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Experiential Learning Final Paper

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Learning and Growth: My Experiential Learning with MetaTherapy and Western Heads East

In this reflection, I will expand on my experiences at MetaTherapy and the Fiti Probiotic Project in Rwanda with Western Heads East. Both internships honed my professional skills in physiotherapy and community health and deeply ingrained in me the values and insights of the Arts and Humanities. Through challenging environments, diverse cultural interactions, and ethical engagements, I navigated the complexities of overcoming barriers, learning empathy, communicating, and adapting. This reflective piece captures my personal and professional journey illustrating the importance of diverse learning experiences in different settings that can profoundly influence one's perspective and approach in both the sciences and humanities.

MetaTherapy: Day to Day

My day-to-day tasks at MetaTherapy included administrative responsibilities like taking phone calls, making appointments with patients, and following up on email and accommodations. On the side, when I had finished my clinic duties, I was given the opportunity to shadow therapists. I shadowed mainly physiotherapists where I learned more practical skills, such as deep muscle and tissue release, small adjustments, and exercise prescription planning. I learned that physiotherapy is not just about sports injuries but also includes a diverse range of treatment methods done in a holistic manner. I was able to use various machines and modalities like laser therapy, shockwave, and ultrasound to help ease the patient's pain. The modalities also

helped to increase muscle recovery, reduce swelling, and overall increase the speed of recovery. Through this training, I learned to value the hands-on experience and the role it played in enhancing my skills and understanding of physiotherapy.

In one experience of treating a patient with a rolled ankle, I learned from my therapist that by examining her entire body and understanding how each component works to support the body as a whole, he was able to discover that the patient had major stability and balance issues. His approach to treatment was based on a holistic understanding of the body. Although the patient came in to receive rehabilitation for her ankle injury and to alleviate her ankle pain, the physiotherapist was able to identify a larger issue at hand that could have contributed to the initial injury. The physiotherapist used various methods to diagnose her pain, massaged her ankle to release the pressure built up from the injury, and prescribed her a few exercises to help with healing and increase her overall stability. An example of an exercise the physiotherapist prescribed was the single-leg human clock exercise. The patient was tasked to stand on one leg and move the other leg into different positions according to the therapist's instructions as if her leg was a hand on a clock. Each time, she would be able to return her leg back to the center to regain her stability. This exercise helped to improve her balance. To progress this exercise further, she could not allow her foot to tap back into the middle and would have to keep her leg lifted to 180 degrees. As a result, I observed improvements in the patient's core strength and stability over the next month. This scenario, along with the other patients I encountered, was a crucial step in my professional growth. It helped me realize the significance of evidence-based practice and how integrating a holistic approach to diagnosis improves patient-centered care. Furthermore, being a part of the entire process from diagnosis to treatment and recovery demonstrated the effectiveness of integrated learning.

Working with various patients in the clinic gave me more breadth and depth in understanding how to converse and treat different ages of patients. This adaptation was important in revealing the distinction of values and concerns of various age groups in patients, in order to effectively address their problem and ease their mind. For example, many younger patients were keen to return to sports or daily physical activities, necessitating an emphasis on ensuring their strength and full healing to prevent further injury. This understanding prompted me to stress the importance of a gradual recovery and rehabilitation process to strengthen muscles and tissues surrounding the injury. Conversely, older patients were more focused on managing pain and discomfort. Their tendency to cease prescribed exercises when pain was absent could lead to recurring pain over time. Given their slower healing process, it became essential to guide them patiently, reminding them consistently, and providing simpler yet effective exercises that didn't exert too much effort but were still impactful. The emphasis shifted from a swift return to sports, as with younger patients, to a more gradual approach that prioritized their comfort and well-being. As a result, I have grown to appreciate diverse experiences that contribute to my toolbox as a physician. This adaptability is invaluable in treating patients with varying needs and circumstances, fostering a more comprehensive and patient-centered approach.

