

# Using client experts for developing communication skills and formative feedback with occupational therapy students

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# The context

- Second year occupational therapy students complete a 7-week credit free course to prepare them for their first 8-week practice placement.
- In occupational therapy in Australia simulation type learning activities has been advocated for preparation for placement courses to develop students' communication skills, professional behaviour and information gathering skills (Rodgers et al., 2010).



# Client experts

- For the last three years, 5 people with a range of disabilities, termed ‘client experts’ have attended a student session. Students both interview and assess the clients based on their real disabilities /abilities. This authentic learning is aimed at providing formative feedback on students professional behaviour, communication and information gathering skills and prepare them for the practice environment.



# The aim of the client expert session

- To complete communication tasks that reflect what is expected of them on placement
- To practice content taught in other parts of the course ie to have an opportunity to ‘put it all together’
- To work with real clients and develop a confidence in client communications through experience
- To practice in a safe non assessed environment
- To receive formative feedback on their communication skills



# Based on the dimensions of authentic learning from Gulikers et al., (2004)

- 1. Task (Meaningfulness, relevance, degree of complexity, and criterion situation at the students educational level)
- 2. Physical context (Similarity to professional workplace. Availability of professional resources (methods/tools) and similarity to professional time frame (thinking/acting))
- 3. Social context (Similarity to context of practice)
- 4. Result/Form (Demonstration of competence, presentation to others, multiple indicators of learning)
- 5. Criteria (Based on criteria used in professional practice, transparent and specific) – Needs to be developed



# The process

- Each student is placed in a team of 5/6 students
- Each team is allocated a client expert
- Each student in the team has a set assessment or information gathering or other tasks to complete with the client expert.
- Each group has an OT group facilitator
- The group has a time period to complete the tasks
- Each student group experiences two client experts



# The tasks

- Interview and information gathering
- Interview and information gathering and sit to stand transfer
- Interview and information gathering and dressing assessment
- Interview and information gathering wheelchair measurement
- Interview and information gathering and standardised cognitive screen



# Communication preparation

- Sessions on interview and information gathering including video examples. They have also had practice in previous assessed modules.
- Sessions on synthesising, summarising and verbal reporting
- Sessions on documentation
- Skills such as cognitive screen, wheelchair measurement and dressing they have done in previous courses
- But learning is by doing and responding to the client





# Types of communication explored in the session

- Introduction and consent
- Interview and information gathering (about their medical history, family/social situation/ activities of daily living)
- Instruction e.g. Sit to stand, dressing
- Communication during measurement e.g. wheelchair and Montreal Cognitive Assessment (MOCA)
- Recording/documentation
- Discussing the outcome/results of the assessment
- Finishing and closing
- Succinct summary after clients have left

# Authentic learning: communication challenges

- One client has Parkinson's and is very quietly spoken and can be hard to hear
- One client has dysarthria, post stroke, and also has a great sense of humour and students have to both interview and keep them on track
- One client has no diagnosis, but English is their second language
- One client has no cognitive issues but when the student completes a MoCA, she answers some questions incorrectly so they have to provide the results and interpret them in a meaningful way
- One client is a wheelchair user and has a severe kyphosis and has to be measured for a new wheelchair (remember the client is the expert!) So questions must seek their opinion as well.



# Formative Feedback

- Each year we have tried different ways to provide feedback
- - Facilitator verbal feedback on each student
- facilitator forms for the group ( too general)
- - facilitator written forms for each student (hard to fill in for each student and manage the group)
- Ratio 5/6 students to each client expert and one OT facilitator
- This year the client interactions were recorded using a tablet for formative feedback.



# Using I pads

- Consent from students and client experts, recordings deleted at the end of the session
- I pads only have so much power!
- Background noise of other groups made it hard to hear what was being said
- Facilitator was a cameraman rather than faciliator
- Feedback was as longer as the session



# Feedback to students includes

- Professional behaviour and dress
- Use of appropriate language
- Tone of voice
- Non verbal communication
- Therapeutic use of self
- Building rapport
- Question generation and information missed or not picked up
- Observation
- Ability to synthesise and summarise information

# Other feedback

- Peer feedback
- Self evaluation
- Client feedback



# Feedback from students

- Would prefer to do initial interview in pairs
- Would like to give and seek feedback from each other
- Working as a big team was difficult
- I wish we could have done interviews suitable to our placement
- Especially found the session with client experts helpful as it allowed us to develop practice skills and it would be good to have more hands on practice and role modelling
- Maybe if there was 2 sessions with clients, just it was a bit rushed and videoing did not go to plan



# The future

- Client experts are happy to come again next year
- Need to develop specific criteria for feedback
- Need to develop peer and client feedback in a more detailed way
- Need to re evaluate the filming of sessions with view to time, maybe this needs to be completed on a different day
- Need to encourage more student self evaluation





# Further work

- Research is indicated into the effectiveness of client experts as an authentic learning activity from student, facilitator, and client expert perspectives. The lack of summative assessment also needs to be investigated.



# References

- Gulikers, J.T.M., Bastiaens, T.J., & Kirschner (2004). Perceptions of authenticity: Five dimensions of authenticity. Paper presented at the Second Biannual Joint Northumbria/EARLI SIG Assessment Conference, Bergen
- RODGER, S., BENNETT, S., FITZGERALD, C. & NEADS, P. 2010. *Use of simulated learning activities in occupational therapy curriculum* [Online]. University of Queensland and Health Workforce Australia. [Accessed June 5 2013].

