

Framework for Fieldwork

Making the Most of Student–Educator Collaboration

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As university programs swell with occupational therapy students, a new challenge emerges: The need for fieldwork educators (FWE) is at an all-time high.¹ At Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital for Rehabilitation (CCCHR), Level II fieldwork students frequent the facility during summer and fall months. Hosting fieldwork students has been beneficial for all involved parties: Students gain clinical skills in a challenging pediatric environment, fieldwork educators earn continuing education units (CEUs) necessary for licensure, and the student contributes fresh ideas to the facility. This article, written in collaboration between a Level II fieldwork student and her fieldwork educator, outlines the teaching approach used at CCCHR, with the aim of providing fieldwork educators with ideas for successfully organizing the fieldwork experience.

A quality student placement is one in which learning is optimal and individualized to meet students' needs.¹ A recent study completed in Australia identified a welcoming atmosphere, detailed orientation, clear expectations, graded learning experiences, and quality modeling as key factors in a successful fieldwork experience.² At CCCHR, these factors are addressed with pre-fieldwork recommendations

Ideas from the Cleveland Clinic Children's Hospital for Rehabilitation for successfully organizing the occupational therapy fieldwork experience

for preparation, a 12-week student schedule with graded learning opportunities, structured journaling, and project/in-service completion that is research based and provides opportunity to reflect on what is learned during the fieldwork experience.

PRE-FIELDWORK PREPARATION

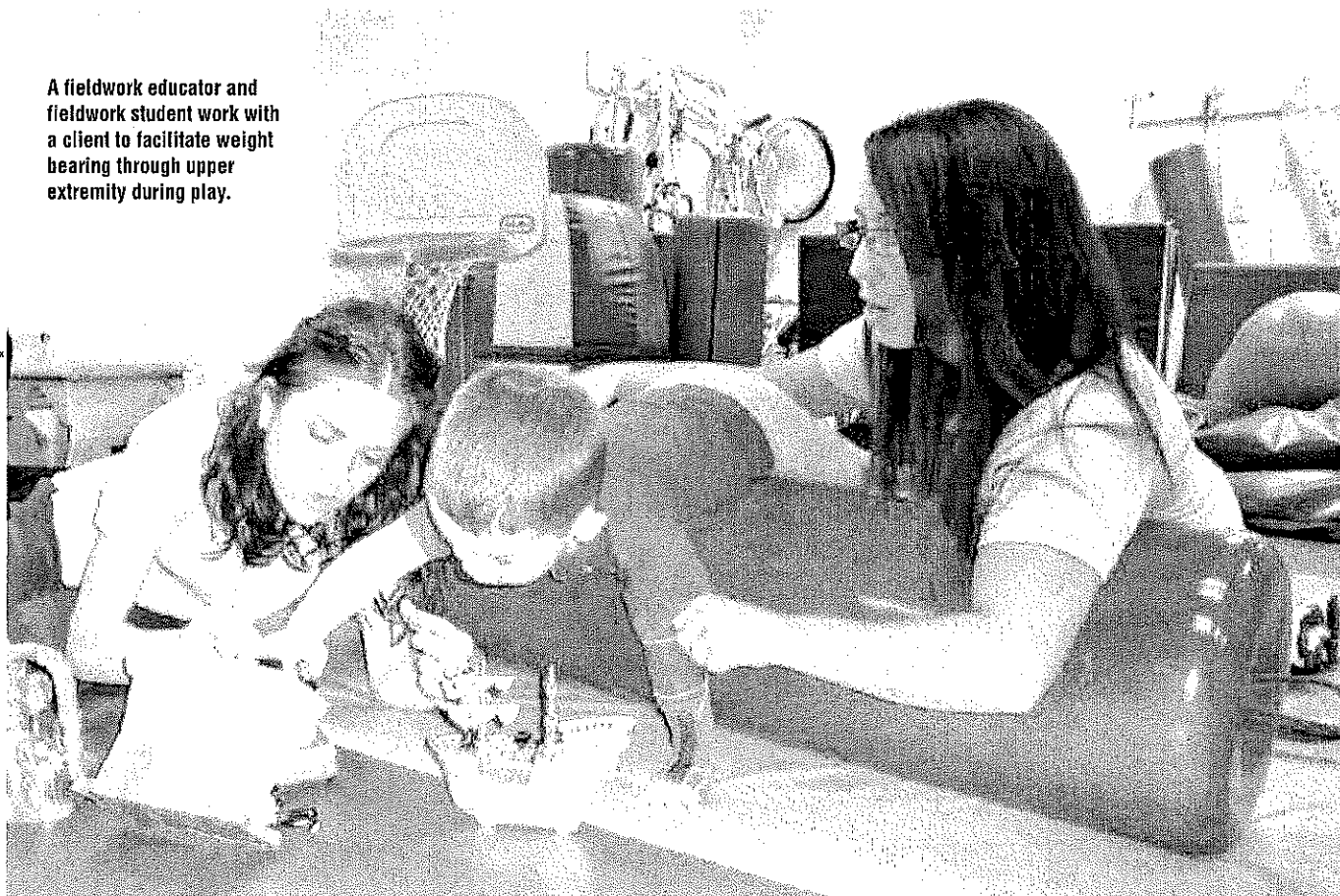
Research shows that students who considered pre-fieldwork preparation to be beneficial tended to have a higher degree of satisfaction with their fieldwork experience.³ Fieldwork educators indicate that they have limited time to re-teach basic skills due to the demands of clinical practice, and therefore greatly appreciate a student who reviews these concepts prior to beginning the fieldwork experience. Students, in consultation with their academic advisors, should review basic skills including manual muscle testing; range of motion; subjective, objective, assessment, and plan (SOAP) notes; and medical terminology. They should also have a general understanding of occupation and activities of daily living.⁴ This prior level of knowledge