Growth and Development: Handling Workplace Conflict

A huge learning curve I experienced was dealing with workplace conflict where I was unfairly critiqued and felt undervalued. However, I learned to rebuild my confidence after facing unfair treatment and learned the importance of self-awareness and mental strength. I reflected upon my mental weakness in dealing with challenges. This was reflected in my desire to give up and stop working at the clinic once I encountered the conflict with my supervisor as well as

falling deeply into my emotions and feelings of inadequacy. I was consumed by my emotions of doubt in my ability as an intern which led me to “walk on eggshells” around my supervisor. Once I talked with my parents, I was finally able to address my own feelings of doubt and change my perspective to how I will approach the situation. I learned that when I got too much into my own head, I created a barrier for myself, from questioning every action in fear of overstepping boundaries to limiting my socialization which further impacted my relationship with other clinicians and patients. I recognized that going through failure and being able to come out from it makes me mentally stronger to address future conflicts and helped me navigate workplace conflict without compromising my self-confidence.

Furthermore, I reflected on my compliance in wanting to oblige people's wishes and desires. This tendency to go along with the wishes of others to maintain harmony or to gain approval made it harder for me to adapt to the workplace conflict. It made the process of reaching out to the supervisor and owner to address the unattended tension very uncomfortable for me. Despite these challenges, I chose to stay and volunteer, focusing on learning and personal growth. This experience taught me the importance of self-awareness, handling difficult feedback, and separating personal feelings from professional responsibilities. Through these challenges, I can identify my patterns of shutting down. I learned to slowly pull myself out of my emotional dwelling and build up my resilience to failure. It was a pivotal moment for me in learning to earn respect and adapt to challenging situations in the workplace.

After my discussion with the owner and the supervisor, they explained that their reluctance to give me another opportunity stemmed from a past experience with a co-op student who fell below expectations and then plateaued, leading them to assume the same might happen with me. However, with additional weeks that passed, they recognized that I was exceeding

expectations. Their explanation seemed to only address one of my concerns which was their reason for not paying me. However, they never fully addressed what actions of mine lead them to initially decide to revise our contract. I chose not to press further and ended the conversation on a positive note. Though the meeting didn't provide a clear resolution in restoring my contract and pay, it brought clarity to what had gone wrong. This pivotal moment allowed me to move forward, breaking down the mental barrier of doubt and incapability that I had created for myself. It accelerated my mental recovery from my perceived "failure" and motivated me to seek new opportunities and highlights within the workplace.

With time, the supervisor warmed up to me more. I felt the change in attitude and emotions that she had for me. She offered to give me more learning opportunities and would initiate more conversations with me. This allowed me to take on more responsibilities and put my skills to the test. I demonstrated my abilities when I was asked to run tests for a client on my own. This showed that they trusted me not only with their client but also based on my skills and performance. I performed cupping on a client within just a couple training sessions. Cupping is a form of alternative medicine where we take glass bulbs of varying sizes and place a flame inside the cup to create a suction that can be applied to the surface of the skin. This creates a tension that allows for the tissues and muscles to relax and helps with pain, inflammation, blood flow, and relaxation. I discovered my quick learning ability in hands-on activities which grew my confidence in handling clients. As a result, this experience taught me to adapt, harness my strengths and turn disadvantages into advantages. Furthermore, it aided my ability to apply my skills in various settings beyond the clinic, such as with the soccer team I was coaching, and for my family and friends who were prone to sports injuries. Overall, the internship was crucial for my professional growth, instilling lessons on resilience and adaptability.

Strengths:

During my time working at MetaTherapy, I honed my interpersonal skills, adeptly engaging with clients both over the phone and in person. The ease of interaction extended across diverse age groups, facilitating the establishment of relationships with both physicians and clients. My keen observational abilities and attention to detail enabled me to discern cues from patients and physicians, gauging their comfort levels and respecting their boundaries. Additionally, my strength in collaboration emerged through my open-mindedness to diverse opinions, and this helped to foster effective teamwork with the interns. From SASAH, working in group projects and learning to work with students that are all great academics with different second majors pushed me to learn to adapt to the different working styles. This made it easier when I worked with individuals in the same field as often our ideas were the same, but when they weren't, I had experience dealing with opposing thoughts and learning to respect others' opinions. This approach involves patience and an awareness to consider opposing viewpoints. Moreover, my proficiency in problem-solving, from assessing complex scenarios to devising creative solutions, greatly contributed to enhancing patient care. These skills collectively align with the qualities essential for a proficient physiotherapist. Interpersonal skills are paramount for building trust and rapport with patients, collaboration is crucial in a multidisciplinary clinic setting, and adept problem-solving is indispensable for accurate diagnoses. From reflecting on my strengths, I learned that being a physiotherapist could be perfect for me due to my strengths aligning with the attributes of a proficient physiotherapist.

