



CAOT & ACOTUP Position Statement: Professional responsibility in fieldwork education in occupational therapy (2012)

It is the position of the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) and Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy University Programs (ACOTUP) that all occupational therapists have the professional responsibility to engage and support entry level occupational therapy fieldwork education where possible.

Recommendations for occupational therapists:

1. Occupational Therapists practicing in Canada contribute to fieldwork education of entry level occupational therapy students (for example: supervising, co-supervising, support/cover for occupational therapist who is supervising by redistributing caseload).
2. Occupational therapists offer at least one fieldwork placement a year, as appropriate.
3. Occupational therapists explore innovative methods to support entry level student education.

Commitments from occupational therapy organizations:

CAOT recognizes completion of fieldwork is an integral component of occupational therapy education. CAOT accreditation standards require completion of 1000 hours of fieldwork. CAOT therefore encourages occupational therapists to support fieldwork through supervision of occupational therapy students in fieldwork placements.

ACOTUP will provide occupational therapists with continuing education opportunities to acquire, maintain and refine requisite knowledge and skills to fulfill their role as fieldwork educators.

Background

The CAOT Profile of Practice of Occupational Therapists in Canada (2012) identifies supporting fieldwork education as one of the key competencies within the occupational therapist's role of practice manager. It is imperative for the future of the occupational therapy profession that

occupational therapists embrace the role of preceptor and commit to fieldwork education for student occupational therapists.

Occupational therapy placements provide an ideal opportunity for students to learn skills and apply theories in practice, but also for professionals to use some of the many enablement skills, one of which is 'to educate' (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007). Fieldwork placements provide structured learning experiences which allow students to develop professional behaviour, professional identity and competence to practice in the future (Mason & Bull, 2006). Likewise, educating, coaching and mentoring are key enabling skills which make occupational therapists competent role models and supervisors for students (CAOT, 1997; 2002).

Nevertheless, there are also some challenges within the profession to offering fieldwork placements. For example, as academic enrolments increase, greater demands are placed on practitioners and fieldwork placements for students have become more limited in number and more difficult to secure (Thomas et al., 2007). Lack of physical space, workload pressures, lack of time and staffing issues (e.g. turnovers, part-time and precarious employment) are additional barriers to therapists offering student placements (Thomas et al., 2007). With these barriers, the benefits in offering fieldwork placements are often overlooked. For example, in a 2007 study conducted by Thomas et al., supervisors identified enhancement of clinical reasoning and time management skills, as well as increasing the diversity in the workplace and promoting the exposure of their services to the university and community as benefits to hosting fieldwork placement students. In this study, occupational therapists also noted that offering fieldwork placements made graduate recruitment more efficient as student capabilities and work characteristics can be assessed during fieldwork (Thomas et al., 2007). These benefits counter the perceptions of decreased productivity when offering placements decreases the time and cost needed to train new hires and improves employee retention rates (Thomas et al., 2007). It is hoped that by understanding the benefits of offering fieldwork placements occupational therapists will assume this responsibility with the outcome being increased preceptor value and meaning. In addition, identifying the difficulties in obtaining placements will assist in the process of recommendations and solutions to this issue.

Professional Responsibility

According to the CAOT Code of Ethics, it is the "member's responsibility to the profession and the professional organization to do everything within their means to provide for growth and development of occupational therapy" (CAOT, 1996, p. 2). This can include developing programs for clients or developing educational programs for occupational therapy fieldwork students (CAOT, 1997; 2002). In addition to the professional responsibility, educating future occupational therapists and offering fieldwork experiences clearly contribute to the growth and development of the occupational therapy profession. This will ensure that the next generation of occupational therapists is prepared upon graduation and ensures that the profession of occupational therapy will continue to prosper (Thomas et al., 2007).

Placement models

It is important to understand the purpose of fieldwork and how essential it is in occupational therapy education. To continue the promotion and development of the profession, it is the duty of current occupational therapists to take on the role of fieldwork educator in leading and shaping the future of this profession (Jung & Tryssenaar, 1998). Occupational therapists agree to adhere to their code of ethics including the professional responsibility to provide support for students through appropriate practice education opportunities.

Various fieldwork models have been well documented in the literature (Hummel, Higgs & Mulholland, 2010; Baldry Currans, 2003; DeClute & Ladyshevsky, 1993). For example, the traditional apprenticeship model of one (1) therapist: one (1) student, and newer models including two (2) therapists: one (1) student, two (2) students: one (1) therapist or 'group' and 'role' emerging models. It is recognized that these models all provide a deeper understanding of students' transition from classroom to practice setting (Bonello, 2001). The ability to offer a variety of methods of teaching to fit with everyone's preferences or context will broaden the student experience and provide flexibility to the occupational therapists providing student education.

Glossary of Terms

Fieldwork Education: Refers to the practical integration and application of knowledge, skills and attitudes learned at university, to professional Occupational Therapy practice in the real world (Canadian Guidelines for Fieldwork Education in Occupational Therapy (CGFEOT), 2011)

Fieldwork Placement: Refers to the course component of the placement which is usually undertaken in a facility external to the University. Placements are facilitated with the provision of professional support, supervision, guidance, feedback and evaluation by an Occupational Therapist (CGFEOT, 2011)

Fieldwork Educator: A qualified Occupational Therapist or Occupational Therapy Educator with at least one year's experience (World Federation of Occupational Therapists, 2002)

Occupational therapy: The art and science of enabling engagement in everyday living through occupation; enables people to perform the occupations that foster health and well-being; enable a just and inclusive society so that all people may participate to their potential in the daily occupations in life (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007).

Role Emerging: Student placements in settings where there is no established occupational therapy service (Bossers, 1997)

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Resources

Fieldwork models:

http://umanitoba.ca/faculties/medicine/units/medrehab/ot/fwk_models.html

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