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Advocating for the Field of Occupational Therapy in a Childcare Setting

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BACKGROUND

- There are approximately 24 million children under the age of five years old living in the United States of America today (Laughlin, 2013).
- 12.5 million children (61%) regularly spend time in childcare settings each week (Laughlin, 2013; Steed & Roach, 2017).
- Significant social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development occurs during the first five years of a child's life (Williams et al., 2019).
- Sufficient staff training and adequate services offered within childcare settings have proven to promote children's well-being, development, and formation of strong attachments and healthy relationships (Williams et al., 2019).
- Assisting the childcare staff, addressing the needs, and providing training to build staff confidence when working with typically developing children, as well as children with unique needs, are just some of the benefits of occupational therapists (OTs) being present in the childcare setting (Clark & Jackson, 2019).

PURPOSE

- The purpose of this capstone project was to advocate for the field of occupational therapy at the Center for Children and Families (CFCF), a childcare setting in Vermillion, South Dakota.
- To explore if, because of their extensive knowledge of human development and the unique needs of every age group, along with the ability to recognize, support, and provide methods in which to enhance development, OTs would be beneficial staff members in every childcare setting.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Model of Human Occupation (MOHO) Model of Practice

- Evidence-based, client-centered, and holistic
- Places emphases on five components: volition, habituation, performance capacity, the environment, and occupational performance (Kielhofner & Burke, 1980; Taylor, 2017).
- Volition: what motivates and drives an individual to make choices, decisions, and takes into account an individual's values and interests (Kiralý-Alvarez, 2015; Taylor 2017).
- Habituation: a client's volition is used to form habits, which in turn help to establish new roles that are able to be competently completed (Kielhofner & Burke 1980; Taylor, 2017).
- Performance capacity: an individual's capability to perform activities based on his or her physical and mental abilities (Andrew et al., 2019; Kielhofner & Burke, 1980; Taylor, 2017).
- Environment: influences an individual's volition, habituation, performance capacity, and ability to successfully participate in occupations (occupational performance).
- The occupational therapy student (OTS) assessed the volition, habituation, performance capacity, the environment, and occupational performance of the staff and children at CFCF in order to guide objectives, assignments, and interactions.

Lifespan Development Frame of Reference

- Development occurs in sequential and predictable ways (Creek, 2014; Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Kohlberg, 1973; Llorens, 1970; Piaget, 1971).
- When one set of skills is mastered, a new set of skills is able to be learned.
- The OTS utilized components in order to understand and promote healthy development, bridge the gap between maladaptive and healthy behaviors, and to guide objectives and activities (Creek, 2014).

MOHO and Lifespan Development are complimentary; they place emphasis on the individual being the center of therapy services, the environment and its influence on the individual, and the specific aspects of an individual's life that motivates participation in meaningful occupations (Creek, 2014; Kielhofner & Burke, 1980).

METHODS AND ACTIVITIES

- The OTS and the faculty mentor established a partnership with CFCF.
- The capstone experience was guided by the following learning objectives and deliverables:
 - **Objective One:** Complete paperwork and training required by the childcare facility prior to working with children and staff.
 - Obtained negative COVID-19 test.
 - Recent background check.
 - CPR and BLS certifications.
 - Created and distributed introduction letter to staff and families.
 - **Objective Two:** Increase knowledge in specific areas including autism, child development, sensory processing, and clinical reasoning to improve the ability to work with children of all ability levels and diverse backgrounds.
 - Completed two continuing education courses and obtained certifications of completion.
 - **Objective Three:** Provide resources and staff trainings to help meet the developmental, cognitive, fine motor, communication, play, sensory, and environmental needs of the children at CFCF.
 - Created and administered needs assessment to gain a better understanding of the staff's knowledge of human development for children between the ages of zero and five years, their knowledge of occupations for children between the ages of zero and five years, their knowledge of occupational therapy, knowledge of adverse childhood experiences, and to determine the overall impacts of the capstone project.
 - Created Resource Binders with specific overviews, occupations, developmental milestones for typically developing children, indications of possible developmental concerns, and references tailored to each age group in the classrooms in CFCF.
 - Presented and trained staff on how and when to use the binders in in-service training
 - Created and presented two in-service trainings to childcare staff.
 - "Occupational Therapy in the Childcare Setting" including Resource Binder training
 - "Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)"
 - **Objective Four:** Effectively advocate for the field of occupational therapy.
 - Researched and designed occupation-based educational handout for staff and families.
 - Collaborated with the site director and staff.
 - **Objective Five:** Gain clinical knowledge about the ages and developmental stages of the children that attend CFCF in order to develop professionally as a pediatric occupational therapist.
 - Participated in daily observations, play times, feeding times, and learning activities.
 - Administered the Denver Developmental Screening Test (DDST) to children identified as having one or more developmental concerns (Frankenburg & Dodds, 1967).
 - **Objective Six:** Collaborate with the faculty mentor throughout the capstone experience.
 - **Objective Seven:** Create thorough and comprehensive literature review.
 - **Objective Eight:** Write and create a capstone project and defense.
 - **Objective Nine:** Complete all correlating class assignments in conjunction with the capstone experience.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

- All nine objectives were achieved.
- Data analysis from the final needs assessment indicated that the OTS successfully helped increase staff's knowledge of human development for children between the ages of zero and five years, in turn advocating for the field of occupational therapy.
- Information and resources provided by the OTS will be utilized by the childcare facility director and staff in order to enhance participation in work occupations and meaningful activities with the children with whom they work closely.
- Children were shown to participate more often in purposeful activities tailored to meet their developmental needs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Implications:**
 - An OT would be beneficial on-staff in childcare settings to meet the needs of children and to assist the staff within childcare settings to meet the developmental needs of children receiving services.
 - Childcare staff and OTs create a dynamic interdisciplinary team.
- **Recommendations:**
 - A more in-depth needs assessment:
 - Tailor resources and trainings to the staff's preferred learning styles.
 - Staff education level and years of experience.
 - Environmental modifications to meet the developmental needs of the children.
 - Consider high turn-over rate of staff.



CONCLUSION

- OTs play essential roles on a team of professionals when addressing human development and child behavior.
- The OTS promoted participation in meaningful occupations, enhanced occupational performance for the staff and children, encouraged healthy development of the children, and advocated for the field of occupational therapy in a childcare setting.
- The chosen conceptual framework model of practice and frame of reference, MOHO and Lifespan Development were appropriate throughout the capstone experience and facilitated positive outcomes (Kielhofner & Burke, 1980; Taylor, 2017).

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