A Comparative Analysis of Disability Policy in the U.S. and Canada from an Occupational Lens

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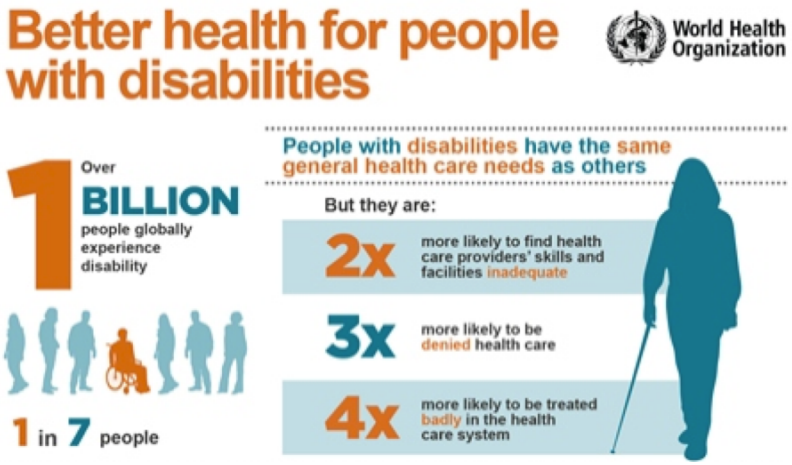
Introduction



- One billion individuals are living with some form of disability worldwide[1]
  - Will continue to increase as health care, technology, and medicine advance
- Disability is a global and human rights issue
  - Agreement over need to understand the complexities of disability and how to better shape inclusive environments[2,3]
- Occupational therapy (OT) is a profession that works closely with disability in many contexts[4]
- There is extensive evidence behind occupational therapy's capacity to facilitate independence and address barriers for individuals with disabilities[9,10,11]

Introduction: The Problem

- The World Report on Disability points to a lack of literature analyzing international policy development to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities[1]
- There are gaps in the existing literature between disability policy and occupational therapy practice[9]
- The CAOT and AOTA have both published similar visionary statements for future practice[12,13,14]
  - These ideals include potential advancements for policy, yet the current political landscape of each nation is under-researched

Long term goal and Purpose

- The overarching goal of the current project is to identify synergies and gaps between the current policy discourses on disability and the new challenges and opportunities identified for OT practice

- The current project objective is to critically appraise central policy documents pertaining to disability
  - These documents were compared to the current political landscapes of the U.S. and Canada through an occupational lens

- A conceptual analysis of the OT profession's opportunities for advancement in disability policy is the final deliverable

Aim 1: Evaluate definitions

Aim 2: Assess current perspectives

Aim 3: Develop analysis

Intended Audience

- The final deliverable, a conceptual analysis accompanied by a practice model, is to be utilized by:
  - Policymakers
  - Occupational therapists
  - Researchers
  - Educators
  - General Public

Significance

- Throughout the last fifty years, perspectives of disability have shifted away from a medical model toward a social model[16,17]
  - Emphasizes systematic and environmental barriers to participation
- U.S. passed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in 1990
  - Although gives recognition to social model, has been challenged by federal courts' attempt to narrow and medicalize disability[18,19]
- Canada currently utilizes a cross-cutting, systematic approach to disability policy
  - Office for Disability Issues, currently no omnibus legislation
  - Disability Creation Process and Canadian Human Rights

Universalization vs Contextualization

- There have been unsuccessful recommendations for the universalization of disability policy and the adoption of a universalistic perspective of disability[27,28]
  - Coordination and consistency difficulties
  - Decreased accountability and lack of coherent aims
  - Data collection difficulties
- Researchers have emphasized that effective policy is typically adapted to fit a specific context
  - Contextualized to each community or nation the policy is intended to guide[29]

Universalization vs Contextualization

- Disability policy is shaped by theoretical and conceptual disability frameworks
  - These frameworks define the concept of disability
  - This has an implication for the nature of the solutions that are created to address meeting needs of people with disabilities

- Discussion question: what do you view as advantages or disadvantages to adopting a universalistic or context-specific perspective of disability?

