

Fieldwork Educator Readiness

Donna M. Costa

The decision to become a fieldwork educator is often made suddenly; the occupational therapist or occupational therapy assistant is asked by his or her supervisor to accept a new student. How do you go about determining whether you are ready to begin supervising? Most occupational therapy practitioners are aware of the requirement that a fieldwork educator has to have at least 1 year of experience, but there is more to it than that. The Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE[®]) establishes standards that govern educational programs for occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants. The newest set of Standards¹ go into effect on January 1, 2008, and require that students be supervised by an occupational therapist or occupational therapy assistant who has "a minimum of 1 year of practice experience subsequent to initial certification, *and is adequately prepared to serve as a fieldwork educator [italics added]*" (pp. 42-43).¹ How do you gauge whether you are adequately prepared to supervise?

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) has two excellent resources available to you. The first is *Role Competencies for a Fieldwork Educator*² (available at www.aota.org; click on Educators-Researchers, Educator Resources, Commission on Education, Official COE Documents) based on the *Standards for Continuing Competence*.³ There are five standards of role competence for fieldwork educators:

- **Knowledge**—Be able to structure fieldwork experiences to facilitate students' professional development; develop learning activities and assignments; recognize different learning styles and design student learning based on these

Knowledge
Supervision
Critical Reasoning
Interpersonal Skills
Professional Practice

Ethical Reasoning
Performance Skills
Education
Evaluation
Administration

- **Critical Reasoning**—Be able to evaluate and share the literature on fieldwork; integrate and apply theory, literature, and research into practice; understand the curriculum design of the school sending the student; evaluate the interpersonal dynamics between the student and other personnel at the fieldwork site; and resolve any conflicts that may arise.
- **Interpersonal Skills**—Be able to demonstrate a positive image of fieldwork and of practice and supervision; establish and maintain an effective supervisory relationship with students that maximizes their learning; resolve any interpersonal conflicts that may develop; demonstrate multicultural competence; and help students identify their strengths and areas for

improvement in a way that maximizes their professional growth.

- **Performance Skills**—Be able to plan fieldwork experiences that will develop competent, entry-level practitioners; develop learning objectives, assignments, and learning activities; evaluate students' performance; and establish and maintain accurate records that document outcomes of student learning.
- **Ethical Reasoning**—Be able to serve as a role model and client advocate for students; resolve fieldwork issues in an ethical manner.

The other AOTA resource that fieldwork educators should take advantage of is the *Self-Assessment Tool for Fieldwork Educator Competency*⁴ (available at www.aota.org; click on Educators-Researchers, Educator Resources, Fieldwork Education, Resources for Fieldwork Supervisors and AFWC). This tool can help occupational therapy practitioners to

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effort and to developing a special venue and program for our senior members that will be an integral part of the 2008 AOTA Conference & Expo in Long Beach. ■

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determine their areas of strengths and where more learning is needed. The five competency areas in this self-assessment are:

- **Professional Practice**—This section assesses the occupational therapy practitioner's proficiency in practice; one cannot be an effective fieldwork educator without competence in the particular area of practice.
- **Education**—The items in this area focus on those skills essential for effective supervision of fieldwork students. These skills include being able to evaluate each student's learning needs, design a progression of learning experiences, facilitate student-centered learning, use several different teaching strategies, work with students of different abilities and with those who have disabilities, promote clinical reasoning, and engage in learning to advance professional development and knowledge of fieldwork education.
- **Supervision**—The items in this area relate to the theory and practice of clinical supervision of fieldwork students. The fieldwork educator must be able to provide students with performance expectations, collaborate with students in establishing learning objectives and activities, give students feedback and make suggestions for improvement throughout their fieldwork experience, be an effective communicator who is able to resolve conflict and get students to open up, use a variety of supervisory strategies, serve as a role model for students, and collaborate with the student and academic fieldwork coordinator if the student experiences difficulty.
- **Evaluation**—The competencies in this section focus on the fieldwork educator's ability to use various tools to measure the student's performance and to explain them to the student. The fieldwork educator also needs to be able to assist the student to self-reflect and self-evaluate. Documentation is a critical component of this section to ensure that the student's legal and ethical rights are protected.
- **Administration**—The final section addresses the fieldwork educator's ability to complete all documentation in a timely manner, provide students

with an orientation to the fieldwork site, and organize all aspects of the fieldwork experience. Competencies include creating a fieldwork manual, developing site-specific behavioral objectives, and ensuring compliance with ACOTE Standards and legal statutes.

After the fieldwork educator has completed the above self-assessment, he or she needs to develop a Professional Development Plan, outlining goals for learning along with time frames. The plan should include self-study, attendance at workshops, enrollment in academic courses, independent reading, peer review, finding a mentor, and consultation or supervision. A growing number of books and articles are being published on clinical supervision and student learning. The competency of fieldwork educators helps to ensure successful fieldwork experiences for students and supervisors, leading to a new generation of competent, entry-level practitioners. ■

References

1. Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education. (2007). *Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE®) standards and interpretive guidelines*. Retrieved September 12, 2007, from <http://www.aota.org/Educate/Accredit/StandardsReview/40601.aspx>
2. American Occupational Therapy Association. (2005). Role competencies for a fieldwork educator. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 60, 650-651.
3. American Occupational Therapy Association. (2005). Standards for continuing competence. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 59, 661-662.
4. American Occupational Therapy Association. (1998). *Self-assessment tool for fieldwork educator competency*. Retrieved September 12, 2007, from <http://www.aota.org/Educate/EdRes/Fieldwork/Supervisor/Forms/38251.aspx>

Additional Resources

Clinical Supervision in Occupational Therapy: A Guide for Fieldwork and Practice
By D. Costa, 2007. Bethesda, MD: AOTA Press.

The Essential Guide to Occupational Therapy Fieldwork Education: Resources for Today's Educators and Practitioners
By D. Costa, 2004. Bethesda, MD: AOTA Press.

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