Western Heads East: Goals

In my report on my internship with Western Heads East (WHE), I focused on enhancing community health and promoting health through a probiotic-yogurt program. The project involved sustainable development and the empowerment of women in the business realm to create their own sustainable social enterprise. The first goal of the project was meeting the department professors in the University of Rwanda campus kitchen. This was a valuable first step in building relationships with faculty members who play an active role in implementing the probiotic-yogurt project. The department professors introduced us to the University of Rwanda (UR) campus kitchen, and we quickly started a checklist of materials that would be needed to start yogurt production. After primarily assessing which materials were missing from the kitchen, we conducted a cost analysis of the materials. This was done by both assessing the cost of local items versus buying in bulk from vendors such as Amazon due to time constraints. Another short-term goal for the project was gaining the Rwandan Standards Bureau approval. This process was lengthy as we had to gather materials and review articles that spoke on the probiotic cultures that we used to create the probiotic yogurt. We gathered the data based on the published journals at Western and compiled a list of articles to be sent to the board to be reviewed. By getting the Rwandan Standards Board approval, we would be able to sell the probiotic sachets in order to get some funding for the campus kitchen to help fund the yogurt production and distribution. Achieving the Rwandan Boards approval represents a significant milestone, as it opens avenues for selling probiotic sachets to fund yogurt production. As a result, building relationships with department professors early on helped us adapt to the environment earlier and aided the process of cross-cultural education and awareness.

Long Term Goals:

The long-term goals of the probiotic yogurt project are in the interests of expanding social enterprises to improve audience reach of probiotic yogurt and its benefits. To achieve this, the foundation laid by the past interns needed to be renewed and continually built upon in terms of ideas and research to fit the Rwandan context. Given the nationwide scope of this project, it was crucial to establish collaborative relationships with community-driven organizations early on. By expanding our network and raising awareness of the health benefits of probiotic yogurt, we actively engaged with local businesses. Additionally, to seamlessly integrate this project into Rwanda, we prioritized gaining a deeper understanding of the country's culture and history. The 1994 genocide had impacted the health and economy of Rwanda. We believe that developing probiotic yogurt as a remedy for various health issues could effectively contribute to addressing the high rates of malnutrition resulting from the genocide. Since probiotic yogurt helps to combat diarrheal disease and inflammation and improves the overall immune system, it would work to alleviate this issue. On top of that, Rwandan families regularly consume milk and yogurt as both foods are essential to their diet, making the transition as seamless as possible. It is also cheaper compared to other food products which makes it more sustainable to produce and distribute in local businesses. Both considerations play an important role in the marketization and production of the product. Through these long-term goals, I was able to develop cultural sensitivity from considering the impacts of a nation and its social economy to develop strategies to achieve our product goals. Furthermore, it gave me the opportunity to fully immerse myself into the culture and to hear the firsthand experiences of those who were impacted by the genocide.

Challenges:

One of the greatest challenges we faced was getting the yogurt kitchen started and running since its halt from the pandemic. We needed to purchase yogurt equipment for the kitchen in order to teach the students how to make the yogurt. With the uncertainty of the grant between Western and the University of Rwanda, we could not start experimenting with the yogurt due to the lack of funding available. Therefore, we shifted our focus towards management aspects of the yogurt kitchen and how it could be sustained. It was very hard to figure out what our next steps were supposed to look like as we were originally told our objectives were to focus on yogurt production. To overcome this challenge, we met with existing student organizations on the campus that we believed might be interested in this experience. We hosted presentations, yogurt training, and information sessions for students in hopes of gaining interest for the probiotic-yogurt project. Thankfully, many students were interested in the practical aspects of this experience. They appreciated the club as it would give them opportunities to work with the local community and get a chance to apply the knowledge that they gained in class. As a result, networking with students and faculty members proved instrumental in acquiring valuable insights from those with firsthand experience in Rwanda, aiding us in problem-solving. Additionally, we cultivated a mindset that transcended traditional boundaries, leveraging available resources by exploring collaborative opportunities with various existing clubs in the UR campus.