is important because it is necessary in order for new skills to be learned, implemented, and refined.⁵

In addition, the fieldwork educator can facilitate student preparedness with pre-fieldwork communication. At CCCHR, the student receives a letter at least 1 month prior to arrival indicating more advanced materials for review. These include a list of frequently treated conditions, recommended readings specific to the areas of practice to be covered during the experience, and a list of assessment tools used at the facility. Recommended readings and review items serve as a beginning point for conversations between the fieldwork educator and student.

At some point prior to beginning the fieldwork, it is also important that the student and fieldwork educator exchange general knowledge of one another in preparation for future interactions. Important details that a fieldwork educator should gather about the student include settings of previous fieldwork experiences, preferred learning and communication styles, and long-term clinical interests. The stu-

A fieldwork educator and fieldwork student work with a client to facilitate weight bearing through upper extremity during play.



dent will be interested in knowing the fieldwork educator's number of years in practice and areas of expertise. AOTA offers a Fieldwork Data Form and Personal Data Sheet that can be helpful in gathering and exchanging this information between the student and fieldwork educator (www.aota.org).

ELEMENTS OF THE 12-WEEK SCHEDULE

Developing and implementing a 12-week schedule is another opportunity to outline clear expectations for the student. Of course, the original plan can be altered to meet the individual needs of the fieldwork educator and the student as time passes. The CCCHR Level II fieldwork schedule incorporates several important principles: a checklist for orientation, a list of clinical practices and modalities (e.g., casting, splinting, taping) that the student should be exposed to during the experience, graded exposure and expectations for documentation, and recommendations for a workload that increases in both number of clients and level of difficulty over time.

Checklist for orientation. Orientation should be thorough, and for larger facilities may take 1 to 2 days to complete. The fieldwork educator should introduce the student to clinical staff, including other occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, students, physical therapists, speech therapists, managers, and rehab assistants/techs. Special attention should be given to the individuals with whom the student will be in contact most often. The fieldwork educator should provide a tour of the facility, detailing locations for treatment materials, evaluation materials, and available treatment spaces. Easily overlooked, but perhaps most important, the fieldwork educator should show the student the locations of restrooms and staff lounges, point out spaces for storing materials and personal belongings, and explain the lunch procedure. Chiang, Pang, Li, Shih, and Su found that 49.3% of fieldwork students surveyed were not sure of or not satisfied with personal space provided at fieldwork sites, with the greatest percentage of these students completing fieldwork in the

hospital setting.³ To improve the level of satisfaction and student perceptions of the therapy department, all students should be granted some space, regardless of how small, that they can call their own during the 12-week experience. Students who receive personal space in an office shared by other occupational therapy practitioners will also benefit from informal learning opportunities. Community office space enables collaboration and interactions with practitioners that further promotes clinical growth.

Clinical practices and modalities. The fieldwork educator is responsible for exposing the student to the intervention process, including evaluating, treating, and discharging the clients. At CCCHR, daily exposure to sensory integrative approaches, self-care development, bilateral upper extremity strengthening, and neurodevelopmental techniques is typical. Treatment strategies—including casting, splinting, constraint-induced therapy, and Kinesio taping—occur at varying rates, depending on the needs of current clients. Although the student's workload

may not warrant these less common modalities, it is expected that the fieldwork educator expose the student to these forms of practice. This can be done through hands-on demonstration with the student, or by permitting the student to spend time observing other therapists when they are using these techniques. A checklist of these and similar items is placed at the beginning of the 12-week schedule. Although the student will not gain independence performing these somewhat advanced techniques, the ability to observe them promotes a better understanding of total practice and the necessity for ongoing continuing education.

Graded exposure to documentation.

