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Transitioning From Clinician to Fieldwork Educator

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Throughout the fieldwork education process, the amount and type of involvement of both the educator and the student change. As the amount of direction by the educator decreases, the amount of participation by the student increases. Students may be performing at any stage in the continuum of learning to apply knowledge and skills in the fieldwork setting, depending upon the variables specific to the setting and the knowledge base and skill set of the student. It is important that the fieldwork educator modify the approach to education in response to the unique challenges of the learning environment and knowledge base and skill set of the student at each stage of fieldwork development.

Many practitioners enter into the role of fieldwork educator without adequate preparation (Dowling, 2001; McCrea & Brasseur, 2003; Spence, Wilson, Kavanagh, Strong, & Worrall, 2001). Without preparation, fieldwork educators may default to their own student experiences as a source for methodologies and have misperceptions related to students' fieldwork preparation. They tend to use the same method with all students, regardless of the students' knowledge or skill levels, and without regard for each student's learning style, which

can result in passive student involvement, dependence on the fieldwork educator, and diminished critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Dowling, 2001; McCrea & Brasseur, 2003). Training specific to fieldwork education can expose the fieldwork educator to strategies and behaviors that promote student learning and development.

Practitioners may not have been taught methods specific to helping students apply concepts learned in the classroom to practice (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2009; Christie, Joyce, & Moeller, 1985; Costa, 2004; Herkt, 2005; Ilott, 1995; Johnson, Haynes, & Oppermann, 2007; Kautzmann, 1990; Quilligan, 2007). They may possess supervisory skills but lack expertise in instructional design.

One reason for this lack of training may be that limited empirical evidence exists in the area of fieldwork education, especially as it relates to fieldwork outcomes. Knowledge about fieldwork education has primarily come from descriptive studies that have led to the identification of methods for selecting various teaching styles and facilitating critical thinking in students (Dowling, 2001; McCrea & Brasseur, 2003). Fieldwork educators can benefit from research that has been conducted in the area of fieldwork education specific to developing relationships with students, analyzing and applying evidence-based research regarding educator and student behaviors, and understanding and applying principles related to conflict resolution.

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Based on a review of the literature, one of the most influential factors relevant to the effectiveness of the fieldwork educator is the ability to communicate effectively (Quilligan, 2007). Adopting an effective style of communication with students has been shown to improve student performance. Research has supported a correlation between superior student performance and a student's perception of being able to share their thoughts and feelings with the fieldwork educator without fear of judgment, verbalize their learning needs, and ask questions. Students' performance has been positively affected by positive reinforcement and constructive feedback that is provided with perceived genuineness and empathy (McCrea & Brasseur, 2003).

Methods to Enhance Fieldwork

In addition to enhancing their communication skills, fieldwork educators need to help the student systematically develop goals and design and implement interventions based on the results of a client evaluation. Given the current shift from fieldwork supervision to fieldwork education, practitioners may not be prepared to apply *instructional design principles* to create the most effective learning experiences if they have not been educated in how to design learning in a systematic way. Instructional design is the practice of creating educational experiences with the goal of maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of knowledge and skill acquisition (Stutz-Tanenbaum & Hooper, 2009). The fieldwork educator assesses the student's knowledge and skills, establishes goals of instruction, and designs interventions to assist in the process of learning. Instructional design includes the analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation of instructional experiences. The fieldwork educator demonstrates knowledge about the subject matter being taught; interacts effectively with the student; demonstrates leadership and administration skills; and possesses the skills required for designing learning experiences (Fink, 2003). The effectiveness of the fieldwork experience is influenced by the competency of the educator in implementing effective and efficient instructional design principles.

During a positive fieldwork experience, the student experiences a *role shift* from student to practitioner and professional and becomes increasingly aware of his or her own values, perceptions, biases, and ethics. The student's relationships shift from those with classmates and professors to those with coworkers and clients and/or caregivers. The student develops a sense of identity as a professional as he or she begins to articulate and demonstrate the values and perceptions of role models and to blend personal style with practice. Students grow and develop through reflective practice. The student's role also shifts from recipient of knowledge to provider-teacher of knowledge, routinely incorporating teaching into practice (Johnson et al., 2007). As practitioners, students become accountable to clients, caregivers, employers, and inter-professional team members.

