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Abstract

A service-learning pilot project involving occupational therapy (OT) students and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) is described. The purpose of this pilot project, developed using Transformative Learning Theory, was to determine if service-learning could be a viable approach to provide in-depth learning in areas only superficially covered in a typical OT curriculum. The objectives of this experience were focused on developing the knowledge and skills needed to address a noted gap in OT practice, post-secondary transition services for individuals with IDD. Using a peer-mentor approach, OT students were matched with young adults with IDD for a fieldwork Level I experience that continued for nine months. Weekly experiences for the mentees were planned by their mentors who also participated in advocacy on campus to facilitate an environment fostering social inclusiveness. Students engaged in 12 online threaded discussions and participated in a focus group interview one month after the program ended. Data were analyzed to examine the effectiveness of the peer mentor approach in expanding students' knowledge and perception of their role in transition services. Data revealed increased knowledge of the diverse challenges and strengths of individuals with IDD, increased knowledge of the goals and activities provided by post-secondary transition services, and an understanding of how OT services could contribute to such services. These benefits are exactly those needed to contribute to transition services, demonstrating that, at least for this content area, service-learning is a viable approach to addressing noted gaps in practice.

Keywords

Service learning, peer-mentoring, post-secondary transition planning

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ABSTRACT

A service-learning pilot project involving occupational therapy (OT) students and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) is described. The purpose of this pilot project, developed using Transformative Learning Theory, was to determine if service-learning could be a viable approach to provide in-depth learning in areas only superficially covered in a typical OT curriculum. The objectives of this experience were focused on developing the knowledge and skills needed to address a noted gap in OT practice, post-secondary transition services for individuals with IDD. Using a peer-mentor approach, OT students were matched with young adults with IDD for a fieldwork Level I experience that continued for nine months. Weekly experiences for the mentees were planned by their mentors who also participated in advocacy on campus to facilitate an environment fostering social inclusiveness. Students engaged in 12 online threaded discussions and participated in a focus group interview one month after the program ended. Data were analyzed to examine the effectiveness of the peer mentor approach in expanding students' knowledge and perception of their role in transition services. Data revealed increased knowledge of the diverse challenges and strengths of individuals with IDD, increased knowledge of the goals and activities provided by post-secondary transition services, and an understanding of how OT services could contribute to such services. These benefits are exactly those needed to contribute to transition services, demonstrating that, at least for this content area, service-learning is a viable approach to addressing noted gaps in practice.

Introduction

Service-learning is a form of active learning which has become quite popular in higher education (Bringle et al., 2011; Chambers & Lavery, 2018). The “service” component represents unpaid work intended to assist the mission of a community organization. The “learning” component involves an intentional structure to promote the acquisition of new knowledge or skill through activities such as critical reflection on one's experiences (Billig, 2011; Gray, 1999). Service-learning has been found to be mutually beneficial for both the community in which the service is performed and for college students who engage in such service (Chambers & Lavery, 2018; Lau, 2016).

Students benefit in that these experiences provide them with opportunities to apply knowledge and skills learned in the classroom with individuals in real-life contexts (Chambers & Lavery, 2018). In a study conducted by Greene (1997), occupational therapy (OT) students engaged in service learning reported an increased awareness of diversity in persons with disabilities and decreased stereotypical perceptions of older adults. In a study by Scott (1999), OT students engaged in a variety of community settings, were noted to develop an ability to form therapeutic relationships, skills in adapting activities to individual needs, and skill in group leadership. Gitlow and Flecky (2005) explored student perspectives on their experiences collaborating with community agencies on improving the accessibility of art venues. At the end of this experience, students expressed a deeper understanding of the importance of “adapting the physical and social environment to persons with disabilities" (p. 545). Additional outcomes included increased comfort interacting with persons with disabilities, increased understanding of the social constructs of disability, and the personal meaning of accessibility for persons with disabilities. They also reported an increased understanding of OT’s role in advocating for persons with disabilities (Gitlow & Flecky, 2005). More recently Lau (2016) conducted a study of students leading health promotion activities in an after-school program targeting children at risk for obesity. Students who participated in this project appreciated how the experience reinforced content learned in the classroom and expressed confidence in their ability to work with children of varied ages. Moreover, students reflected on their ability to problem solve and adapt their expectations to the child's developmental level (Lau, 2016). Given the outcomes of these studies, educational programs should consider service-learning as a strategy to provide a richness and depth to student learning that simply cannot be achieved in the classroom.

