Using the Occupational Profile for Student-Centered Fieldwork Education

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Within the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process, 2nd Edition (Framework-II), an official document that describes what is important to the profession and the process for delivering services, there is considerable emphasis on using occupation-based interventions to help clients engage in meaningful occupations that benefit their physical health, well-being, and quality of life. Additionally, there is substantial attention paid to using an occupational profile during the evaluation process to gain an understanding of the client’s perspective and background. In creating a profile, it is essential to ask questions such as: “Who is the client? Why is the client seeking services? What occupations and activities are successful or are causing problems? What contexts and environments support or inhibit desired outcomes? What are the client’s priorities and targeted outcomes?” (p. 650).1

For occupational therapy practitioners, the Framework-II can guide not just daily clinical practice but successful fieldwork as well. Clinical education is an integral component of an occupational therapy student’s professional preparation, and it serves as a bridge between the classroom and the clinic. In clinical practice, the occupational profile is used to gain insight into the lives of our clients by finding out what is meaningful to them. This is an important step in the occupational therapy process to ensure a client-centered approach. As fieldwork educators, we can also use our occupational therapy expertise and incorporate this rapport-building process into the fieldwork education experience.

So, during your initial meeting with your student, or as part of your formal orientation process, consider using your understanding of occupational profiles to gain better insight into the life of your fieldwork student. Create a simple interview tool that can be used to understanding your student more personally and holistically, and to initiate the fieldwork educator–student relationship.

The following questions are examples of how to guide interviews to obtain occupational profiles of fieldwork students.

- What do the students perceive as their strengths and areas of need?
- What social roles do your students have?
- What are their daily routines, habits, and patterns of performance?
- What are their interests or leisure pursuits?
- Do they exhibit balance between work, school, and leisure?
- What motivates them?
- How do they best learn?
- What are their learning priorities?

One of the most important outcomes of the fieldwork education process is for the fieldwork student to cultivate and nurture his or her professional identity as a future occupational therapy practitioner. Dickerson defined the five essential role competencies of a fieldwork educator, based on AOTAs Standards for Continuing Competence. These five competencies consist of knowledge, critical reasoning, interpersonal skills, performance skills, and ethical reasoning. In the case of performance skills, for example, the fieldwork educator must “plan fieldwork experiences within his or her setting that will prepare ethical and competent practitioners” and “to develop fieldwork course objectives, course materials, and educational activities and experiences that promote optimal learning for students” (p. 650).2

The use of an occupational profile to initiate the fieldwork educator–student relationship provides an opportunity to discover the occupations, interests, motivations, and goals of your student, allowing you to be a student-centered fieldwork educator, ensuring a more meaningful learning experience, and assisting you in viewing your fieldwork student as an occupational being. Don’t confine your contribution and role as a fieldwork educator to merely supervising students. By using an occupational profile and encompassing a student-centered approach as a fieldwork educator, you will enhance the future of the occupational therapy profession by developing the readiness, experience, and preparation of our future practitioners.

References

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