Let's Go for Therapeutic Groups in Spanish

- A FIELDWORK I EXPERIENCE

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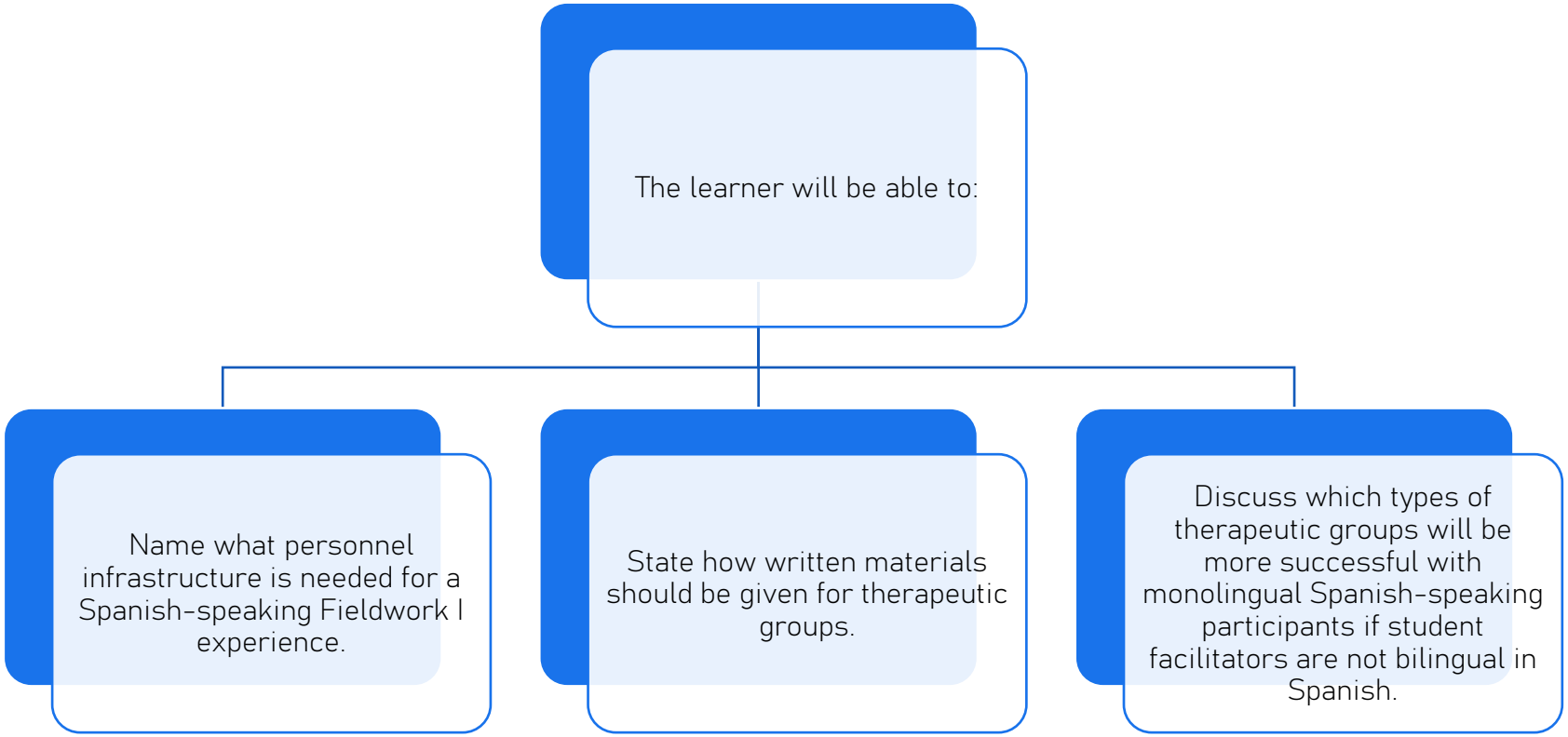
Introduction

Demographic shift in U.S. population with nearly 1 in 3 children Latine/Hispanic heritage by 2060 (Yagual & Hoyt, 2025).

Spanish-speaking older adults cannot receive health services at Senior Centers due to language barriers (Lavalley, 2023).