Transition Services

Besides benefits to the students, service-learning experiences may also benefit the profession. A possible use of service-learning could be to address topics not well covered in educational programs. One such topic may be transition services for high school students. Transition refers to times in life when change requires individuals to develop new skills, practice novel activities, or assume new roles and routines (Gibson et al., 2010; Orentlicher et al., 2017). One important transition occurs when individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) leave high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2017) and move into post-school occupations such as work, post-secondary education, and independent living. To promote success in these

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occupations, transition services, mandated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA; Almalky, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2017), are designed to identify challenges and provide the necessary supports to address those challenges. Successful transition planning requires collaboration between student, family, school, and appropriate outside agencies to provide those supports for the continuing needs of the individual with IDD (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Several authors have indicated that occupational therapists providing services in primary and secondary school settings have minimal involvement in post-secondary transition services (Abbott & Provident, 2016; Mankey, 2011). Kardos and White (2005) conducted a study that surveyed OT practitioners to determine the extent to which they participated in transition services. Their results indicated limited involvement in post-secondary transition services in addition to limited knowledge of OT's role in such services. Barriers to OT participation in transition services included a lack of knowledge of such services, a perception that transition is conducted by other professionals, a lack of funds to expand the role of the OT, already heavy caseloads, and family and other professionals' lack of awareness of the role of OT (Kardos & White, 2005; Mankey, 2011). One possible solution to overcoming these barriers is to provide a greater focus on the knowledge and skills needed for effective transition services in OT curricula. This focus should include not only more information specific to transition planning but include the skills of collaboration and advocacy in order to better prepare OT's to not only participate in transition planning but to also advocate for that participation (Abbott & Provident, 2016; Benson et al., 2021, Leytham & Otty, 2020; Mankey, 2011).

This article describes a pilot project using a service-learning experience with first year OT students intended to provide more in-depth learning regarding post-secondary transition services. While data was collected as part of the program evaluation of the project, the project itself was not considered research. The College Institutional Review Board (IRB) was consulted, and they agreed. Objectives of this experience included:

- Articulate an understanding of the diverse needs of individuals with IDD during the transition period from secondary to post-secondary occupations.
- Articulate an understanding of the goals of and activities provided by post-secondary transition services.
- Identify the role of OT in post-secondary transition services.
- Develop skill in working collaboratively with other professionals.
- Develop competency and skill in advocating for OT services.

Peer-Mentoring as a Service-Learning Approach

Mentoring is a practice that has been used as a strategy to support individuals' performance in domains such as business and medicine as well as education (Collier, 2015; Shaughnessy, 2013). Mentoring is considered a partnership in which both parties benefit from the relationship. Peer-mentoring is a strategy that uses individuals of similar age or experience working together to promote the achievement of personal or professional goals (Shaughnessy, 2013). As individuals with IDD transition from high school to adult occupations, they often experience barriers to full community inclusion that increase feelings of social isolation. Peer-mentoring programs have been used with

individuals with IDD to promote social inclusion while developing skills that contribute to successful engagement within the community (Athamanah et al., 2020). Given the similar age of college students and individuals using post-secondary transition services, a peer mentoring approach to this service-learning project seemed appropriate.

This pilot service-learning project involved OT students acting as peer-mentors, to individuals with IDD within a community transition service located on the college campus. This experience served as an option for fieldwork Level I for the OT students, referred to as mentors throughout this article. The program continued for the entire school year, but it should be noted that due to COVID restrictions, the last month was completed using an online format. Note that there were also fieldwork objectives associated with this experience. Since these were not specific to transition services, they will not be addressed in this article.

Description

For the past three years, the College partnered with a non-profit community agency that provides transition services to individuals with IDD. The work internship network program (WIN) combines an instructional element, provided on campus by community personnel, with work experience on-campus supervised by college staff. The program is open to young adults with IDD interested in gaining work-related skills prior to seeking competitive employment. Five to eight IDD participate in the program annually. These individuals are the mentees referred to in this article.