Relevant Goals: AOTA's Vision 2025

- Collaborative: Occupational therapy excels in working with clients and within systems to produce effective outcomes.[12]
- Leaders: Occupational therapy is influential in changing policies, environments, and complex systems.[12]

- Emphasizes the provision of care for "all people, populations, and communities through effective solutions that facilitate participation in everyday living."[12]
  - In order to establish greater influence, expand the reach of the profession, and "maximize health, well-being, and quality of life for all people" occupational therapists and related community members need resources that clarify their role and articulate what opportunities will be available in the next decades.

Relevant Goals: CAOT Strategic Plan, 2016-2019

- Guide for advancements in occupational therapy
  - Includes disability management

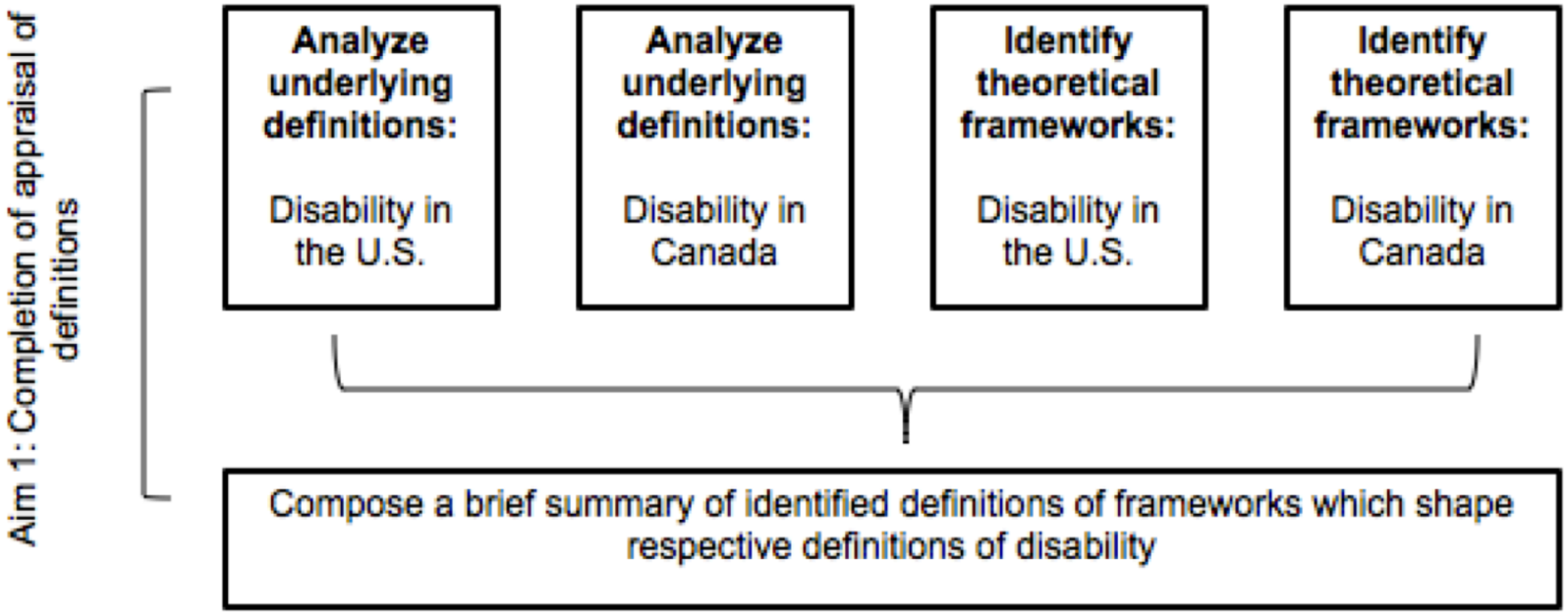
- Highlights the need for OTs to collaborate with policymakers, researchers, organizations, and additional stakeholders[15]