Necessary infrastructure of an administrative staff who is bilingual and ideally an occupational therapy practitioner (OTP) who is bilingual or at minimum proficient in Spanish to host a psychosocial fieldwork I experience.

Learning Objectives



Occupational Therapy Doctoral (OTD) and Master's (MOT) Program Requirements



At least 1 fieldwork experience (either Level I or Level II) must have primary focus on ment health, behavioral health, or psychosocial aspects in a site setting (ACOTE, 2023).



Because of lack of acute psychiatric settings, client occupational performance can be observed in community-based senior centers, for example.



An innovative community-based, faculty-led Fieldwork I experience was explored with the Service and Experiential Learning Through Engagement in the Community (SELTEC) (Brown & Mohler, 2020).

Background

Fall of 2022 the entry-level OTD and MOT programs at Samuel Merritt University (SMU) started a clinical placement at a local Spanish-speaking senior center.

Center primarily serves monolingual Spanish speakers, and the OT clinical instructor was a native Spanish speaker.

Due to time constraints, the original OT clinical instructor could no longer supervise students there for Fall 2023.

Positionality

- No other OT clinical instructors from a mental health practice setting who spoke Spanish were available.
- This professor who is not a native Spanish-speaker but is proficient in Spanish had to step in the role (but with much trepidation).
- The psychosocial course is connected to this “lab” or clinical rotation which is 1 of 4 rotations which host 10 students each week from 9:00 to 11:50 a.m.



Description

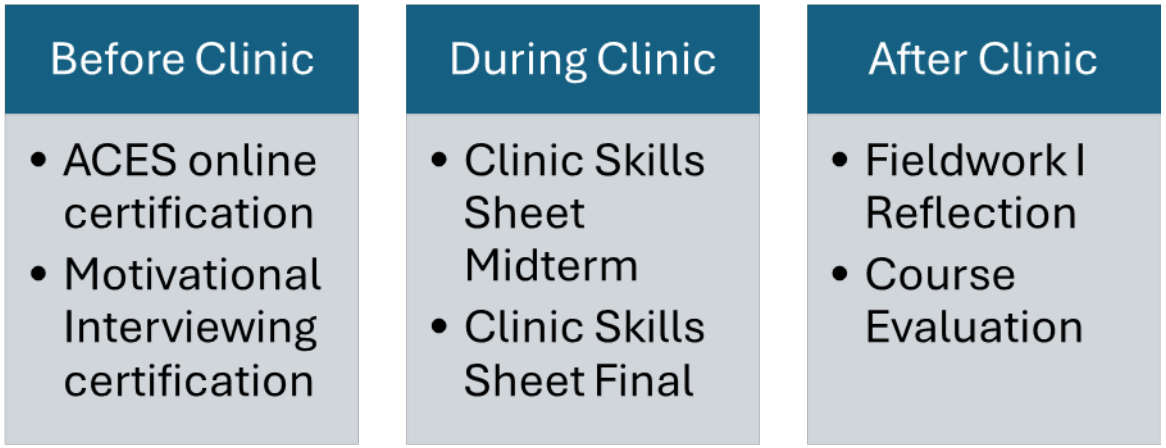
- Spanish-speaking senior center serves older adults who voluntarily attend seeking services and resources in Spanish.
- Culturally appropriate resources and services much needed as PTSD in refugee populations may be as high as 86% and depression as high as 75% according to systematic reviews (Al Khoury, 2026).
- Senior center program manager requested leisure groups for seniors, especially arts & crafts groups where students facilitated 90-minute groups each week for 12 weeks.

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Assessment

Figure 1

Assignments for the clinical component of the Psychosocial Fieldwork I Course



Description of Assessment

- Before students go to their fieldwork I sites, they must complete 2 online courses to receive certificates in Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and in Motivational Interviewing (MI).
- During clinic, they must complete a self-assessment of their clinical skills at midterm and they must meet with their assigned clinical instructor to discuss their clinical skills near end of course.
- After the clinical portion of the course is completed, their Fieldwork I Reflection assignment is due. Finally, the last day of class, they complete a course evaluation for the clinical portion of the course. [See Table 1 for Student Quotes.]

