

Consortium for the Educational Advancement of Travel Instruction Position Paper

Enhancing Professional Development through Shared Learning Across Disciplines

The professions of occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy (physiotherapy) (PT), orientation and mobility instruction (O&M), and travel instruction (TI), have many opportunities for intersections to occur when professionals from these fields are working with individual clients. Most often, however, clients receive treatment or service in discrete and unconnected fashion, even if an individual client is receiving services from professionals in each of these fields. We believe that collaboration among these professionals inform and edify one another's practice and thereby, enhance the overall service delivery for clients.

Popular and professional writing is replete with declarations on the benefits brought about as a result of collaborating with someone outside one's own field. One does not have to look far for journal and magazine articles that tout the wisdom of collaboration. Books and articles give testimony to the growth and development of new ideas, new trends, new thinking and new innovations as a direct result of collaborating. (e.g. *A Whole New Mind*, by Daniel Pink; *The Ten Faces of Innovation*, by Tom Kelley; *The World Is Flat*, by Tom Friedman).

Meaning of Collaboration

Contrasting the definition of collaboration with the definitions of coordination and cooperation illustrates the higher level of engagement and investment involved when individuals or parties are working in a collaborative spirit. Distinctions can be made among these three types of interpersonal working relationships.

Coordination occurs when the efforts of different parties are organized to reach a common goal. High-stakes issues are often not involved and the parties involved do not need to carry on a relationship beyond the accomplishment of the task at hand. The goal is static. (*Wikipedia*)

Cooperation comes about when individuals or groups work toward a goal and during that engagement, the means used to achieve the goal results in gains and losses on the part of each participant or group. This can sometimes foster a competitive environment and parties need not carry a relationship beyond the accomplishment of the task at hand. The goal is static. (*Wikipedia*)

By contrast, when individuals engage in a collaborative working relationship, all participants work together and build consensus to reach a decision or create an outcome, the result of which benefits all parties. Competition, in this relationship, is an almost insurmountable roadblock to collaboration. For a true collaboration to be present, the relationship among individuals must continue beyond the accomplishment of the immediate task at hand in order to assure its viability. The goal is dynamic in a collaborative relationship. (*Wikipedia*)

Professions and professionals have much to gain if opportunities are created for the sharing of expertise, knowledge and research. As the definition implies, however, collaboration must be created, developed, and consistently nurtured in order for breakthrough outcomes and dynamic relationships to be maintained. Collaborative relationships themselves are dynamic. Individuals must trust one another and the goal and outcomes must be valued by the participants involved. Individuals must value the expertise and contribution of each of the members in order for collaborative relationships to be maintained.

It is the intent of this paper to propose that a much richer and more highly evolved service could be available to clients and professionals alike, if opportunities for collaboration among the professions and professionals in the fields of OT, PT, O&M, and TI were created and fostered. Practitioners from each of these professions bring a wealth of expertise and personal experience which would inform the practice of fellow professional colleagues from other disciplines. This sharing would in turn, enhance the delivery of services to clients and develop collaborative experiences for the clients and professionals alike.

Individual professionals can begin to create their own opportunities for cross-discipline collaborations if some basic groundwork is established beforehand. One prerequisite for an effective collaboration is that partners have the time and opportunity to learn about one another and to have compatible aims or objectives for the segments in which they have joint interests. Personal preconditions for effective collaboration include the ability to communicate effectively (especially around technical requirements) and the willingness to share ideas. Additionally, collaborating individuals should feel comfortable exploring new ideas in order to develop them further in a previously untested or unfamiliar direction. (*Wikipedia*)

Professionals sharing their knowledge and expertise can enhance one another's professional repertoire while all experts are growing by learning together. Shared learning occurs through the collaborative activity itself.

Professional Collaboration

One of the most logical and concrete places to begin a professional collaboration would be to understand the specific areas of professional expertise involved in each of the discrete professions. The primary place to start is with a definition of the role and function of each profession represented.

Following are the definitions the professions of OT, PT, O&M, and TI. Each of these professions assists persons with mobility limitations due to disabilities or aging.

Occupational Therapy: Occupational therapy is skilled treatment that helps individuals achieve independence in all facets of their lives. Occupational therapy assists people in developing the "skills for the job of living" necessary for independent and satisfying lives.