Through establishing the club, we hosted elections for student representatives and really got to really know the students in depth and see their talents and strengths. The club representatives were elected by the students within the club which allowed them to decide who they wanted to represent them and make the big decisions in the club. For me, facilitating the role of decision maker from us to the student representatives was a bit more challenging than I

initially anticipated. Students sought us for solutions to problems related to the club's foundation. However, as our engagement deepened with the student representatives, we shifted toward a collaborative problem-solving approach. Recognizing the importance of the students' autonomy, we refrained from imposing our beliefs and management styles. Instead, we offered suggestions and collaboratively made crucial decisions. By involving the students in the planning process and final decision-making, we struck a balance between accomplishing tasks and meeting deadlines. Throughout the process we tried to empower the president to be confident in his decision-making, fostering the independence he needed, while earning respect from club members. It was truly fulfilling to witness the president take initiative in planning and having full autonomy to make decisions for the club was a rewarding experience. Overall, gaining insight into when to assume a leadership role and when to delegate was a valuable experience for me. I discovered my preference for having control, which is why working under a supervisor who granted us the autonomy to make independent decisions facilitated our growth as interns.

Another challenge we encountered was acquiring the necessary equipment for yogurt production, as essential tools were not readily available in local markets and supermarkets. Items commonly found in Canadian supermarkets were not available in local markets in Rwanda. Complicating matters, we had a set deadline for the yogurt training date, and we were keen on avoiding further delays given our limited time in Rwanda. Online ordering was not a viable option due to the extended shipping times. Fortunately, our supervisor connected us with a supplier who had experimental supplies, and we acquired the thermometer and lactometer. Moreover, we were faced with constraints in both tools and budget, we explored alternative methods that could achieve the desired tasks, even if they involved additional steps. For instance, due to the unavailability of measuring cups for dry ingredients, we opted for a food scale to

measure the required amount of milk powder. Through the search for alternative solutions and maximizing the limited resources at our disposal, we successfully completed the yogurt testing and training on the scheduled date. This challenge made me reflect on the need to come up with creative solutions to addressing problems and finding new approaches to problem solving when one part doesn't work out. Furthermore, learning to be resourceful helped us further adapt given the situation we were in, allowing us to make the most out of it.

The last challenge we encountered was the marked differences in how tasks are completed at the University of Rwanda compared to our accustomed practices at Western University. Notably, there exists a disparity in the timing of meeting deadlines and, overall, a slower pace in getting tasks done. Since there is not a huge urgency for completion of school-related tasks, there was a tendency for last-minute changes and a generally slower pace of completion. This uncertainty created a need for constant flexibility and a potential requirement for backup plans. Working with students from a different culture significantly expanded my understanding and adaptability in approaching collaborative task completion. To overcome potential cultural barriers and misunderstandings, we diversified our communication methods. By limiting the highest priority tasks to the students, we took a larger load in other tasks to ensure that deadlines were still met. Furthermore, for students that wanted to get involved more, we gradually delegated more tasks while providing ongoing support. This adaptive approach ensured effective collaboration, facilitating the success of tasks and maintaining a positive working relationship. Through collaborating with students from diverse cultural backgrounds, I honed my communication skills, learning when to assert myself in urgent situations while respecting their opinions. This experience fostered greater cultural sensitivity and enhanced my adaptability to different working styles. While collaboration may be straightforward within a

familiar cultural framework, appreciating and understanding another culture was a novel experience for me. This journey highlighted a weakness in my ability to accommodate others and be flexible, especially during instances when assigned tasks weren't completed by the agreed-upon deadline. It was a learning curve that required patience, prompting me to adjust my expectations and assume a larger role when necessary. These challenges underscored the importance of cultivating patience and flexibility, ultimately contributing to a more effective collaboration across cultural differences.