Methods of teaching to facilitate a positive experience can include using *graded learning* with the intent to increase the student's responsibility for learning (Provident, Leibold, Dolhi, & Jelfcoat, 2009). The student can provide input into the development of goals, which can enhance his or her sense of empowerment and

accountability. Graded learning can be effective in situations where a specific learning need is identified. The educator can provide the student with opportunities for observation by serving as a role model. The student can be challenged by using strategies that include cues, probing questions, and selective trial and error.

Satisfaction with learning is linked to quality and timeliness of *feedback* (De Beer & Mårtensson, 2015). Students who receive feedback perform better when strengths and areas for growth related to performance and behaviors that need to be changed are identified (Quilligan, 2007). Through feedback, barriers to learning and subsequent ways to achieve the goals are identified, and the student is encouraged to explore alternative methods. Self-reflection strategies designed to increase student self-awareness can include written, verbal, audio, or video mediums.

Styles may include feedback that is direct, indirect, sandwiched, constructive rather than destructive, nonverbal, ongoing versus intermittent, specific versus generic, active versus passive, and formal versus informal. Effective feedback can be provided through partnership, empathy, acknowledgement of barriers to learning, respect, legitimizing feelings, and supporting efforts towards improvement. Strategies for providing effective feedback include identifying the source(s) of the feedback that are credible and well-intentioned; modifying feedback based on the student's level of experience or education; and briefly summarizing. When providing effective feedback, it is important to be mindful of student self-esteem, maintain a focus on the behavior versus on the student, allow the student time to respond, relate feedback to the learning goal, preface feedback with "I" statements, be non-judgmental, and avoid making assumptions. Effective feedback should be provided routinely, sought by the student, accurate, factual, clear, relevant, descriptive, timely, and private. A feedback checklist can help the educator provide feedback that is well-timed, expected, based on firsthand or observed data, appropriate in amount, focused on changeable behaviors, phrased in descriptive and nonjudgmental language, specific to performance versus generalities, identifies subjective data, and avoids assumptions. A feedback grid can encourage the student to continue to demonstrate performance skills and behaviors that have been effective by citing specific examples that include a description of his or her impact and identify performance skills and behaviors that the educator would like the student to develop or demonstrate more often. The educator can identify an area of potential growth for the student that could include decreasing or terminating specific performance skills or behaviors that are not helpful or even potentially harmful by predicting their potential impact (Quilligan, 2007).

About the Education SIS

The Education Special Interest Section (EDSIS) members share a common interest in the field of occupational therapy education and include program directors, fieldwork educators, academic fieldwork coordinators, and faculty. The EDSIS has a Fieldwork Subsection for fieldwork educators and academic fieldwork coordinators, and a Faculty Subsection. The EDSIS strives to share current evidence-based teaching and learning tools and strategies in order to facilitate best practices in occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant education.

- Meet the EDSIS committee members at www.aota.org/EDSIS.
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Clinical reasoning is developed through students planning, directing, performing, and reflecting on client care (Cohn, 1989), and assists them with integrating therapeutic concepts and skills. Clinical reasoning can be developed through having discussions; processing personal feelings and/or values; establishing accurate and appropriate intervention plans based on evaluation results by integrating client priorities, context(s), theories, and evidence-based practice; and articulating a clear and logical rationale for the intervention process. Clinical reasoning skills can be evaluated by questioning what the student knows and evaluating his or her level of performance. Effective questions include *informational*, which refers to asking the student for specific information; *application*, which asks the student to apply knowledge to a specific situation; and *problem-solving*, which asks for principles and creative answers to new ideas (Crist & Scaffa, 2004).

Reflection promotes the application of newly learned skills to improve student outcomes. Reflection involves thinking in both retrospective and prospective ways (Cohn, Schell, & Blesedell Crepaue, 2010). *Retrospective reflection* involves processing the results of what happened and considering one's response to it. *Prospective reflection* identifies goals, and strategies for achieving those goals. Effective strategies to encourage student reflection include planning key questions in advance; phrasing questions clearly and specifically; adapting questions to accommodate the student's needs and level of understanding; avoiding answering the question; and allowing the student to question the educator. As the student responds, the educator can provide positive reinforcement, pose additional probing questions, ask for justification, clarify questions, elaborate, or re-direct the question to another student for additional perspectives.

Conclusion

Fieldwork educators are the primary resource in supporting practice through developing innovative and evidence-based approaches to intervention, implementing health care changes, and expanding client-centered approaches. We need to be leaders who demonstrate the ability to integrate the roles of practitioner and educator as we engage students in learning opportunities.

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