context, and this study would lend support to this type of self-care promotion. Subsequently, connecting occupations with participation in health and wellbeing opportunities can be encouraged by OT faculty, exemplified in ACOTE Standard B.3.4. and noted in this OTD program's coursework. Study participants had expressed how

imperative it was for embodiment of stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy personally and professionally. Self-care occupations are foundational but unfortunately may become neglected when people are experiencing stress, which adds clout to the importance of habituation of these occupations by faculty.

A final implication for practice with the key findings was also reflected in a qualitative study of OT faculty members highlighting role modeling occupational balance: “Educators teach who they are and personify an implicit curriculum” (Hooper, 2007, p. 237). There is a perceived notion that faculty influence and impact matters to students in shaping their life trajectory. Thus, when faculty role model what they preach (i.e., actionable self-care concepts of managing stress, wellbeing, and self-efficacy in this particular study), replication from students is more likely to occur due to the presence of social cognitive theory. As noted in a policy from the School of Medicine and Healthcare Sciences (2017), “Health care education includes developing an understanding and appreciation of professional behavior. Learners acquire professional behavior primarily by observing the actions of their teacher role models” (p. 1). OTD program faculty are expected to be role modeling their identity so communication to students is necessary for them to understand that faculty are real and experience distress as well. This notion of some healthy level of self-disclosure can be used to foster rapport with students and break down barriers between faculty and students so both feel a sense of support and understanding. Acknowledging no students were included among the study participants, the perceived impact on students was that they feel supported, while faculty feel heard and validated in their roles.

From the data analysis, following key assertions were constructed:

- *OTD programmatic change is best received when created intentionally within a culture of effective communication.*



- *OTD program faculty and staff asserted promoting self-care occupations are essential not just in times of stress but should be pervasive.*
- *OTD program faculty and staff are to be consciously role modeling through communication of both personal and professional identities.*

## **Limitations**

The recruitment of study participants occurred during the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic which yielded increased stress within the OTD program with the shift to exclusive online learning (in addition to how it disrupted many other areas of occupation for faculty and staff). Therefore, a limitation emerged in the number of study participants; 10-15 were initially anticipated, but nine were willing and able to partake. Another limitation had to do with the inability to partake in any in-person fieldwork in the OTD program as COVID-19 ceased all in-person meeting opportunities. This would have included observable fieldwork, producing another option for triangulation of data to support theory development through an additional validity method. The researcher did come on-site to the OTD program once just prior to the restrictions to complete an interview in-person, but all other interactions had to be done virtually. While virtual interviews were a necessity, they do not possess the same type of milieu created with both researcher and study participant in the same room.

Bias may exist in the research study with respect to which study participants agreed to partake. Four faculty members cited heightened stress levels related to personal and professional role overload as a reason not to partake in the study. Those who did consent to partake may have been intrinsically motivated to partake based on the topic, exhibited in an enthusiastically expressed shared belief on self-care occupations being of great value. Study participants' motivation may have influenced a positive perspective on the data reported about the topic. As a

reminder, with constructivist grounded theory methodology, the goal is for results to contain elements of applicability and not to be generalized across populations.

### **Recommendations**

Three areas of further inquiry have been identified in relation to this study. First, faculty noted that due to the programmatic change from the content-heavy MOT curriculum to the occupation-centered OTD curriculum, questions arose on the sustainability of teaching implicit curriculum involving a strong emphasis on mental health concepts (i.e., managing stress, wellbeing, self-efficacy) as the inclusion hinges upon faculty's experiential learning and value surrounding these topics. It would be beneficial to study the belief system regarding the importance of mental health concepts in the curriculum for the perceived impact on students as study participant Jo observed students through the years as presenting with more anxiety. It would be advantageous to learn more about stress managing, wellbeing promotion, and beliefs on self-efficacy to know how to best support students in their quest for an OTD.

Honing in on the theoretical codes constructed in this study, the experience of seeking occupational balance was touted and described by most study participants. OT's should ideally be capitalizing on operationally defining and leading this movement of constructing occupational balance due to OT's rich history and knowledge in analyzing occupations. Understanding what occupational balance is from an individual perspective and how OTD faculty and staff can more fully realize it is of great value during a time of programmatic change but beyond this time period as well. OT's need to be leading research and further discussion on the topic of occupational balance for those seeking its perceived and realized benefits: managing workload through time management skills and empowered goal setting as well as promoting self-care occupations for decreased feelings of burnout.

