The Revised Fieldwork Performance Report: Implementation and Implications

Richard G. Cooper

The revision of the Fieldwork Performance Report (FWPR) began with the passage of Resolution 584-82. The Representative Assembly funded the project in 1982, and the committee is now nearing completion of the project. However, major decisions must be made before the implementation of the revised form can begin. These decisions deal with the method of fieldwork educator (supervisor) training in the use of the revised FWPR. Since the implications of these decisions cut across several divisions of the Association, considerable discussion is necessary.

The Need for Fieldwork Educator Training

In any instrument used to measure performance, the quality of the scoring depends on the instrument design and the skills of the fieldwork educator using it. All AOTA documents were used to identify current entry-level competencies during designing of the revised FWPR. The purpose of the instrument was limited to the assessment of competence and the evaluation of performance of entry-level skills. The remaining factor in the quality of scoring is the skill of the fieldwork educator in using the instrument. The fieldwork educator must have knowledge of the instrument, clinical skills that provide a basis for the assessment of student performance, and professional judgment in using the measuring scale. If competence in any of these areas is lacking, rater error will occur. An excellent description of rater error in the FWPR is given by Slaymaker:

... regrettably, the AOTA instrument is plagued with many of the problems to which rating scales are subject. One of the primary areas of difficulty is rater error.

We tend to give students the benefit of the doubt (leniency). Many therapists also avoid the lower ratings, feeling such low ratings reflect on them as teachers (central tendency). Likability influences therapists into giving higher ratings than might be warranted or lower ratings than are called for (halo effect). Lack of enough opportunities for observation leads to both logical and proximity error. Add the fact that many of the supervising therapists admit they have never seen a copy of the FWPR manual, and the obvious conclusion will be that much work needs to be done (1).

The problems of rater error are neither simplistic nor understated. Steps can be taken to control rater error. These steps include a clear purpose for the instrument, use of an appropriate scale for rating performance, and adequate fieldwork educator training.

Purpose of the FWPR

The current FWPR lists the following purposes:


The revised instrument centers only on assessment of competence and evaluation of performance for admission to the certification exam. There remains considerable value in the other purposes listed. Therefore, the Revision Committee has recommended that a counseling manual be developed to assist in the completion of the remainder of the purposes listed.

Measurement Scale

The second step in controlling rater error lies in the measurement scale. The current measurement scale is based on observation of clinical competence. The current scale uses the number of correct completions given ten opportunities to perform. However, few fieldwork sites provide 10 opportu-
tunities for each competency, and even fewer supervisors observe and record them. In reality, supervisors use their professional judgment in determining scores. Therefore, a scale that reflects the professional judgment of student competence would best meet reality. If such a scale is used, development of the professional judgment skills of the rater will be critical to its success.

Factors In Rater Training

Rater training has the greatest potential for ensuring success of the new fieldwork instrument. There are four factors to consider, each representing a continuum of choices. The first factor is the level of skills presented in the training process. Training could center on the instrument only or on assessment of performance in general. Teaching to the instrument will increase the value of the new form. Teaching performance assessment would provide generalization of skills to many evaluation forms.

The second factor is the timing for rater training. Rater training for the current FWPR centered on the construction of the rater's guide and training of field test supervisors. Recommendations were made to continue the process, but were not funded. If training of all fieldwork educators is accepted as a goal, a major time commitment is made. We hope that such a commitment will be made.

The third factor is the funding of the training. Does AOTA fund the training through general funds or a fieldwork supervisory certification fee? These choices point to a need for immediate discussion between all parties concerned, including education, certification, and fieldwork educators.

The fourth factor is the format or vehicle for the training. The traditional format consists of the construction of a rater's guide, the training of faculty, followed by continuing education workshops for the population. History shows this format effective for a short time and covers the target population on a hit-or-miss basis. Another choice is to attach the training to an established AOTA policy such as the Essentials of An Accredited Educational Program for Occupational Therapists (3). This format would see the production of the rater's guide, provision of 1 to 2 years of workshops for current fieldwork educators, and implementation of a change in the essentials. Another AOTA policy to which rater training could be attached is recertification.

Decisions on the choices cannot be made in isolation or by one committee of volunteers. Choices are raised to indicate the need to begin serious discussion. The effects of each choice must be reviewed within the level of commitment the membership is willing to make. Only through such discussion will the best decision be made.

Conclusion

Competent fieldwork performance is critical for entry of practitioners into the profession. Previous attempts to implement successful fieldwork evaluations have fallen short of our goals. The success of any fieldwork performance evaluation depends on the quality of design and implementation of rater training. There must be a clear purpose in design. Competencies measured must blend reality with theory. The rating scale must reflect a level of professional judgment on the part of the fieldwork educator. The choices of format, funding, time frame, and level of skills included in rater training are all interlocking continuums. Discussion of the choices and implications must begin now and should involve all divisions of the Association. If a commitment is made to train fieldwork educators, then major implications for education, practice, and certification have been set in motion.

REFERENCES