The WIN Program runs five days a week from September to June. A typical day starts with a brief morning meeting, followed by 4 ½ hours at a campus work setting with a half-hour lunch. Work settings are matched with the mentees' strengths and interests and include the dining hall, admissions office, athletic settings, office of advancement, the college radio station, and campus safety and maintenance services. Mentees have the option to rotate through the campus work settings to maximize their work-related experiences. While such rotations are strongly encouraged, mentees are allowed to choose their own assignments constrained only by the availability of settings. In addition, mentees are provided with the opportunity to audit college courses and engage in social activities such as attending a football game with similarly aged peers.

A peer-mentor component was added to the WIN program in collaboration with faculty from the OT program. Staff from the community agency as well as a faculty member from the college's OT department collaborated to design the program and oversee its implementation. The peer-mentor program was carried out each Wednesday afternoon from 12:00 to 3:00 PM. On that morning a vocational instructor provided classroom activities that supported the mentees' transition to competitive employment. In the afternoon, the mentees had lunch with their mentors followed by structured activities planned by the mentors designed to enhance the mentee's goals for transition. Goals included such things as interview skills, effective social communication, and time management.

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Besides the Wednesday afternoon times, mentors were also assigned readings, posted to a weekly online discussion forum, and participated in weekly planning sessions. Faculty guidance was provided, carefully ensuring that mentors' actions were safe and well-thought out but allowing mentors to also make mistakes and learn from those mistakes. Such guidance became minimal as the project continued and as mentors gained in confidence.

The peer-mentor program is seen as a potential model for meeting curricular objectives related to post-secondary transition services. Mentors were exposed to concepts from the social justice literature relevant to this service and the population including social determinants of mental health and wellbeing, mental health promotion, positive psychology, positive social functioning (Scaffa et al., 2010), and occupational justice (Nilsson & Townsend, 2010)**.** Students were consistently encouraged to apply their understanding of the concepts of occupational justice including occupational deprivation, alienation, marginalization, and individual rights to their planning and actions throughout the project (Nilsson & Townsend, 2010)**.**

The pilot project itself was based on the Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991) chosen due to its use in the master's OT program curriculum as a whole. Transformative Learning Theory is based on the premise that individuals develop a set of assumptions or fixed beliefs and expectations about the world based on familial experiences, community, and culture. Such assumptions or fixed beliefs often include stereotypes, and prejudices (Mezirow, 1991). The core of Transformative Learning Theory is the belief that people tend to uncritically assimilate their values, beliefs and assumptions (Cranton & Taylor, 2012; Mezirow,1991). Transformative learning occurs when an alternative perspective requires one to question previously held beliefs or meanings, thereby fostering the recognition of certain beliefs as oppressive and perhaps not in the best interest of those involved (Cranton & Taylor, 2012). Mezirow and Associates (2000) proposed that transformative learning occurs through some variation of nine elements. These elements were considered when planning the activities used throughout the project. Table 1 provides a listing of the nine elements with examples of how each was used in the project.

Table 1

Elements of Transformative Learning Matched with Examples from the Project

Element of Transformative Learning	Example of Learning Activity
Disorienting dilemma	This population was unknown to the mentors and they experienced a challenge in that limited information regarding each mentee was available. Some training was carried out initially, but mentors were expected to learn through exposure, experience and resources provided as the project progressed.
Self-examination	Prompts used in online discussions required mentors to engage in an examination of their personal context. Through such discussions as well as in-person group meetings, mentors shared knowledge and personal attitudes prompting them to realize their misperceptions regarding the mentees' self-awareness and ability to identify their own strengths, needs, and preferences.
Internalized role assumption	The mentors' emerging awareness prompted their understanding of the parallels of their existence with their mentees, fostering a desire to become positive role models.
Recognition that others share the problem	Mentors quickly realized others on campus experienced similar misperceptions of IDD. This recognition prompted action to educate others by engaging their mentees in various campus life activities while simultaneously advocating for inclusion and a greater understanding of the mentees' capabilities.
Exploration of options for new ways of acting	This exploration took place in group planning sessions and through online discussion prompts that facilitated constant reflection of past activities and construction of new ones. Readings were used in this exploration when mentors were asked to locate peer-reviewed articles describing evidence-based interventions applicable to working toward meeting their mentees' goals.
Building competence and self-confidence in new role	Mentors noted the greatest support they provided to mentees was social support. They focused on friendship and trust-building to inspire their mentees' confidence in attending social events with non-disabled peers. In this process, mentors themselves described a sense of increased competence and confidence in dealing with their mentees' social and sensory needs.
Planning a course of action	Mentors were self-directed throughout the project in developing plans for the mentees. Often this took the form of group activities for all, but occasionally mentors would plan an individualized activity for their specific mentee's goals. This planning began with simple activities but progressed into novel and innovative activities.

