

# Who Benefits from Fieldwork?



Florida Occupational Therapy Association



The obvious answer to the question is the student. The student is provided numerous opportunities for guided exploration and skill development in all aspects of occupational therapy. In “real world” occupational therapy settings, the student practices techniques, uses theories to guide assessment and intervention, observes skilled services provided by others, and reflects on how his services benefitted clients that day. The student develops her clinical reasoning skills, identifies alternative strategies/techniques to use with her clients the following day, and refines communication skills. Through fieldwork the student solidifies all previous learning about the art and science of occupational therapy, and gradually transitions from the student role into that of the student occupational therapist or occupational therapy assistant, and then emerges as the practitioner ready to begin the first job.

The occupational therapist &/or occupational therapy assistant who take on the role of fieldwork educator also benefit from the fieldwork experience. The fieldwork educator gains a renewed appreciation for the learning process as she finds herself reviewing information and techniques that have become “automatic” through experience, but now need to be explained, demonstrated or taught. The fieldwork educator refines his ability to connect science and theories to the real needs of clients in order to better guide his student through the intricacies of providing occupational therapy services. The fieldwork educator also gains ideas from the student on how to expand the use of occupations and other evidence-based practices into her routines. Through all of this, the fieldwork educator’s skills are expanded and strengthened.

The clients who are served by the student occupational therapy practitioner and her fieldwork educator benefit from the combined enthusiasm, creativity, and expertise of the student-therapist team.

The final benefactor of fieldwork education is the organization that hosts the student. The fieldwork experience provides the therapist and department administrator with a prolonged interview of a prospective employee. Whether the experience is Level I or Level II, there are multiple opportunities to interact with the student, observe her verbal and written communication skills, and self-confidence in interacting with clients and team members. The Level II fieldwork experience also provides the organization the opportunity to facilitate the development of skills that are specifically needed in that clinical setting. In essence, fieldwork provides the framework for orienting the new employee to the organization.

So, in answer to “Who benefits from fieldwork?” , the answer is Everyone!!

\*\*\*\* Have you become a fieldwork educator yet? Has it been a while since you took a fieldwork student? Call 1 or more of LFOTEC’s fieldwork coordinators today. All are looking for additional fieldwork educators, and all are ready to mentor you through this role! \*\*\*\*

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# Fieldwork Alternatives: FLOTEC



## Non-traditional Fieldwork II Partnership between an Occupational Therapy Assistant Program and a Sheltered Workshop

To encourage participation in health-promoting occupations, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) articulated a Centennial vision that envisioned occupational therapy as a “powerful, widely recognized, science-driven, and evidence-based profession with a globally connected and diverse workforce meeting society’s occupational needs” (AOTA, 2007a, para. 1). To support this vision, occupational therapists encouraged client’s with disabilities to make decisions, learn critical life skills, and set goals for optimal change (Braveman & Suarez-Balcazar, 2009). Unfortunately, systems designed to create access for individuals with disabilities faced challenges over the years (Braveman & Balcazar-Suarez, 2009) including reimbursement issues of occupational therapy services. To address this, the profession encouraged educational institutions to utilize resources in their community through fieldwork education so occupational therapy students could engage in enriched learning opportunities (AOTA, 2007b).

Provident & Joyce-Gaguzis (2005) encouraged development of fieldwork education in non-traditional areas to better prepare future therapists for community practice. Influenced by AOTA’s vision (2007a) and the need for community services, a non-traditional fieldwork site was implemented to meet the needs of both Keiser University’s Occupational Therapy Assistant Program and Easter Seals of Florida Adult Training Program in a Florida community. This site was designed to offer pre-vocational/vocational services at a sheltered workshop setting employing adults with developmental disabilities (Easter Seals, n. d.). This setting was chosen because of its commitment to provide individuals with the opportunity to gain greater independence in their lives (Easter Seals, n. d.). This Level II fieldwork placement followed standards set forth by Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) to create learning experiences guiding student progression toward entry-level practice (AOTA, 2009). Students were chosen based on evidence of learning styles gathered from the Personal Data Sheet, as well as assessment of independent learning skills, trustworthiness, and professionalism demonstrated in the classroom.

Through this experience, students learned techniques that encouraged clinical thinking skills, creativity, and application of new ideas (Sternberg, Grigorenko, & Zhang, 2008) through hands-on experiences with ongoing reflection to promote active learning (AOTA, 2009). Guidelines were implemented regarding weekly goals and expectations of student learning and staff responsibilities. Learning outcomes focused on assessment of students’ abilities to utilize evidence-based research, completion of activity analyses and weekly progress notes, and the construction of projects so consumers could “develop and improve a variety of skills including sequencing, sorting, spatial awareness, and numerous fine motor skills” (Easter Seals newsletter, 2011, para. 3). Journaling was also integrated into the learning experience by use of a weekly log of observations and activities. In addition, client outcomes and program evaluation were monitored throughout the experience, and qualitative and quantitative surveys were completed with the staff’s approval and participation revealing the benefits of the endeavor.

The initiation of this non-traditional fieldwork opportunity provided a link between education and practice (Costa, 2006) that created greater access of services previously not available due to lack of funding. Ultimately, the goal of this fieldwork was for clients to engage in occupations that were important to them and activities that allowed participation in home, school, workplace, and community life (OTPF, 2008).

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