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Table 1

Student Quotes from Course Evaluation

Number	Quote
1	"Had a really great time participating at [site name] due to [professor's] relationships and engagement with the people and staff there."
2	"Fieldwork was important for the students' learning experience."
3	"The groups were nice."
4	"Enjoying the challenge of the different sites and personnel that we worked with."
5	"[Professor] was very supportive during our fieldwork level 1C rotation as she guided us and even translated when students needed it. She cares deeply about the course she teaches and the community partnerships [the university] has."
6	"The [site name] was such a great site and a pleasure to work with. Thank you for connecting us to this fantastic organization!"

Table 2

Culturally Responsive Suggestions for Successful Groups

Number	Suggestion
1	Ask the site to have name tags for each participant.
2	If there are bilingual English and Spanish-speaking students, try and intersperse them accordingly to match to the participant group(s).
3	Ensure that students do not only speak to the participants who speak more English. All students need to make an effort to communicate with participants in Spanish.
4	The students are encouraged to use their therapeutic use of self and keep the focus on the clients.
5	Try and have the students have activity groups rather than educational groups unless the students are bilingual and can process more insight-oriented activities.
6	Make sure that the activity instructions are printed in Spanish and English.
7	OTP briefly introduce the purpose of OT and mention university for continuity.
8	Have the students introduce themselves by name.
9	Ask the students tell what group they will facilitate and a brief therapeutic purpose.
10	OTP briefly close the large group and speak about the next week's plans.

Discussion



Student responses regarding Spanish-speaking senior center as a Fieldwork I experience were positive.



Older Adult participants in Spanish, wrote their well wishes to the students on a large poster board, entitled, “Gracias Estudiantes!”

Staff shared the following:

- *The seniors felt cared for and listened to. Many of them have younger grandchildren who often have limited time to spend with them. Projects like this one helped our seniors feel supported and valued by the younger students. One activity that stood out was when a student helped a senior reflect on her daily activities by keeping a diary. The senior shared that she had been having a difficult day, but through conversation with the student, she realized that anger was an emotion she could process. Letting go of that anger and focusing on the positive made her feel much better.*

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Discussion

01

The role of *familismo* or a home away from home was why some older adults liked to participate at the center (Ramirez & Magasi, 2025).

02

Communal needs being valued above individual desires may play a part in the environment at the center.

03

"Concept of collective occupation" explored in a scoping review (Anzai, Norikazu, & Bontje, 2026) as opposed to most OT practice in the U.S. focusing on individuals' occupational needs might also be at play at the center.

Implications

At minimum, a site bilingual staff and a bilingual or proficient Spanish-speaking OTP are the necessary personnel infrastructure needed for a psychosocial fieldwork I experience.

Written materials need to be in Spanish and English when used in conjunction with therapeutic groups in Spanish.

Occupation-based task groups are most successful unless there are bilingual students in Spanish and English to facilitate more insight-oriented occupation-based reflective groups.

Conclusion

- Scarcity of fieldwork I sites and lack of OT services to Spanish-speaking clients makes relevance of a fieldwork I experience at a Spanish-speaking center necessary.
- Collaboration of the center and the university is vital for a successful experience to serve an underserved and marginalized population of Spanish-speaking older adults.
- Intergenerational interactions between participants and students was profound for a Win-Win situation—Let's go—VAMOS!

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Questions/*Preguntas?*



Thank You/*Gracias!*



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ACTIVITY BREAK

"The Group Therapy Starter Kit: Twenty Easy-to-Use Activities in English and Spanish"
(Ching, E., in process with *Cognella, Inc.*, Anticipated Publishing Date, March 2027)

- Closing: To share what each participant gained from the group work. (10 minutes to 30 minutes depending on number of participants)
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- Equipment: Enough chairs for each participant to see one another in a circle.
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- Directions: Ask participants what they learned or gained from their group experience.
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- Process: Have them compare how they first came into the group with what brought them here to what their take-away message is. Were expectations met? If not, did they gain something else?

- Cierre
- **Propósito:** Compartir lo aprendido. *(10–30 minutos)*
  Materiales: Sillas en círculo.
  Instrucciones: ¿Qué aprendiste o ganaste en este grupo?
  Proceso: ¿Cambió tu percepción desde el inicio hasta ahora? ¿Se cumplieron tus expectativas?
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- Si deseas que este documento esté en formato PDF o que se edite para un folleto o presentación, también puedo ayudarte.

Translated into Spanish by Dr. Alondra Ammon, PhD, MOT, OTR/L

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