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Acquiring knowledge and skills	Faculty provided guidance to the mentors which often took the form of assigned readings and discussion prompts. Readings and prompts were not always planned ahead, but often grew from the mentors' expressed desire for specific information and/or skill development.
Engagement in provisional efforts to try new roles and assess feedback	One of the hallmarks of Transformative Learning is self-reflection. Such reflection took place throughout the project as a way to collect and assess feedback on mentors' actions. As an example, mentors discussed the desire to enhance mentees' social participation. They encouraged engagement in activities that provided connections to other individuals on and off campus, followed by reflection on how their role in the activity enhanced or hindered mentees' engagement and participation.

Recruitment and Training of the Peer-Mentors

Seven OT students in the first year of the OT program were recruited by an OT faculty member who provided oversight and guidance throughout the 2019-2020 academic year. Many of these mentors expressed an interest in a future career in school-based OT. Mentors were assigned to specific mentees by the agency staff overseeing the program. They participated in a one-time 90-minute training session provided by the agency and supervising OT faculty prior to the start of the program. Content presented in this training included an overview of the agency's mission and goals for the WIN Program as well as factors that predict adult success and the barriers and facilitators for such success (Test et al., 2009). The expected role of the student as peer-mentor was covered in the training, including serving as a friend, a positive role model, and sharing knowledge, skills, information and perspectives to foster personal and professional growth (Ramani et al., 2006). Finally, the mentors were guided by community agency staff to develop an understanding of the mentees' capabilities and potential while respecting professional boundaries.

Wednesday afternoon group activities were planned by the mentors. In all instances, the individual needs of the mentees were considered through individualization of the group activities as well as individualized supports. Examples of activities are provided in Table 2. Initially, mentors chose activities designed to build a trusting relationship between mentors and mentees. They then progressed to activities designed to develop work skills and capabilities, consistent with the mission of the transition service. Consideration of inclusiveness and building age-related social skills was important throughout the program.

Table 2

Examples of Activities Provided by Mentors

Weekly lunch in the campus dining hall: Mentors chose the cafeteria as an environment in which social skills could be developed. Mentees engaged in conversation with each other, with mentors, with college staff, and with other students. In the cafeteria, as well as when simply walking around campus, mentees were surrounded by peers of the same age. College students were found to be accepting and welcoming, creating an environment which fostered occupational engagement and sense of inclusiveness. Mentors provided support as mentees engaged in what was sometimes an overwhelming environment full of decision-making demands such as where to sit, what to eat, and when/where to throw out trash.
Job-related oral presentations: Building on one mentee's stated goal of becoming a teacher, mentors asked the mentees to prepare and present orally on either their current job responsibilities or responsibilities of the job they desired to obtain. Mentors gave their mentees tips on preparing a professional presentation much as they learned tips from the faculty in their graduate courses. Further, they modeled a professional presentation prior to having the mentees perform their own presentations.
Wellness activities: Mentees reported a desire to learn about how to deal with stress. Mentors planned a series of activities (education on healthy eating, yoga sessions, making and using stress balls). In all of these activities, mentors learned along with the mentees.
Community engagement: In a collaborative manner, students in the college's nutrition program provided training and support in food preparation and a community Food Recovery Program. Mentors participated in the community program training along with their mentees. Mentors and mentees volunteered together at worship hall to package food for indigenous persons during the holiday season.
Mock interviews: Mentors created a simulated job interview session for the mentees to practice the skill of interviewing for a job. These mock interviews were held with faculty volunteers on campus. The mentees answered interview style questions about themselves and their current jobs. The mentors prepared the mentees through role-modeling. Debriefing afterwards included providing feedback.
Sporting events: This activity occurred on the weekend. Mentors and mentees attended a college hockey game together, negotiating a new environment with additional social and problem-solving demands.

