

10 reasons for you to make students an offer they can't refuse!

By Andrew Neale

Over the last few years CAOT and University Fieldwork Coordinators of Canada (UFCC) have experienced difficulty in matching all students with appropriate fieldwork placements, due in part to a shortage of offers. Changes in the health care system and in occupational therapists' workloads have altered availability of fieldwork experiences. Since clinical education is an essential part of the learning path of future therapists, it is a priority for fieldwork coordinators to find new ways to make clinical education appealing to therapists and potential preceptors.

A long-term objective could be to raise the awareness of decision makers about this issue at the political level; for example, requesting more resources through the ministries of health and education. Or raising awareness at the sites' administrative level; for example, how to alleviate part of therapists' workloads when supervising a student (Ontario Council of University Programs in Rehabilitation Sciences [OCUPRS], 2002).

On a short-time basis though, UFCC think it is necessary to revisit our perceptions about the benefits of educating occupational therapy students. One of the many benefits is that students are future occupational therapists who will soon enter the workforce and will help reduce the workload and stress related to the occupational therapy shortage across Canada (OCUPRS, 2002). There are many other potential benefits to being a fieldwork educator. Presented here are the findings of a literature search and feedback from BC fieldwork educators through personal communication, feedback on student evaluation forms and feedback given during the University of British Columbia occupational therapy fieldwork educator workshops throughout BC in 2001. Andrew Neale invites you to consider the evidence and identify the benefits for your future involvement in fieldwork education.

— by UFCC

Being a fieldwork educator...

1 *Allows students to bring new ideas and current thinking to your workplace.*

Entry-level students are educated in the “latest and greatest” in occupational therapy. Feedback from educators shows that many students are enthusiastic to share their education while on placement.

2 *Stimulates your clinical reasoning skills.*

Many fieldwork educators reported that they had to constantly “transform theory into practice” when explaining their working practices to students (especially level 1). They found that this process was beneficial and at times enlightening.

3 *Enhances your career opportunities.*

One therapist reported that being able to demonstrate they were committed to fieldwork education “tipped the balance” in their favour when in competition for an occupational therapy position. Others stated that being involved in fieldwork education enhanced their resumé and/or professional portfolio.

4 *Develops professional skills, e.g., time management and priority setting.*

Therapists reported that these skills are necessary to organize a placement experience i.e., working with students to set clear expectations and the overall structure of a placement.

5 *Provides an opportunity to share expertise with future colleagues.*

When a student had a positive experience on placement they were more likely to apply for vacant positions after graduation (especially important in organizations with a shortage of occupational therapists).

6 *Creates and improves your links with universities and CAOT.*

All occupational therapy education programs in Canada and CAOT are involved in fieldwork. Besides offering fieldwork placements, other opportunities may exist to be involved in student education (guest speaker, organizing a clinic, committee work, etc.).

**Want to know how you get involved in fieldwork education?
Contact your local University Academic Fieldwork
Coordinator or CAOT for more information.**

**7 Enhances your reputation
within your workplace.**

Some therapists reported that offering student placements demonstrated a commitment to educating future colleagues and in their own professional development.

8 Reduces your workload.

Is this possible? The literature says “Yes!” (see references.)

9 Develops teaching skills.

Responses confirmed that an essential element of fieldwork education is teaching students both in formal and informal situations.

10 Deeply rewarding for all involved.

Many therapists reported a deep sense of satisfaction on a personal and professional level at the conclusion of a successful placement. Results showed that therapists felt a sense of achievement and they developed many skills. In some cases therapists had proved to themselves that they were indeed an “expert” in their field.

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