Relevant Goals: Sustainable Development Goals

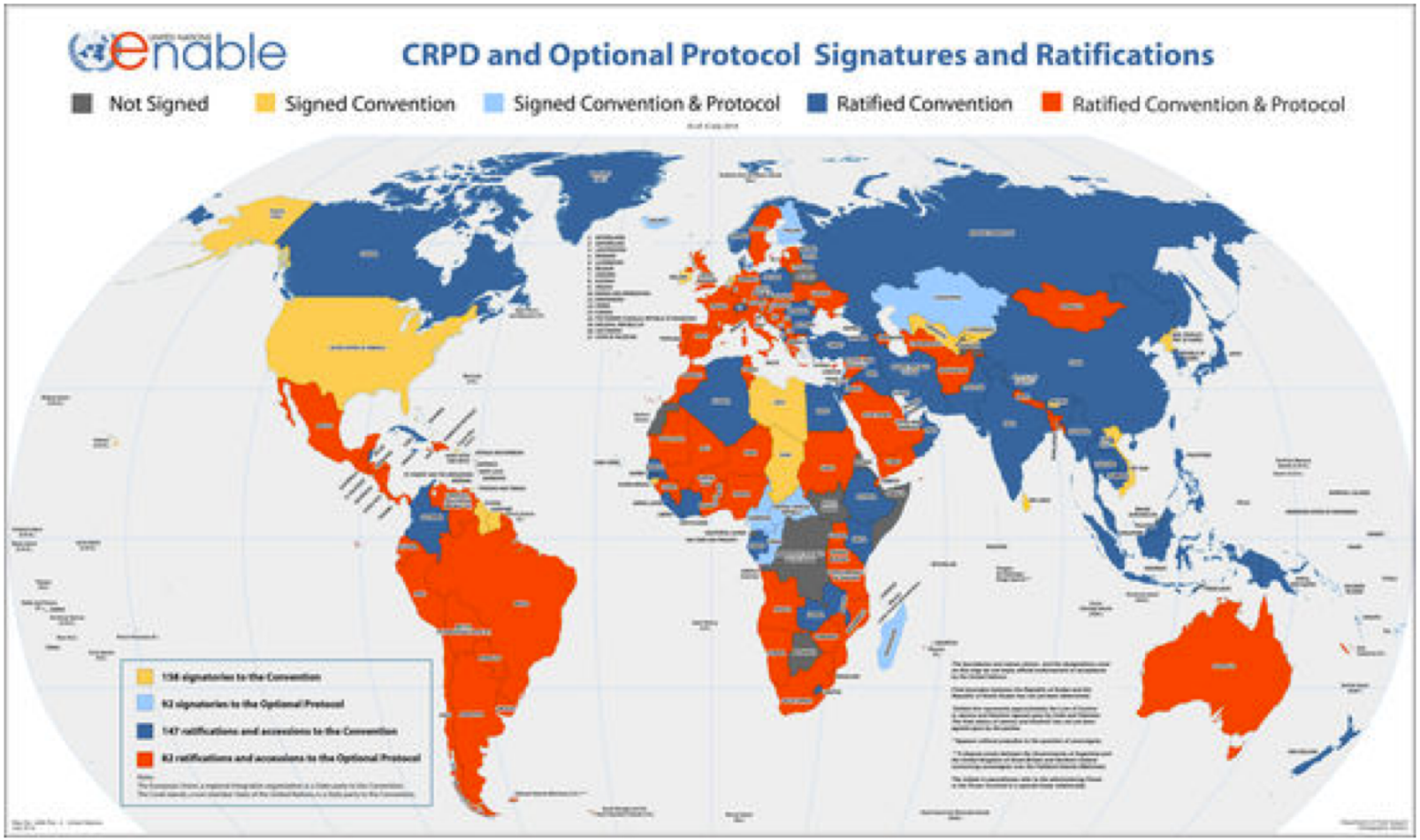
- 4: Education
- 8: Economy
- 10: Reduced inequalities
- 11: Cities
- 17: Partnerships