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As mentioned previously, the last month of the program was carried out virtually due to the COVID pandemic response. The agency staff and the mentors identified the importance of maintaining the peer mentor relationship virtually to ensure consistency and appropriate closure to the relationship. This created challenges as mentors and mentees struggled to maintain social connections in the online environment. On the one hand, the technology challenged the mentees, many of whom simply stopped attending. However, the mentors acknowledged that the experience also emphasized how changes in context and routines could significantly impact occupational performance, mentioning regression in such skills as time management and communication. In terms of work skills, the mentors saw a need to support mentees in developing some technological skill, particularly given the environment that some of the mentees would experience in the workplace.

Assessment

Two methods were used to collect data to assess the effectiveness of the peer-mentoring program.

1. Analysis of the online threaded discussion postings, responding to 12 different prompts, were qualitatively analyzed and matched to the learning objectives.
2. Seven peer mentors engaged in a virtual focus group approximately one month following the last peer mentoring session. The OT faculty supervisor led the focus groups, asking questions targeted at understanding the impact of the program on the achievement of the learning objectives and the feasibility of the program for continued implementation.

Both authors independently reviewed the discussion posts as well as the transcripts from the focus group interview. They then came together to share findings and reach consensus. Findings are organized below by learning objective. All objectives were met.

Objective: Articulate an understanding of the diverse needs of individuals with IDD during the transition period from secondary to post-secondary occupations.
Mentors clearly indicated they met this objective through the combination of relevant readings, discussion postings, and the peer mentorship itself. Prolonged (two semesters) exposure to, and the resulting relationships with their mentees enabled the mentors to understand their mentees' diverse social and emotional needs. Several mentors posted about the cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of living with IDD and how those factors impact overall function and social participation, creating possible barriers to job satisfaction and retention.

Mentors were able to articulate that one of the greatest barriers to employment for individuals with IDD is the stereotyping and discrimination that can occur from the community and potential employers. Several of the mentors came to the peer-mentor experience with exposure to children with ASD and IDD. Those exposures created a stereotypical perception applied to their early experience as peer mentors to this group

of individuals. Mentors however came to an understanding that they needed to address and change these stereotypes, expressing that there is no such thing as a "typical" individual with IDD. As one mentor indicated, "*every mentee had different interests"* and yet another mentor indicated that "*the program had five individuals, each with very different strengths and challenges."*

Objective: Articulate an understanding of the goals of and activities provided by post-secondary transition services. Mentors were initially trained by staff of the WIN program, which has as its mission to support their mentees in achieving post-secondary employment. Mentors came to understand the critical role of developing skills needed to obtain and maintain employment such as effective and appropriate communication, professional behaviors, self-advocacy, and use of coping skills. One mentor indicated that education on the mentees' rights when employed was an important topic that needed to be covered during transition services. The last month of the peer mentor program was carried out virtually due to COVID. This was seen as an advantage by one mentor who indicated that the ability to use technology was an important employment-related skill. However, this objective was not fully met. Post-secondary transition services include much more than simply preparation for employment. Given the mission of the WIN program, mentors did not get experience with this range except through their readings. Mentors indicated that the WIN program should place some emphasis on life skills such as managing finances, social relationships, psychological well-being, and independence in general.

Objective: Identify the role of OT in post-secondary transition services. One mentor posted that OTs' expertise and skills in analyzing those activities and tasks, required for employment, could be beneficial. Based on this expertise, interventions for successful employment, and independent living, might include such things as task modification and implementing other adaptations. Mentors also identified a role as educators, mentioning specifically education in strategies to deal with anxiety, depression, and social anxiety. In addition, mentors recognized the potential for the marginalization of this group of individuals and identified the potential role of the OT in advocating for this group of individuals, specifically with potential employers, and facilitating self-advocacy in their mentees.

