Developing a Repertoire of Professional Behaviors

Gail S. Fidler

Gail S. Fidler, OTR, FAOTA, 630 SW 6th Street, South Garden Villa, #64, Pompano Beach, Florida 33060. At the time of this work, she was Scholar in Residence, Occupational Therapy Department, College Misericordia, Dallas, Pennsylvania.

Becoming a professional involves learning and personal development beyond the mastery of the profession's body of knowledge and technology. As a health professional, the occupational therapist is expected to interact with a wide variety of persons in many different capacities. To engage with others effectively as a therapist, colleague, teacher, or supervisor requires an appreciation of the dynamics of human relationships and the skills of interpersonal engagement. Nurturance of such capacities encompasses the integration of those attitudes, values, and behaviors reflective of a respect for self, an empathic regard for others, personal integrity, respect for the right of a person to hold differing points of view, and a sense of responsibility to contribute to the welfare of others (Beck & Hillman, 1986; Brammer, 1973; Egan, 1986; Fidler, 1993; Peloquin & Davidson, 1993; Purtilo, 1990; Rodgers, 1961).

Rationale

The perceived importance of the interpersonal aspects of practice is evident throughout the occupational therapy literature (e.g., Devereaux, 1984; King, 1980; Mosey, 1981; Parham, 1987; Peloquin 1989, 1990; Peloquin & Davidson, 1993; Schwartzberger, 1993; Yerxa, 1980). Likewise, the American Occupational Therapy Association's (1987) Level II fieldwork assessment includes evaluation of the student's ability to use the self therapeutically and to demonstrate skills of collaboration.

Peloquin and Davidson (1993) cautioned that "if students are to practice the art of occupational therapy, and if they are to use themselves therapeutically, they must learn to do so" (p. 260). There is consensus among specialists in education and interpersonal dynamics that such learning requires having many opportunities over a period of time to develop personal and interpersonal awareness, to learn to tune into self and others, and to practice translating these perceptions and values into behavior. Ensuring such opportunities and enabling students to learn and practice interpersonal and personal skills was a major concern of the faculty members of the new occupational therapy program at College Misericordia in Dallas, Pennsylvania. To reflect these priorities, the entry-level master of science in occupational therapy program was designed to include among its terminal curriculum objectives six outcome expectations related to interpersonal and personal behaviors (College Misericordia, 1993):

1. Demonstrated commitment to a continued quest for self-understanding, for the clarification of one's values and beliefs, and toward enabling

those attitudinal changes that strengthen and enhance professional behaviors.

2. Skill in developing and sustaining a helping relationship.
3. An ability to skillfully use group processes to enhance occupational therapy interventions.
4. An ability to elicit the contribution of others and facilitate collaborative endeavors.
5. A repertoire of professional attitudes and behaviors reflective of ethical standards and values.
6. A commitment to the continuing pursuit of individual professional growth and knowledge.

Procedure

The challenge of meeting these objectives elicited many questions from the faculty members: How could such learning expectations be integrated into and thus become bona fide components of the total occupational therapy curriculum? Could students be held accountable for acquiring a personal and interpersonal behavioral repertoire to the same degree that they are held responsible for the mastery of other content? Is the development and learning of such skills observable and measurable and, if so, by what methods? Was it possible to acceptably objectify what has been perceived traditionally as subjective phenomena? Could unsatisfactory interpersonal performance be a justifiable reason for course failure or termination?

To begin to address these questions, faculty members agreed that because the development of interpersonal behavior is embedded in experience and is inextricably related to personal values and beliefs, the context for such learning and growth needed to be within the interpersonal engagements that are a natural and normal occurrence in each course (i.e., each classroom and laboratory experience). Furthermore, faculty members acknowledged that not only academic course sections were a laboratory for practice in the art of engaging with others, but fieldwork settings were a laboratory as well. To ensure credibility of the outcome objectives for the curriculum, faculty members took three steps. The first was to identify and define those personal and interpersonal behaviors considered critical for professional practice and to organize these into skill clusters. The second step was to identify behavioral indicators for each skill cluster. This step was viewed as essential for clarifying definitions and for providing objective criteria for observation, reflection, and evaluation.

The third step was to develop and implement a methodology for integrating the learning and practice of these skills throughout the occupational therapy curriculum. This initiative involved developing strategies for the two tracks within the curriculum: the 5-year master of science track for the high school graduate entering freshman year as an occupational therapy major and the 3-year track tailored to the educational needs of students holding a non–occupational therapy bachelor's or master's degree or an associate's degree as a certified occupational therapy assistant.

Strategies for integrating the learning and development of professional behaviors throughout the curriculum were planned to begin with the students' first year of study. During their first year, all students, regardless of their track, are enrolled in a 2-credit course entitled, Introduction to Professional Behaviors. This course emphasizes professional behavior, ethics, personal values and beliefs, and the expected practice competencies articulated in the overall objectives of the curriculum. During this time, the personal and interpersonal skills repertoire is thoroughly defined, discussed, and explored (see p. 585). Students understand that as occupational therapy majors, they enter into a contract with themselves, peers, and faculty members to work toward the development of personal and interpersonal skills throughout their years of study. Students accept responsibility for completing an initial self-evaluation of their skills, and periodically, on the basis of feedback from peers and faculty members, they are expected to update these evaluations. It is understood that students will both give and elicit feedback from one another and from members of the faculty. These evaluations become part of the students' record and, as such, are an integral part of the student advisement process and the review of a student's academic progress.