Design: Mixed Methods

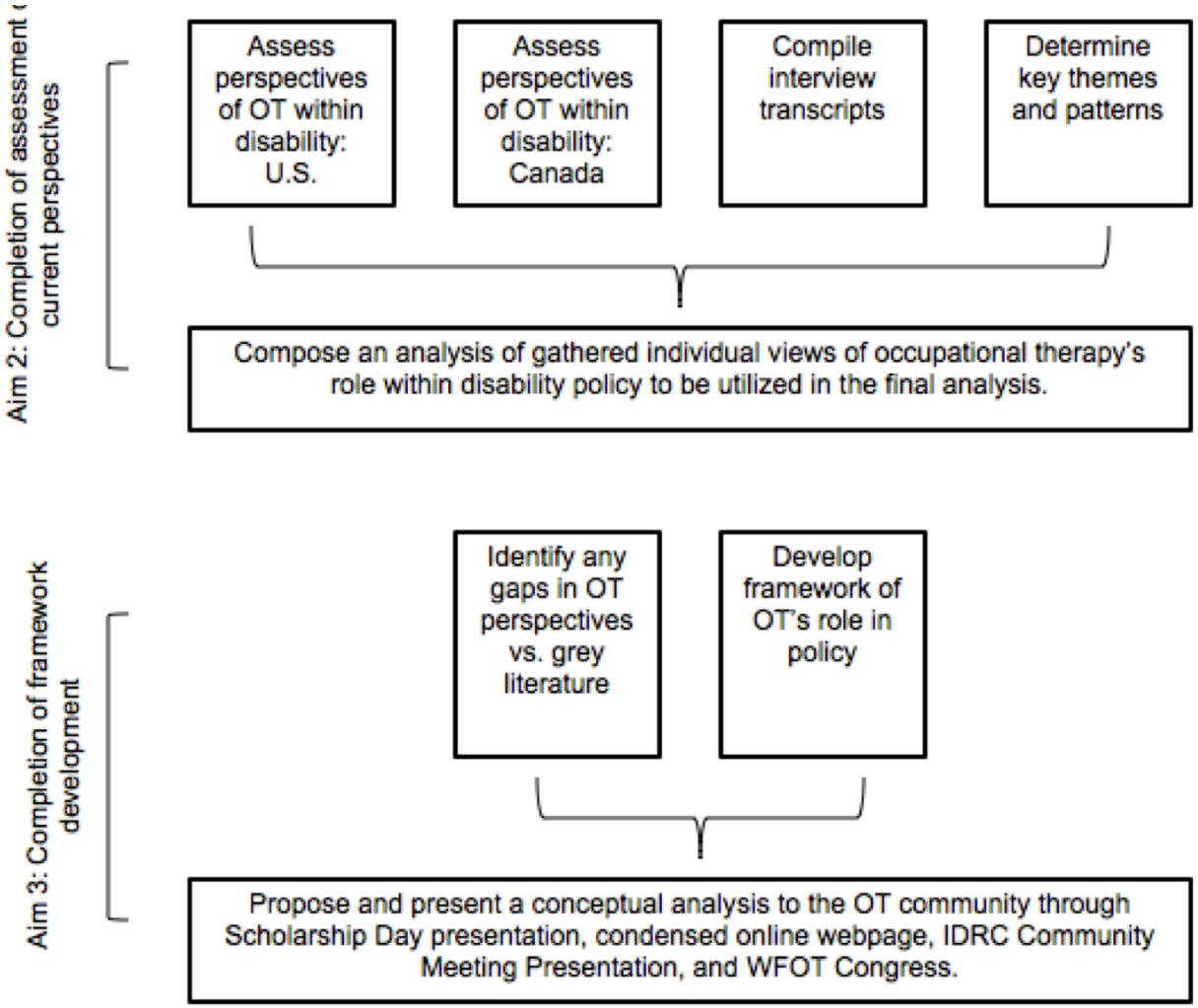
- Exploratory, mixed methods pilot study



United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)



Design: Mixed Methods



Analysis

Definitions and theoretical frameworks

- Grey and academic literature scoping review
  - NVivo thematic coding
  - UNCRPD articles as codes

Current OT and stakeholder perspectives

- Semi-structured interview transcripts coded Using NVivo
  - Word occurrence
  - Thematic
  - Data modeling

Results

Canada node frequencies

Nodes	Number of coding references	Aggregate number of coding references	Number of items coded	Aggregate number of items coded
Nodes\\Article 2 Definitions	22	22	6	6
Nodes\\Article 27 Work and Employment	18	18	7	7
Nodes\\Article 9 Accessibility	13	13	4	4
Nodes\\Article 1 Purpose	6	6	5	5
Nodes\\Article 29 Participation in Political and Public Life	4	4	1	1
Nodes\\Article 20 Personal Mobility	2	2	2	2
Nodes\\Article 23 Respect for Home and the Family	2	2	1	1
Nodes\\Article 25 Health	2	2	1	1
Nodes\\Article 26 Habilitation and Rehabilitation	2	2	1	1

