Creating a High-Quality Fieldwork Experience
What the Best Fieldwork Educators Do

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What makes a quality fieldwork learning experience? Generally, it’s a combination of planning, attention to detail, mindfulness about the interaction of context and personalities, and the flexibility to change as needed along the way. Several studies have explored the markers of quality supervision, which include a well-planned orientation, a sequenced structure of learning experiences, flexibility in adapting structure to fit student learning needs, attention to developing clinical reasoning, time set aside for providing constructive and supportive feedback (Kirke, Layton, & Sim, 2007; Koski, Simon, & Dooley, 2013; Richard, 2008; Rodger, Fitzgerald, Davila, Millar, & Allison, 2011), and consistency in student assessment.

A Well-Planned Orientation
A complete orientation to the fieldwork site is essential to start the fieldwork placement on a positive note (Koski et al., 2013). Specific expectations for student performance should be both written and discussed during the early weeks of the placement (Richard, 2008). Orientation should include not only an overview of the site and site-specific learning objectives, but also an orientation to the fieldwork educator’s teaching style, and an opportunity for students to discuss their learning styles. Providing students with a clear schedule, especially during the early weeks of the placement, helps them feel secure in their setting. Besides specific assignment of clients and other therapies to be observed, specific meeting times for supervision should be established. The American Occupational Therapy Association (2006) Student Evaluation of the Fieldwork Experience provides several critical aspects of a comprehensive orientation, and it can serve as a guide to orientation planning.

A Sequenced Structure of Learning Experiences
According to the accreditation standards, “Initially, supervision should be direct and then decrease to less direct supervision as appropriate for the setting, the severity of the client’s condition, and the ability of the student” (Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education, 2012). Setting up a 12-week schedule of learning activities helps the fieldwork educator plan for increased levels of student independence throughout the experience. Such a schedule might detail the type and number of clients assigned, and time set aside for direct instruction, in-services, and structured observation of the clients or of the supervisor. In the early days of the fieldwork placement, direct instruction and structured observation of clients are often used as teaching methods. Students benefit