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Lead Your Own Learning

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Issues in Fieldwork

This is the first column in a three-part series that will discuss how students can empower themselves in level-II fieldwork and begin practice ahead of the game.

Fieldwork education is an active, student-centered learning process. As an adult learner, you come to your fieldwork education site anticipating a beneficial learning experience that has been created collaboratively between your educational program and the site. Before you even can initiate your first contact with your newly assigned fieldwork placement, you acknowledge that the major goals for your fieldwork experience already have been negotiated between your fieldwork coordinator and your future fieldwork educator. Your fieldwork educator has developed learning objectives and has a series of practice activities for you to move you from student to entry-level occupational therapy practitioner by the end of your level II placement. The missing ingredient is you.

So take the lead by jumping into the fieldwork planning process as a fellow collaborator, an essential team member with them to ensure your own goals and desired learning outcomes.

Fieldwork education is all about you. This is solely a student-centered learning experience where your career aspirations will be challenged, nourished and validated. Don't accept the role of passive recipient. You are stepping up to the plate as an active member of the fieldwork education team. Regardless of how you were matched to your fieldwork site, you are expected to consider your individual professional development goals and outcomes from fieldwork related to your career aspirations.

Being a professional does not mean passive acceptance of another's learning plan. Being professional is having personal learning objectives for your level-II fieldwork experience and integrating them successfully into that experience. This will be the last time that your professional development is the primary goal.

As an active, self-directed fieldwork student, reflect on two questions as you accept this important role:

- What is my future vision and mission as an occupational therapy practitioner?
- How can I ensure that my fieldwork experiences can forward me toward realizing that vision?

You know about the AOTA Centennial Vision, and likely your educational program has one as well. Identify your own personal vision! Let your vision drive your passion. Bring that to the table during fieldwork.

Fieldwork is about convenience, comfort, vacation, housing and getting it over - not!

Instead, use the guiding questions above to create your request for fieldwork placement. Even better yet, share your reflective answers to the above two questions with your fieldwork coordinator, and invite this individual to join your personal professional development team. Seek his or her counsel on how to make this happen within the designated placement process.

Ask for input about how to go about selecting or requesting sites that will assist you in meeting your personal professional development aspirations along with those of your educational program and the fieldwork site. At minimum, the fieldwork coordinator will see you as a self-directed student, highly motivated to achieve beyond the minimal fieldwork education outcomes.

After you have received your placement, study your fieldwork facility's background information. Review all site information such as your fieldwork center's files in your department. Look at current descriptions of the center and the learning experiences provided.

Review feedback from students who completed this placement prior to you through their written feedback in your center's files on campus. Maybe even call a few former students for informal conversation. These individuals are probably now working practitioners themselves, and by this time they will see the value of their fieldwork placement in the context of practice realities.

The intent of this review is to consider how you can realize specific components of your future vision through the specific fieldwork experiences at that site. Using this outline, now identify several learning activities related to those at your future placement site that will specifically integrate fieldwork learning activities to support achieving your vision during the experience.

Share your ideas with your fieldwork coordinator on campus, as the coordinator is familiar with the site and will

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have additional recommendations to ensure the greatest success in integrating your learning goals into established learning activities there.

Bring up ideas about how to introduce your learning objectives to your future fieldwork educator for consideration.

Now, invite the fieldwork educator to collaborate with you. Your prior study of the fieldwork site's information is the platform to demonstrate your awareness and interest in its learning opportunities as they relate to your professional development. Share this information as part of your introductory contact with the fieldwork educator at your site, in your introductory letter, during a pre-placement visit, if possible, and during the first week of your orientation.

Keep in mind the quote re-framed here for the context of this message: Fieldwork education is not about finding yourself. It is about creating your future as an OT!

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