Results

U.S. node frequencies

Nodes	Number of coding references	Aggregate number of coding references	Number of items coded	Aggregate number of items coded
Nodes\\Article 9 Accessibility	54	54	16	16
Nodes\\Article 2 Definitions	22	22	10	10
Nodes\\Article 5 Equality and Non-discrimination	17	17	7	7
Nodes\\Article 24 Education	16	16	4	4
Nodes\\Article 20 Personal Mobility	15	15	8	8
Nodes\\Article 33 National Implementation and Monitoring	15	15	8	8
Nodes\\Article 23 Respect for Home and the Family	13	13	3	3
Nodes\\Article 1 Purpose	11	11	7	7
Nodes\\Article 25 Health	11	11	4	4

Word frequency cloud: Canada

Word frequency cloud: United States

Interview results

- No substantial differences between responses by country
- Participants in both countries appeared to be more progressive than current legislation
  - More forward thinking (i.e., empowerment model)
- Definitions of disability:
  - "A naturally occurring part of life that we as a society need to figure out how to adapt to. We as a society need to adapt for people with disabilities as opposed to people with disabilities doing the adapting to what the norm looks like in society."
  - "A mismatch between an individual, their goals and what they want to accomplish, and the context that they find themselves in. That context can be an environmental context, physical context, a digital context that precludes them from getting to do what they want to do."

Perception of national views

- "I think in society we're still lagging behind a little bit, I think there's an effort to sort of change it. But I do think that there's this sort of medical model where disability is a very physical thing—you look different than other people, you sound different than other people, you get around different than other people, you need support from different people. I don't think it's intentional, but I think it's just the cultural implications."

Future predictions

- Cautious optimism or skepticism
- "Organizations like AOTA are definitely more on the ball, but I feel like we got left out of policy a while back."
- "There's a lot of really thoughtful and passionate, motivated occupational therapists out there who really have a lot to say, but at the same time we haven't had a lot of traction for the profession and around what we do, why we do it, and how we can contribute in such a unique and meaningful way."

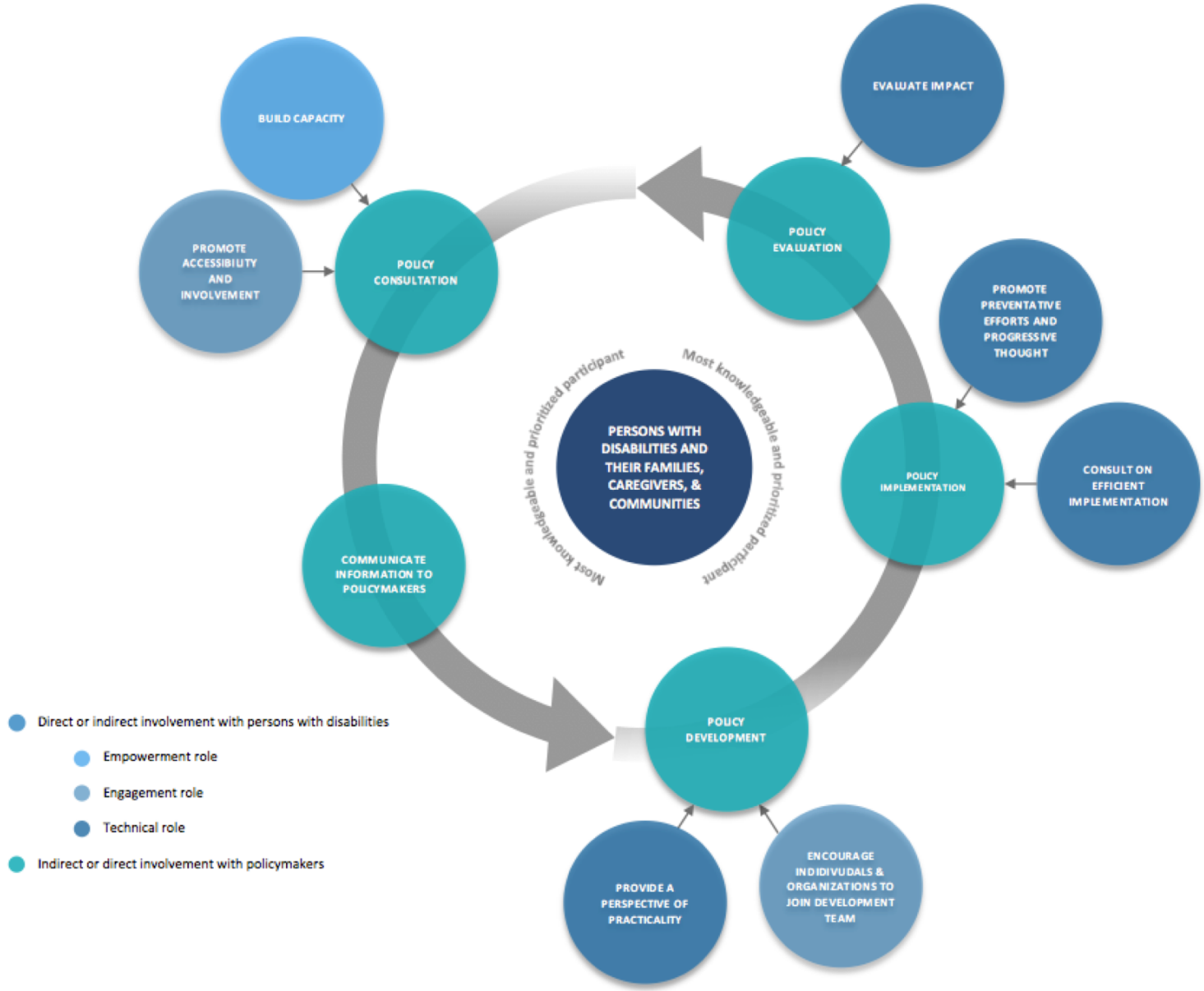
A proposed model of OT's role in disability policy

