Level II Fieldwork Success
A Cooperative Effort

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During Level II fieldwork, occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant students have the opportunity to develop and refine skills, attitudes, and behaviors to support performance in the occupational therapy practitioner role. How can the academic program, the fieldwork educator, and the student work together to promote Level II fieldwork success? A brief look at research directed toward student learning provides key insights.

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS
Providing a comprehensive orientation, clear guidelines, and specific expectations early in the fieldwork enables success. Measurable site-specific learning objectives, rather than general learning expectations, help students express confidence earlier in the fieldwork and generalize their competence after they have completed it (Foley, 2007; James & Musselman, 2006). Although it may be time consuming for the fieldwork site to develop these documents, collaborating with the academic program will make the task easier, and having clear expectations will save time for the fieldwork educator in measuring student performance during the midterm and final fieldwork evaluations. Students also benefit, because those who are aware of site expectations can more accurately appraise their abilities and take responsibility for their learning needs. This greater self-sufficiency is particularly important, as fieldwork educators have increasing expectations of student independent learning and less time to spend teaching skills (Vogel, Grice, Hill, & Mockly, 2004).

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MONITORING PERFORMANCE AND WORKLOAD
A realistic pace of student assignments and closely monitoring student performance sets the stage for student success. Active lab sessions early in the fieldwork help students to practice and verify expected skills before actively working with clients. Regularly scheduled performance reviews help the students and supervisors to be on the "same page" in regard to student abilities (James & Musselman, 2006). Conversely, fieldwork educators should avoid shielding students from the realities of practice. Recent graduates identified negotiating organizational policies, setting treatment priorities, managing caseloads, and supervising support workers as helpful preparation for practice realities (Doherty, Stagnitti, & Schoo, 2009). It is equally important for academic programs to closely monitor the volume of assignments they require during Level II fieldwork, as too many required academic assignments may interfere with students' focus on clients, creating more stress (Foley, 2007).
COPING STRATEGIES
Students who are able to ask for and use feedback on fieldwork are more likely to experience success, while those who have difficulty with constructive criticism are more likely to struggle (James & Musselman, 2006). Student self-confidence is further strengthened when students take initiative for their learning and approach the supervisor with problems and potential solutions, rather than waiting for the supervisor to identify problems.

Student coping strategies can also make a positive difference in a negative situation. No fieldwork situation is perfect, and students need to have the skills to cope with the inevitable negative situations that occur. Students would benefit from opportunities to examine the coping strategies they use during stressful situations while they are yet in the academic program. Social isolation, blaming, and negative self-talk when stressed are particularly ineffective, whereas effective coping strategies include reaching out to others (e.g., peers, the academic fieldwork coordinator, other employees) and self-reflection to gain a realistic perspective on the problem (Low, Cara, & Richardson, 2007). Reaching out to others can extend to relationships with other occupational therapy practitioners or professionals from other disciplines. Students thrive from multiple levels of mentoring and positive recognition from the treatment team (Davis, 2006; Foley, 2007).

EXCHANGING IDEAS
Fieldwork educators commonly cite opportunity for new learning as a benefit to working with students; this benefit is best realized when they both model and look for ways to help students apply fresh ideas to common therapy practices. Modeling is particularly important because the apprenticeship model is the primary supervision approach used by fieldwork educators (Foley, 2007; Vogel, Grice, Hill, & Moddy, 2004). Not surprisingly, students’ perception of what is important in practice is heavily influenced by their fieldwork educator. For example, if a fieldwork educator devalues or does not use theory or research evidence, the student is not likely to either (Hodggets et al., 2007; Stronge & Cahill, 2012).

Exchange of ideas between the academic program and the fieldwork site prior to student arrival can help to ensure that fieldwork educators are aware of the values and practices emphasized during academic learning and that academic educators and students are aware of the skills needed for everyday practice. Sharing textbooks and readings before and during the student experience is one method for encouraging idea exchange, but ongoing “give and take” between the student, the fieldwork site, and the academic program is an essential component of student success.

References

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