The 12-week schedule at CCCHR begins with SOAP notes, which promote organized note taking for the student, leaving less room for errors and omissions. Students begin documentation during their first or second days of fieldwork, learning to document the intervention strategies and client response for sessions modeled by the fieldwork educator. The fieldwork educator encourages the student to write notes detailing the level of assistance provided by the treating fieldwork educator, the client's physical and emotional response to treatment, adaptive responses, and client position during targeted occupations. Initial review of student documentation allows the fieldwork educator to evaluate the student's clinical reasoning skills and level of knowledge retained from previous course work. In 2010, Holmes et al. indicated that students who completed 1,000 hours of fieldwork (the standard established by the World Federation of Occupational Therapists) frequently still fell below competence in practice knowledge, clinical reasoning, and facilitating change, as measured by the Competency Based Fieldwork Evaluation Scale.⁵ Therefore, it is important to introduce, model, and review these skills early in the fieldwork experience.

During the first week, focus is placed solely on daily intervention notes. Once the student becomes efficient with SOAP note documentation, the transition to narrative documentation is made if desired. The skills developed during the SOAP note process allow for greater clarity and

thoroughness in narrative documentation. During the second and consecutive weeks, the student is introduced to progress summaries, written home exercise programs, evaluations, and discharge summaries. Sufficient time is allowed for skill mastery in each category prior to introducing a new documentation domain.

mentation for those clients. A sustained workload is most beneficial in settings requiring long-term care—skilled nursing facilities, outpatient facilities, and inpatient rehabilitation hospitals. This is not a practical approach to be used in acute care settings, where clients are quickly discharged.



A fieldwork student assists a client with fine motor activity to encourage bilateral coordination.

Workload recommendations. The 12-week schedule provides graded expectations for developing workloads. The schedule provides ample time for observation and hands-on learning. Depending on the treatment setting and complexity of the client population, the student begins planning and leading treatment sessions in the first or second weeks of placement. The workload can further be graded by building the student's workload with the least complicated clients initially and more complicated clients later in the fieldwork experience. Students also benefit from sustained workloads, which can be defined as maintaining the same clients over time, with occasional gaps in workload growth. Students completing their outpatient fieldworks at CCCHR maintain a workload, without adding new clients, in weeks 6, 8, and 10 to 12. This provides the student with additional time to focus on current clients, equipment requests, and docu-

STRUCTURED JOURNALING

Journaling is a critical aspect of a successful fieldwork at CCCHR. A template is used for a structured one-page journal entry that the student completes each week. Each journal entry consists of a clinical observation reflecting a specific client or treatment session. Specific skills, such as formulating a detailed description of a client's body mechanics, analyzing a task, and creating a relevant treatment note, can be addressed in this section of the journal template.

Other sections of the journal include things the student did well, things the student would like to improve, and methods to improve these skills. The journal template at CCCHR also includes a space to record the number of clients on the student's workload, a 1 to 5 scale (very easy to very difficult) for how the student regards the current workload, and a similar scale for how the student is generally feeling

(bored to overwhelmed). The journal is mainly completed by the student, but each entry does reserve a section for fieldwork educator comments. In a study done in 2011, Rodger, Fitzgerald, Davila, Miller, and Allison stated that the single most important part of students' learning during their placement was the timely feedback given by



A fieldwork student promotes tripod grasp and wrist extension while using window chalk with a client.

their fieldwork educator.² During the journaling process, both constructive criticism and strengths are shared with the student. This is also a place for the fieldwork educator to establish goals for the student in upcoming weeks that the 12-week fieldwork schedule may not illustrate (such as improving caregiver interactions).

The structured journaling process is used to document both strengths and weaknesses. This gives the student opportunity to track progression throughout the 12 weeks, and also to review previous weeks and self-reflect when necessary. Successful Level II fieldwork placements are focused on an overall flourishing learning experience. Self-reflection allows a student to self-identify strengths and weaknesses and to focus on specific skill acquisition throughout the learning process.⁶ Positive self-reflection pro-

motes an overall feeling of accomplishment and personal growth.

STUDENT IN-SERVICE AND PROJECT
Students at CCCHR complete an in-service presentation and project prior to completing fieldwork. The in-service presentation allows the student to reflect on what he or she learned during the fieldwork experience. The student can choose a topic that occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants within the department want to learn more about or simply one that the student finds interesting. In-service topics may include client case studies, recent medical developments, emerging treatment techniques, or demonstrations of treatment equipment. Most importantly, because evidence-based practice is what provides meaning to our work as practitioners, the in-service should reference research and include an accurate bibliography.

Project completion is an excellent approach to developing student creativity. The student should choose a project that will fulfill a facility need. Ideas for projects that have benefitted our facility include fabricating low-tech equipment (e.g., buttoning boards, fine motor games), implementing facility blogs or Web sites, and developing family resource handouts. The possibilities are endless.

These assignments allow the student and facility to grow. The therapy department gains new knowledge, while the student becomes an overall contributor to the therapy team.