Personal Growth:

My experience with Western Heads East has been transformative, shaping not just my professional capabilities, but also enriching my personal growth. Being in a completely new environment, I learned to adapt to a country and continent that I had never experienced before. Sudden lifestyle changes, such as having constant water from the tap and constant electricity, which I took for granted, became apparent challenges in Rwanda. Being away from family for an extended period was difficult, requiring me to make decisions independently that were once supported by parental advice. However, this experience taught me to be independent and to take charge of various situations I encountered. From such a drastic change of environment, I learned to appreciate the growth that happens when you are placed in a surrounding that is beyond your comfort level. From reflecting on this it further, I appreciate the learning that takes place abroad, where you do not have access to the resources you normally have or the ease of finding these resources.

Networking and collaborating on a local scale within Rwanda have been crucial to my internship growth. This pertains not only to the project itself but also in enlightening me about

the significant impact collaborative efforts can have on both the present and future success of the project. Among the most notable collaborations is with the students at the UR campus, particularly through the Probiotic Advocates Club. This student club has opened numerous avenues for new collaborative efforts and innovative networking ideas. Furthermore, engaging with student leaders allowed me to discover potential stakeholders and other interested parties in the project within the local area. These partnerships offer valuable insights into the needs and aspirations of the local community, enabling us to tailor initiatives to be relevant and impactful. This collaboration not only enriches the project but also provides a broader understanding of the local landscape, fostering meaningful and sustainable efforts. An example of our impact can be observed in the recent conference during Innovation Week in Rwanda, where students presented the benefits of probiotics and successfully generated more interest from potential collaborators. Witnessing the outcomes of our efforts as interns coming to fruition greatly excites me for any tasks I undertake in the future. Even though results may not be immediate or may not materialize at all, the knowledge that our efforts are not in vain motivates me to persist in pursuing my passions, confident that something meaningful will eventually come to fruition.

How the Sciences Intersect with the Humanities:

Listening to the other students' presentations and reflecting on both my experiential-learning credits made me appreciate how much learning and growth I have gained from my two internships. They both pushed me in ways that I have not been pushed in a classroom and demonstrated the importance of taking experiential-learning courses prior to joining the workforce. Both opportunities enhanced my problem-solving skills, increased my professional work experience, helped me develop a mindset of continuous learning through adapting to new

situations, and finally improved my knowledge retention through experiencing diverse challenges firsthand. Furthermore, I have come to appreciate the privilege of being in SASAH and pursuing a double major in both kinesiology and the arts. Although these fields may seem disparate, they are intricately intertwined. Articulating scientific principles into real-life situations, where we engage with individuals, entails considering more than just the theology or history behind a practice; it involves examining the subjects involved and understanding how they might be impacted from different perspectives. This consideration is increasingly important given the growing emphasis on equity, diversity, and inclusion principles beyond healthcare practice. In the humanities, we delve deeper to comprehend the multifaceted struggles that have impacted individuals both in the past, present, and future. Through this, I have developed a profound appreciation for the levels of education I have received. While their impact may not have been immediately apparent during the learning process, I now realize how essential they are and how they inform my interactions with others and across different schools of thought. I would also like to emphasize the integration of humanistic perspectives and creative problem-solving skills that I honed through both internships strikes at the core of interdisciplinary learning. From understanding that there are many ways to approach problems and different perspectives that can change the way you view a situation, I was able to further grasp and practice these skills. My internship with Western Heads East involved engaging with different cultural practices and ethical considerations, which deepened my appreciation for cultural studies and ethical reasoning. The Indigenous courses I have taken in SASAH gave me a broader understanding of the world and how colonization affects many cultures in both implicit and explicit ways. Therefore, learning to be more culturally aware of past historical oppression allowed me to keep an open mind when I was in Rwanda and helped me adapt to culture a lot faster. Both

experiences enriched my understanding of human experiences and the complexities of societal interactions, demonstrating the practical application of the arts and humanities education in real-world settings.

Final Thoughts:

In conclusion, my internships at MetaTherapy and with Western Heads East in Rwanda have been pivotal in shaping my personal and professional journey. These experiences have not only equipped me with practical skills in physiotherapy and community health but have also profoundly deepened my understanding and appreciation for the arts and humanities. Through confronting challenges, embracing diverse cultures, engaging in ethical practice, I have learned to be empathetic and adaptable. These internships have fundamentally transformed my perspective to approach things in a more holistic manner whether in healthcare or just in general.