

From OT Student to OT



Students are always nervous as they enter fieldwork. They must take on clients for the first time and work within a new organization alongside other professionals. Some panicky questions that arise could be: *What if I drop a patient during a transfer? What if I can't find the child's classroom? Can I do the evaluation correctly?*

All good questions, but more important questions are often omitted: *How do you learn the ropes in a new organization? What is the protocol for asking for help if you don't understand something? Do you look and act the part of a confident professional? Can you manage conflict? Will colleagues see you as an equal? Will you be asked to collaborate on issues?*

These kinds of questions are not clinical in nature, but more interpersonal in nature. These *soft skills* are referred to as social and emotional intelligence. If people can hone these skills, and use their social and emotional intelligence in their daily routines, they will be more liked, and more easily embraced and promoted in the workplace.

Flexibility, good communication, professional behaviors and self-awareness are essential skills that are as important as clinical skills. As owners of a staffing agency that places both new grads and experienced clinicians, Lisa and Marilyn have learned that successful job candidates must possess these soft skills. "Yes, you need to know how to administer an evaluation and how to write a treatment plan", states Marilyn, "but if you can communicate well and are aware of how your emotions impact your performance, you will be more

effective than the therapist who has excellent clinical skills but cannot get along with colleagues".

Everyone can benefit from honing their social and emotional intelligence skills. Bradberry and Greaves (2009) have identified four areas that make up social and emotional intelligence: *self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management*. Frequently in the media and the basis for many self-help books, these topics can and should be incorporated into occupational therapy educational programs, and internalized by both novice and experienced OT practitioners to maximize success on fieldwork and in future careers.

Some strategies are: to know what pushes your buttons from other people, keep a journal about your emotions, stop and ask yourself why you do the things you do. What are the emotions that you use in different situations? When you are nervous do you giggle? Are you sullen? Are you overzealous? These emotions can be counterproductive to how you want to be perceived, if they are taken as inappropriate or offensive, or ineffective.

Another aspect in building emotional intelligence is self-management. This is your ability to use your awareness of your emotions to actively choose what you say and do. Examples for developing these skills, are counting to ten before you react, create an emotion vs. reaction list (so that you can separate what is emotion versus the reality of the situation), smile more often, and learn a lesson from every encounter so that you approach everyone as though they have something valuable to teach you. This is a way to remain flexible, open minded and calm during a stressful situation.

The third aspect of emotional intelligence is social awareness. This is a skill that is used to recognize and understand the moods of other individuals. This is also your ability to appreciate others emotions as you interact with them. To build these skills involves observing others. Looking at their facial expressions, their tone of voice, what their emotions are revealing.... Body language used.. etc.

Examples of the strategies to build social awareness are to greet people by name, focus on people you are interacting with, not multitasking, listen attentively, know the culture and rituals of the person you are interacting with... There are many more examples, but these show the importance of

communicating effectively and how crucial it is to understand what others are really feeling so that you are in tune with them, and can respond in the best emotional intelligent way.

The last aspect is relationship management, which is obviously a vital skill needed for both personal and work place relationships. In order to nurture and keep relationships growing we need to nourish and respect the relationships. In the workplace environment we will all have relationships with colleagues, families, and clients. Some effective strategies to strengthen your relationship management skills, are... be open and curious about others... ask them questions about themselves that shows you have an interest in who they are... use your manners. Saying please, thank you, and I am sorry, can go a long way in respecting others.

Another example of building relationships and preserving them are acknowledging the other persons emotions. If you notice a coworker is upset or anxious, it is best to say, I notice you are upset, is there anything I can do? Most people would rather run away than listen to someone else complain and cry about an incident.... But if you are aware of a coworkers distress and are interested in lending an ear this act of caring will go a long way in keeping the work relationship in good shape.

These four areas that are presented here, along with examples of strategies to develop skills in these areas should be a focus for everyone in society. But for the purpose of the audience that will read this article, I am hoping to peak the interest of all clinicians in New York and the soon to be graduating students, of the importance of having social and emotional intelligence for success in their occupational therapy careers.

Reference: Bradberry, T. & Greaves, J. (2009). *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*. San Diego, CA: TalentSmart.

Lisa Davis, Therapeutic Resources (co-owner with Marilyn Rosee) and Co-authors of the book "Occupational Therapy Student to Clinician: Making the Transition" in press.

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Ask Pearl

Q: Dear Pearl, How many hours does AOTA require for Level II fieldwork for both OTA and OT students? Does AOTA still allow 1 absence from fieldwork Level II for each month? I am getting mixed

information from my colleagues.....dazed and confused

Dear dazed and confused:

First of all, ACOTE [The Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education] is responsible for all standards related to fieldwork. ACOTE is an independent

entity within AOTA. There are 19 standards related to fieldwork education for all OT/OTA students. The standards are reviewed every 5 years and the current version took effect on July 31, 2013. Standard C.1.13 states that a minimum of 24 weeks of fieldwork is required for entry level doctoral and master's students while 16 weeks for an associate level student are required. This change is in response to the ever changing practice environment wherein there is no longer a "typical work week".

Adding to your confusion is the fieldwork evaluation form which has a space to record the number of hours. This form was created in 1998, when the standards did require a minimum number of hours. Now, the educational programs are required to track WEEKS, so the start and end dates for the level II experience must be documented. It is the schools responsibility to make sure each student in their program complete the minimum number of weeks set forth by the standards.

In terms of absences, the ACOTE standards make no mention of this. This would fall under the purview of the educational program. At the last MOTEC meeting, all schools present identified that they tell their students that there is no sanctioned time off during the Level II fieldwork. If a student is out sick or misses a day for other reasons, it is the clinical supervisor's decision regarding making up any time missed. It is important to communicate with the fieldwork coordinator regarding any missed time as some schools may have specific policies regarding this.

To access the ACOTE standards: <http://www.aota.org/-/media/Corporate/Files/EducationCareers/Accredit/Draft-Standards/2011-Standards-and-Interpretive-Guide-August-2013.pdf>

Any questions regarding ACOTE standards, contact jamie.geraci@stonybrook.edu

Hope this was helpful, Pearl

*Are you looking to establish a level II fieldwork program? Change up your weekly/monthly student assignments? Establish objectives for your fieldwork program? Develop a fieldwork manual for your facility? MOTEC is here as a resource with its newly created **OUTREACH** Committee. See below our contact info.*

MOTEC Mission

To serve as a resource for fieldwork education allowing for collaboration between fieldwork educators and academic fieldwork coordinators. To promote a supportive network fostering excellence in fieldwork education and helping students transition to competent entry level practitioners ready to meet the occupational needs of society.

MOTEC PHILOSOPHY IS TO:

- Promote quality fieldwork education
- Encourage collaboration between academic programs and fieldwork education sites
- Exchange concerns, ideas and resources between academic and fieldwork educators
- Ensure that fieldwork education supports current and emerging practice areas
- Encourage students to promote occupation centered intervention and evidence based practice in the fieldwork settings
- Encourage students and fieldwork educators to engage in science driven, evidence based practice to support reimbursement of occupational therapy services

One event designed just for you



MOTEC's Annual Clinical Council Day

Date: Wednesday May 7th, 2014
Location: Touro's Manhattan Campus on West 23rd Street.
Topic: Ethics in the High Tech Age: Social Media, Technology, Professional Boundaries & Other Hot Topics

Deborah Yarett Slater, MS, OT/L, FAOTA
 Ethics Program Manager & Governance Liaison
 American Occupational Therapy Association

Earn 4 contact hours equal to 4 Professional Development Units as per NBCOT guidelines.

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