OTHER WAYS TO MAKE FIELDWORK SUCCESSFUL

There are many other approaches to developing successful fieldwork education programs. A fieldwork educator can implement all or some of the following strategies to make the fieldwork experience unique. The fieldwork educator may also want to review the options on this list with the student to determine what is attainable, as a collaborative approach to planning the 12-week experience.

Attend a continuing education course. Practitioners are required to constantly learn new techniques and keep up to date with emerging practice areas,

and therefore, they should model advanced learning for their students. Fieldwork educators and fieldwork sites should require students to attend conferences or continuing education courses if offered by the facility during the student's 12-week placement. Attendance at a course provides the student an opportunity to learn more in-depth material about a specific area of practice, and a better understanding of requirements to retain licensure and registration.

Promote interactions with other students. Interaction among fieldwork students in occupational therapy and other disciplines is an important contributor to a successful fieldwork experience. It establishes a peer outlet, in which successes and failures can be shared. Students are likely to feel equal to their peers, as compared with inferior to licensed practitioners, and therefore may be more inclined to exchange ideas and collaborate to solve problems.

Promote interactions with other occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants. The fieldwork educator should encourage the student to spend time observing other staff practitioners. This exposes the student to a variety of personalities and intervention approaches. When treating, the student will develop autonomy by imitating the skills acquired from several role models and develop a unique treatment style.

Determine learning styles. A study by Jensen and Daniel found that a student's learning and communication styles are two very important factors affecting the fieldwork experience.⁷ Knowledge of these factors permits the fieldwork educator to present material in a way that best accommodates the student, based on whether the student is a visual or hands-on learner, and to know how the student may react to and prefer to receive feedback. Preferred learning and communication styles can be determined through informal conversation, or by using a structured learning inventory.

involve a third party. Third-party involvement can benefit both the student and the fieldwork educator. At CCCHR, a fieldwork coordinator assigns and supervises fieldwork educators and students. During the

12-week placement, this coordinator serves as third-party support, monitoring the fieldwork experience by meeting regularly with both parties. If a serious problem were to arise, the fieldwork educator and/or student would be able to report the concern to the coordinator and the coordinator would then mediate as necessary. The third-party participant should emphasize an "open-door" policy for the student. This person should also have previous experience as an educator in order to provide guidance when necessary to the fieldwork educator.

Complete the AOTA Fieldwork Educator Certificate Program. Prior to hosting a Level II student, attend the AOTA-sponsored Fieldwork Educator Certificate Program (www.aota.org). Course attendees receive a certificate and 15 contact hours toward licensure renewal. Course objectives include: obtain a deeper understanding for the fieldwork educator role, integrate learning theories and supervisory models, and increase skills to provide high-quality educational opportunities.

Maintain communication. Communication between the student's university and the fieldwork placement site throughout the entire fieldwork process is crucial for program success. In 2011, Hanson recommended beginning consistent communication with the academic program within the second week of placement and maintaining open communication throughout the fieldwork experience.⁸ Open communication further enhances the experience for the academic program and the fieldwork site. The academic program becomes increasingly familiar with the demands of the fieldwork site, as well as the strengths and weaknesses exhibited by their own students. The fieldwork site grows increasingly knowledgeable of academic standards and university expectations. The student significantly benefits from this interaction as well. Academic advisors from the student's university can assist the fieldwork educator in handling problematic student situations. The student will likely feel more comfortable discussing problems with a familiar advisor from the university.



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Fieldwork Educator Resources
www.aota.org

Clinical Supervision in Occupational Therapy: A Guide for Fieldwork and Practice
By D. M. Costa, 2007. Bethesda, MD: AOTA Press. (\$39 for members, \$55 for nonmembers. To order, call toll free 877-404-AOTA or shop online at <http://store.aota.org/view/?SKU=1238>. Order #1238. Promo code MI)

Mentoring Leaders: The Power of Storytelling for Building Leadership in Health Care and Education
By E. Gilfoyle, A. Grady, & C. Nelson, 2011. Bethesda, MD: AOTA Press. (\$44 for members, \$62.50 for nonmembers. To order, call toll free 877-404-AOTA or shop online at <http://store.aota.org/view/?SKU=1255>. Order #1255. Promo code MI)

Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Survival Guide: A Student Planner, 2nd Edition
By B. Napier, 2010. Bethesda, MD: AOTA Press. (\$39 for members, \$55 for nonmembers. To order, call toll free 877-404-AOTA or shop online at <http://store.aota.org/view/?SKU=1253>. Order #1253. Promo code MI)

CONCLUSION

Academic programs continue to grow, requiring an increased number of students to complete Level I and Level II placements. There are many ways to build and structure the fieldworks as an educator. The strategies outlined in this article, used together or separately, can help provide a foundation for successful fieldwork experiences. n

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