The demonstration of personal and interpersonal skills is written into the objectives of each occupational therapy course at each level of the curriculum. Students understand that development and practice in these behaviors are outcome expectations for each course. Obviously, some courses, because of content focus, offer more opportunity for interpersonal skill practice and learning than others. For example, a 3-credit course on interpersonal processes engages the student in exploring, experiencing, reflecting on, and critiquing the dimensions of dyadic relationships, group dynamics, and group processes. This learning is supplemented and reinforced throughout an 8-credit course devoted to the study of the meaning and use of activities in everyday living and in defining the quality of life. Both courses, as well as three intervention courses, offer a rich laboratory for the development and practice of interpersonal competencies. Additionally, efforts have been made to reduce lecture time in the new curriculum and increase the use of cooperative learning, the seminar format, small study groups

and task-focused groups, independent study, and other teaching–learning strategies that call on the students' development of critical reasoning and problem solving, interpersonal skills, and self-dependent behaviors.

Development of Professional Behavior

The following outline is composed of the material currently being used at College Misericordia to help students learn, practice, and evaluate their personal and interpersonal skill components of professional behavior. This outline provides guidelines for both students and faculty members in the processes of setting learning objectives; reflecting on, considering, and evaluating behavioral strengths and limitations; and establishing a focus for continued learning and practice. This outline is not used as a checklist or grading sheet; it is used to acknowledge that interpersonal competence is a process, not an end product. Thus, the goal is an ever-increasing positive self-regard, an empathic regard for others, and a growing ability to productively engage with others.

Through mutual teaching–learning experiences between and among faculty members and students, we expect to enable the student to continuously work toward achieving the following:

I. A positive self-regard as demonstrated by

  A. Communicating verbally or nonverbally in a direct, forthright manner
    1. Making eye contact
    2. Stating an opinion clearly
    3. Asking a question
    4. Asking for clarification
    5. Addressing questions or concerns in a timely manner
    6. Exhibiting a confident body posture

  B. Speaking out to identify one's position
    1. Expressing one's opinion
    2. Acknowledging one's stand on an issue
    3. Clarifying one's position

  C. Responding constructively to criticism
    1. Acknowledging error, asset, or both
    2. Acknowledging responsibility for self
    3. Altering behavior on the basis of feedback
    4. Depersonalizing feedback, recognizing that criticism is directed at behavior, not at person

  D. Tolerating error
    1. Trying out the new
    2. Acknowledging that errors are a reality of learning
    3. Speculating
    4. Asking for critique

  E. Exhibiting self-starting, self-reliant behaviors
    1. Taking initiative for one's learning
    2. Identifying and using resources
    3. Initiating an endeavor
    4. Taking responsibility

  F. Advocating for self
    1. Stating one's wants and needs
    2. Speaking and acting affirmatively in regard to oneself
    3. Articulating one's strengths and assets
    4. Asking for commendation

  G. Being dependable and reliable
    1. Following through on a task
    2. Meeting deadlines
    3. Being consistent
    4. Using sound, rational judgment
    5. Being accountable and responsible

  H. Acknowledging one's contribution
    1. Identifying and describing one's contributions and skills
    2. Volunteering to use assets and skills
    3. Describing and evaluating one's limitations
    4. Seeking personally referenced feedback

II. An increasing self-awareness as demonstrated by

  A. Seeking and obtaining feedback
    1. Asking others for their perception of one's behaviors
    2. Seeking feedback from multiple sources, including, but not limited to, peers, superiors, other colleagues, and clients

  B. Reflecting
    1. Giving events a second thought
    2. Engaging in thoughtful review
    3. Considering one's response in retrospect

  C. Becoming more aware of what is happening around oneself
    1. Noting observations of the dimensions and dynamics of the immediate setting
    2. Noting verbal and nonverbal cues
    3. Identifying the interrelationships among persons, politics, economy, and culture
    4. Questioning the interrelatedness of events and one's personal action

  D. Appraising self realistically
    1. Weighing self-evaluation with that of others
    2. Acknowledging similarities and discrepancies of these evaluations
    3. Acknowledging and explaining one's beliefs, values, and biases

4. Recognizing self-appraisal as a continuing
   process
E. Clarifying values continually
   1. Questioning one's belief and attitudes
   2. Evaluating how one's behaviors relate to one's
      own beliefs and attitudes
   3. Evaluating how and why one's values differ
      from or are similar to others
F. Expanding the boundaries of one's behavioral
   repertoire
   1. Trying out new behaviors
   2. Practicing different ways of responding
   3. Engaging in unfamiliar situations
   4. Critiquing one's nonverbal behavior
   5. Seeking opportunity to work on self-
      identified limitations
G. Clarifying relationships with others
   1. Asking for feedback about the impact of
      one's behavior
   2. Confronting another with regard to where
      things stand between self and other
   3. Asking others for the rationale of their
      opinions
   4. Explaining one's own opinion and its
      rationale
   5. Defining and explaining the nature of the
      contract between oneself and another within
      the context of the respective roles of each
   6. Identifying and considering nonverbal cues