- Interview response themes included capacity building, empowerment, promotion of accessibility and involvement, and evaluation or feedback.

- "We have the capacity to build confidence, make individuals feel empowered, connect with people and actually encourage them to believe and realize that they can do something."

- "We really think people with disabilities have the best knowledge about what policies and programs and services should look like for people with disabilities."

The Role of Occupational Therapy in Disability Policy



Outcomes

- Improved understanding of theoretical models that sustain policy and shape practice
- Identified gap between policy document definitions/frameworks and practicing clinicians' definitions/frameworks
- Recognition of OT's current narrow, limited role in disability policy
- Insight into how to advance the profession, achieve future goals, and better meet the needs of individuals with disability through a shift toward social model of health and disability

Limitations and future directions

- Limited sample size
- Lack of perspectives from individuals with disabilities themselves (potential for future research)
- Analysis of only two countries

Key Takeaways

1. American legislation continues to stay rooted in the medical model of disability, while Canadian legislation is progressing towards empowerment and social models.
2. Occupational therapists in both the U.S. and Canada appear to be more forward-thinking and progressive in their conceptualization of disability than the legislation of their countries.
3. Occupational therapists have a significant potential role to play in the realm of disability policy

Significance

- Supports the achievement of AOTA's Vision 2025 by identifying challenges and opportunities that face the profession

- Translates to a wider audience of international occupational therapy communities

- Innovative approach and design which will lay the foundation for development of unexplored avenue of research

VISION 2025

Engagement Plan

- Conceptual analysis to be disseminated to educators, clinicians, policymakers, and researchers
  - Condensed webpage
  - Community Meeting Presentation for the Inclusive Design Research Center (IDRC)
  - Washington University discussion forum
  - WFOT 2018 Congress poster presentation
  - Manuscript publication

Questions & initial thoughts

Discussion

- How do you think your community, country, or self defines disability?
- Do you find the results of this study to align with your personal experiences in that there is a lag between needs of persons with disabilities and the legislation intending to address those needs?
- The analysis of legislation for this project was conducted before the announcement of the development of a potential Canadian omnibus federal legislation, currently referred to as the Canadians with Disabilities Act. What are your thoughts on this transition?
- What is your initial impression of this study and this model?
- What's missing? Are there any additional ways in which occupational therapists and stakeholders can impact disability policy and better meet the needs of individuals with disabilities?