Lastly, being able to understand the experience of OTD faculty as role models would be valuable since little research exists on this perspective specifically with this population. Effective faculty mentors result in realization of being admirable faculty role models. This study indicated that experienced faculty invested in mentoring newer faculty yielded lasting positive impacts for both the mentor and mentee. Faculty evolving and refining their mentoring skills was a catalyst in building self-efficacy to then foster growth and development for the benefit of newer faculty. This type of synergy may be perceptible to students who have the opportunity to role model after faculty. Understanding faculty as well as student experiences of what makes an impactful role model would give insight on what is salient in their OTD faculty roles to foster opportunities for role modeling. As students create their professional identity as an OT, faculty are to be mindful of how they greatly impact students in acquiring this identity.

## **Conclusions**

It is advantageous for faculty to be knowledgeable and experienced in how they can foster engagement in wellbeing opportunities for habitual stress management and increased reserves of self-efficacy to be successful in their academic roles as well as their overall lifestyle. As the data has been constructed, faculty have developed curriculum beliefs around the process and outcomes of implementing programmatic change for transition to an entry-level OTD. These beliefs created a strong assertion on the necessary habituation of effective self-care occupations that inform the OTD program's culture of communication. Understanding the impact of explicitly and implicitly creating communication circles of support recognized faculty and staff as role models of occupational balance. Embodying this role ultimately moves the OT profession forward in the form of educated students who enter the profession as self-efficacious practitioners who are making a difference in their communities as agents of change. Utilizing a

constructivist grounded theory standpoint, OTD programmatic change is best experienced when created intentionally within a culture of effective communication. Through faculty-to-faculty mentoring, a noteworthy connection was constructed between habitual wellbeing occupations and self-efficacy in order to manage stress.

OTD program faculty and staff asserted promoting self-care occupations are essential not just in times of programmatic change or distress but should be pervasive throughout the culture of the program. Understanding the process of how this is embedded and promoted by OT faculty for creating occupational balance was an aim of this study. OTD program faculty and staff are to be consciously role modeling through communication of both personal and professional identities for the perceived benefit of students.

From this network of categorical construction, the following theorized process is reported for the benefit of OT faculty: *In the midst of implementing educational programmatic change, a culture of communication and emphasis on self-care occupations may tend to empower faculty habituation for role modeling occupational balance for students.*

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## Appendix A

### THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**Project Title: Faculty Perspectives: Understanding and Responding to Stress Management Needs in the Occupational Therapy Doctorate**

**Principal Investigator:** Alyson R. Wilhelmi Downs  
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**Department:** Educational Foundations & Research  
**Research Advisor:** Dr. Cheryl Hunter  
**Research Advisor**  
**Phone/Email Address:** 701.777.3431 / cheryl.hunter@und.edu

#### **What should I know about this research?**

- Someone will explain this research to you.
- Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.
- If you don't take part, it won't be held against you.
- You can take part now and later drop out, and it won't be held against you.
- If you don't understand, ask questions.
- Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

#### **How long will I be in this research?**

Your participation in this study will last about an hour.

#### **Why is this research being done?**

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to research the understanding and constructing of processes assumed by occupational therapy (OT) faculty in creating wellbeing opportunities for stress management within the context of increased educational attainment at a the University of North Dakota OT doctoral program. Additionally, it is worthwhile to investigate the connection of self-efficacy described by faculty due to anticipated positive impacts cited via existing literature. Possessing such research involving this change will be beneficial if and when other OT programs decide to embark on increased educational attainment to a doctoral degree level.

#### **What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?**

If you decide to take part in this research study, you will experience at least one individual semi-structured interview (30-60 minutes in duration) with the principal investigator; follow-up interviews will occur if needed to further expand upon the topics. A 5-minute self-efficacy survey will be provided prior to the interview interaction to deepen understanding of self-efficacy; questions you prefer to not answer may be skipped. The location of interviews will be on the University of North Dakota campus and may occur in-person or virtually. Follow-up will take place via an anonymous Blackboard Discussion Board for broader understanding between

study participants with the principal investigator. The study will involve audio and/or video recording via Zoom technology which will be erased upon completion of the dissertation. Total time commitment is estimated between 65-95 minutes.

**Could being in this research hurt me?**

The most likely risk that you may expect from taking part in this research includes psychological or emotional discomfort with the disclosure of information on the topic of stress management during the process of increased educational attainment changes.

**Will being in this research benefit me?**

The most important benefit you may expect from taking part in this research includes contributing to the body of knowledge from this research on faculty perspectives regarding occupational therapy stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy.

**How many people will participate in this research?**

An estimated number of 15 people will take part in this study at the University of North Dakota.