Physical Therapy: Physical therapy is provided by health care professionals who diagnose and treat individuals of all ages, from newborns to the very oldest, who have medical problems or other health-related conditions that limit their abilities to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives.

Orientation & Mobility Instruction: Orientation and mobility instruction is a sequential process in which visually impaired individuals are taught to utilize their remaining senses to determine their position within their environment and to negotiate safe movement from one place to another.

Travel Instruction: Travel instruction is safe and independent purposeful movement in a public environment provided to persons with disabilities, other than those who are blind or visually impaired, which prepares and teaches independent travel skills, in the community which may include the use of public transportation.

Professionals from each of these fields have unique expertise, information, and experience that can inform and enhance services provided to a person with mobility limitations due to disabilities or aging. It is important for professionals entering into a collaborative relationship to understand the values and principles upon which the professions (and the professionals working within each discipline) base their practice and service.

Scope of Practice

Scope of Practice is defined as the boundaries within which a fully qualified practitioner may practice in a specifically defined field. The scope of practice is limited to that which the individual has received education and clinical experience, and in which the individual has demonstrated competency.

Proposed changes to a profession's scope of practice often elicit debates perceived as turf battles between two or more professions, with the common refrain of "this is part of my practice so it can't be part of yours." Often lost among the competing arguments and assertions are the most important issues of whether this proposed change will better protect the public and enhance consumer's access to competent services. Most professions today share some skills or procedures with another profession. It is no longer reasonable to expect each profession to have a completely unique scope of practice, exclusive of all others. Overlapping scopes of practice are a reality in a rapidly changing environment. The criteria related to who is qualified to perform functions safely without risk of harm to the public are the only justifiable conditions for defining scopes of practice.

Collaboration between OT, PT, O&M, and TI providers should be the professional norm. Competent providers will refer to other providers when faced with issues or situations beyond the provider's own practice competence or where greater competence or specialty care is determined as necessary or even helpful to the client's condition.

Overlap among professions is necessary. No one profession actually owns a skill or activity in and of itself. One activity does not define a profession but it is the entire scope of activities within the practice that makes any particular profession unique. Simply because a skill or activity is within one profession's skill set does not mean another profession cannot and should not include it in its own scope of practice.

(Legislative Considerations for Assessing Changes in Healthcare Professions Scope of Practice, http://www.fsbpt.org/download/Assessing_Scope_of_Practice_Final_August_2006.pdf)

Once a professional understands the dimensions and job functions of another professional's role, a collaborative relationship can begin to be developed by looking for areas of commonality while respecting differences. OT, PT, O&M, and TI are closely allied professions in that each provides a service to a population which has limited mobility. The conditions of that limited mobility and the required adaptation for independence mobility is what defines the areas of specialty and the required preparation for each of these professions.

Within the codes of behavior, each profession recognizes limitations to their practice as defined by professional preparation received and the requirements of registration or certification. In the Code of Ethics of The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. it states: "Members shall provide only those services for which they are properly qualified by registration or certification." In the Code of Ethics published by the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario, it state: "The physiotherapist refrains from practicing outside his or her level of competence." In the American Physical Therapy Association's Code of Ethics it states: "If the diagnostic process reveals findings that are outside the scope of the physical therapist's knowledge, experience or expertise, the physical therapist shall so inform the patient/client and refer to an appropriate practitioner." And in the Code of Ethic of Orientation and Mobility Specialists it states: "The Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialists will not assume responsibilities that are better provided by other professionals who are available to the student."

There is recognition of dual qualifications among these professions. Individuals have become qualified to provide services within dual areas of expertise. For example: Some physical therapists have completed the university requirements for orientation and mobility instructor and qualified for the O&M Specialist certification. Another example would be those orientation and mobility instructor who completed the University of Wisconsin orientation and mobility program from 1978 to 1983 becoming dually prepared to be orientation and mobility instructors and travel instructors.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the common interests of professionals who provide client services in the instruction of purposeful movement. For those professionals, continued education is required for professional growth and improved competence and as a means to enhance service to clients. The Consortium for the Educational Advancement of Travel Instruction has identified as one of its main purposes: to support and promote the continuing development of academic discipline and profession of travel instruction to enable persons with mobility limitations to travel safely

and independently. The Consortium will offer continuing education opportunities and welcome shared learning with other professionals.

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