III. An interpersonal competence as demonstrated by

A. Being sensitive to the feelings, values, and
   agendas of others
   1. Acknowledging one's own feelings and
      expressing how they are similar to or different
      from another's
   2. Responding by word, tone of voice, facial
      expression, touch, or gestures to the feeling
      tone of another
   3. Encouraging another to clarify or share his or
      her values and opinions
   4. Expressing respect for the right of another to
      hold different values and beliefs
B. Listening to and hearing others
   1. Paraphrasing the statements of another
   2. Asking for clarification
   3. Responding to what is being said
   4. Responding to nonverbal cues
C. Developing dialogue skills

1. Asking another to share or explain his or her
   point of view
2. Withholding judgment during another's
   explanation
3. Explaining one's own point of view and
   rationale
4. Encouraging others to critically explore one's
   perspective

D. Developing collaboration skills
   1. Asking others for their ideas or perspectives
   2. Acknowledging the importance of the
      knowledge, expertise, or skills of another
   3. Contributing ideas and critiques to the task
      at hand
   4. Acknowledging the value of various
      interactive styles
   5. Compromising to reach a consensus without
      abdicating one's basic values
E. Empowering others
   1. Acknowledging the contribution of another
   2. Supporting another toward self-agency
   3. Acknowledging the strengths and skills of
      another and encouraging their use
   4. Asking another to participate
F. Contributing to the learning of others
   1. Sharing knowledge, ideas, and questions
   2. Eliciting input, opinions, and participation
      from others
   3. Stimulating and originating discussion
   4. Completing assignments on time
   5. Offering thoughtful contribution to
      discussion

IV. A commitment to learning as demonstrated by

A. Having enthusiasm for inquiry and discovery
   1. Expressing excitement about new learning
   2. Seeking new ideas and new perspectives
      through questioning, reading, and discussion
   3. Trying out new perspectives and new ideas
B. Being content prepared
   1. Completing assignments on time
   2. Formulating clarifying questions
   3. Contributing thoughts and ideas
C. Contributing beyond requirements
   1. Volunteering for a special assignment
   2. Contributing materials and information
      beyond those required of assignments
   3. Stimulating others to contribute

Summary

The curriculum initiatives outlined in this article are now in the third year of development and implementation at College Misericordia. Further work needs to focus on refining the inclusion of interpersonal skill learning objectives into course objectives and developing a uniform method of monitoring and evaluating outcomes in this realm of learning. Faculty members continue to grapple with the complex questions of the extent to which the student seeking a professional degree can be held accountable for demonstrating an acceptable level of personal and interpersonal skill. However, student and faculty member critique of the endeavor is ongoing, and it is expected that this collaboration will continue to stimulate further study and refinement of both the content focus and the process of this undertaking. ▲

Acknowledgments

References

American Occupational Therapy Association. (1987). *Fieldwork evaluation for the occupational therapist.* Rockville, MD: Author.

Beck, A., & Hillman, E. (1986). *Positive management practices.* San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Brammer, L. M. (1973). *The helping relationship.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

College Misericordia. (1993). *Occupational therapy curriculum guide.* Dallas, PA: Author.

Devereaux, E. B. (1984). Occupational therapy's challenge: The caring relationship. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 38,* 791–798.

Egan, G. (1986). *The skilled helper: A systematic approach to effective helping.* Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Fidler, G. S. (1993). Nationally Speaking—The quest for efficacy. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 47,* 583–586.

King, L. J. (1980). Creative caring. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 34,* 522–528.

Mosey, A. C. (1981). *Occupational therapy: Configuration of a profession.* New York: Raven.

Parham, D. (1987). Nationally Speaking—Toward professionalism: The reflective therapist. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 41,* 555–561.

Peloquin, S. M. (1989). Sustaining the art of practice in occupational therapy. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 43,* 219–226.

Peloquin, S. M. (1990). The patient–therapist relationship in occupational therapy: Understanding visions and images. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 44,* 13–21.

Peloquin, S. M., & Davidson, D. A. (1993). Brief or New—Interpersonal skills for practice: An elective course. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 47,* 260–264.

Purtilo, R. (1990). *Health professional and patient interaction* (4th edition). Philadelphia: Saunders.

Rodgers, C. (1961). *On becoming a person.* London: Constable.

Schwartzberger, J. (1993). Therapeutic use of self. In H. Hopkins & H. D. Smith (Eds.), *Willard & Spackman's occupational therapy* (8th ed., pp. 226–294). Philadelphia: Lippincott.

Yerxa, E. J. (1980). Occupational therapy's role in meeting a climate of caring. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 34,* 529–534.