**Will it cost me money to take part in this research?**

You will not have any costs for being in this research study.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

**Who is funding this research?**

The University of North Dakota and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

**What happens to information collected for this research?**

Your private information may be shared with individuals and organizations that conduct or watch over this research, including:

- The Institutional Review Board (IRB) that reviewed this research
- Research Advisor, Dr. Cheryl Hunter

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential. We protect your information from disclosure to others to the extent required by law. Data collected in this research will be de-identified and might be used for future research. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

Since the researcher is a mandatory reporter: You should be aware that there are some circumstances in which we may have to show your information to other people. For example, the law may require us to show your information to a court or to tell authorities if we believe you have abused a child, or you pose a danger to yourself or someone else.

It is the subject's right to review/edit any of their audio/video recordings. Only the principal investigator and research advisor (as requested) will have access to such recordings. All audio/video recordings will be erased at the culmination of the dissertation process.



**What if I agree to be in the research and then change my mind?**

If you decide to leave the study early, we ask that you contact the principal investigator.

**Who can answer my questions about this research?**

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at 701.777.4279 or [UND.irm@UND.edu](mailto:UND.irm@UND.edu) if:

- You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.
- You are not getting answers from the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone else about the research.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You may also visit the UND IRB website for more information about being a research subject: <http://und.edu/research/resources/human-subjects/research-participants.html>

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Subject’s Name: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Subject

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject’s legally authorized representative.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Person Who Obtained Consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix B

### New General Self-Efficacy Scale

**Age:** Adult

**Duration:** < 3 minutes

**Reading Level:** 6th-8th grade

**Number of items:** 8

**Answer Format:** 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree.

#### Scoring:

To calculate the total score for each participant, take the average rating of the items by adding respondents' answers to each item and dividing this sum by the total number of items (8).

#### Sources:

Chen, G., Gully, S. M., & Eden, D. (2001). Validation of a new general self-efficacy scale. *Organizational research methods*, 4(1), 62-83.

**Instructions:** Participants are told that (a) general self-efficacy relates to “one’s estimate of one’s overall ability to perform successfully in a wide variety of achievement situations, or to how confident one is that she or he can perform effectively across different tasks and situations,” and (b) self-esteem relates to “the overall affective evaluation of one’s own worth, value, or importance, or to how one feels about oneself as a person.”

**Instructions:** Please circle your answer below.

1. I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I set for myself.

Strongly  
disagree

Disagree

Neither agree  
nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

2. When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

3. In general, I think that I can obtain outcomes that are important to me.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

4. I believe I can succeed at most any endeavor to which I set my mind.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

5. I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

6. I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

7. Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well.

Strongly  
disagree

Disagree

Neither agree  
nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

8. Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well.

Strongly  
disagree

Disagree

Neither agree  
nor disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

## Appendix C

### Semi-Structured Individual Interview Question Outline

Overall Research Question: *How do occupational therapy faculty understand and construct a process to manage stress, promote well-being, and foster self-efficacy for themselves and their students during a period of programmatic change?*

- 1) Describe your involvement with the transition to the OTD with respect to roles, responsibilities, expectations, etc. What impact has this change had on you?
- 2) How valuable is it for faculty to embody effective stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy? What is the basis of your answer?
- 3) Stressors are people, places, things, ideas, etc. that provoke the feeling of stress. Overall, how stressed are you feeling in your academic role (0-10, 10 highest)? Why?
- 4) What do you do to manage stress and promote wellbeing within yourself?
- 5) Self-efficacy is known as the belief in personal capabilities and is vital for personal and professional success in academia and beyond. How strong do you believe your self-efficacy to be?
- 6) Please share some examples of how you are intentionally weaving self-efficacy into your implicit and explicit interactions with fellow faculty/staff and students.
- 7) What more can be done by faculty to focus on stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy within the OTD program?
- 8) How will focusing on stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy be of benefit for OTD students while they are in school?

- 9) As a component of self-efficacy, performance accomplishment (i.e., mastery experience) involves practice of a skill to build self-efficacy (belief in your capabilities). How do you exemplify this in your faculty role?
- 10) As a component of self-efficacy, verbal persuasion can be used by mentors to foster self-efficacy. What themes have your mentors relayed to you in building your self-efficacy over the years?
  - a. How have you mentored others (other faculty, staff, students) using verbal persuasion?

## **Appendix D**

### **Anonymous Text-Based Asynchronous Blackboard Discussion Questions**

- 1) How will focusing on stress management, wellbeing, and self-efficacy be of benefit for OTD students when they are future therapists?
- 2) How does your professional context in the UND OT Department support your self-efficacy?
- 3) With the switch to online/remote learning due to COVID-19, what have you noticed with regard to changes in stress management and wellbeing promotion for faculty and students?