Objective: Develop skills in working collaboratively with other professionals. Throughout the WIN program, collaboration between agency staff, college personnel, mentees, and mentors were encouraged. For instance, mentors sought out feedback from the agency staff on a regular basis to ensure the activities and their interactions aligned well with the goals of the WIN program. The mentors recognized and valued this interprofessional collaboration and indicated it was critical for quality programming. The mentors were able to articulate the roles and responsibilities of these other professionals and the congruence with their own roles. One mentor summarized what was learned by stating that collaboration needed the creation of *a "strong relationship with those currently working at the facility (through) active listening, mutual respect, clear communication without jargon, leadership, and teaching skills to demonstrate knowledge of practice."*

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Objective: Develop competency and skill in advocating for OT services. As noted above, mentors recognized the role of advocate as a potential role for OT**.** They wove advocacy strategies through several of their planned, and unplanned activities. Mentors identified how their own stereotypes were transformed through the peer mentor program, allowing them to identify the stereotyping nature of others. With this knowledge, they were able to advocate with campus personnel and other students for the benefit of mentees. For example, mentors advocated with students in the college's nutrition program who were developing a training module for the mentees. A mentor stated that such advocacy resulted in "*the college campus, and students on campus...accepting and welcoming help to create an environment that fosters (the mentee's) occupational engagement."*

Discussion

A peer mentoring approach was chosen as the focus of this pilot project because such programs have been shown to result in a mutual benefit to both mentor and mentee (Shaughnessy, 2013). Benefits for the mentee were noted although not the focus of this article. One of the most obvious benefits for the mentees was the ability to experience a college environment while sharing experiences and creating positive social relationships with non-disabled peers (Schwartz et al., 2020).

In terms of the OT student mentors, the achievement of all learning objectives related to learning concepts and skills related to post-secondary transition services is the most obvious benefit. The purpose of this pilot project was to determine if service-learning opportunities could be used as a supplement to OT program curricula to address noted gaps in professional education, such as that gap noted in the literature related to preparation for contributing to post-secondary transition services (Abbott & Provident 2016; Kardos & White, 2005; Mankey, 2011). In this pilot project, the peer mentoring of individuals with IDD did indeed facilitate the in-depth learning of knowledge and skills specific to such transition services. It is our hope that these mentors, in their future careers, will positively impact the role of OT within post-secondary transition services. This pilot project has proven its potential to add value to the OT program.

Additional benefits to the mentors should be mentioned. The goal of the Transformative Learning Theory is to challenge existing assumptions and biases. The mentors did indeed transform. Similar to outcomes reported in peer mentor programs on other college campuses (Athamanah et al., 2020; Griffin et al., 2016; Hafner et al., 2011), mentors reported significant personal and professional development from their mentoring experience. Most notable, mentors reported the mentoring experience opened their eyes to their own stereotyped perceptions of individuals with IDD. This new knowledge motivated them to move beyond the comfortable weekly meeting space and introduce their mentees to others on campus in the dining hall, the athletic center, and at a college hockey game.

The mentors valued educating other students and college personnel with the goal of fostering social inclusion. Engagement in these activities led to new collaborative projects, one involving students from another professional program (nutrition) in which mentors and mentees participated in a food recovery training program. The mentors took advantage of this opportunity and others to model for non-disabled students their confidence in their mentees' ability to engage in typical college-life activities, in turn providing an opportunity for the mentees to show their competence and hopefully, dispelling stereotypical thinking. Mentors extended their activism off-campus by inviting their mentees to volunteer to package food for the homeless and indigenous persons during the holiday season at a community site.

A person-centered approach was modeled by the OT faculty supervisor and WIN staff toward the mentors. The mentors were observed to use the same modeling approach to allow the mentees a voice in the choice of activity and goal setting. For example, mentors would talk about the challenges they were experiencing, and the faculty supervisor would suggest how they might address that challenge. Similarly, mentors would talk to their mentees about the challenges the mentees were facing, incorporating that information into choice and planning of activities. While not totally person-centered, it was an emerging skill for the mentors.

Mentors also developed knowledge and skill in working with groups. Mentors had to learn how to identify individual needs, and then address those needs with a skill-building activity that was appropriate for the group as a whole. For example, mock interviews were used but interview questions, interview approach and the type and amount of support provided to each of the mentees differed. Intentional modeling of appropriate social skills and communication was a common strategy used by the mentors with individual mentees during group activities. Explicit but tactful feedback during such times was used to correct and teach the mentees how to listen and support each other.

Implications for Occupational Therapy Education

Occupational therapy programs must meet ACOTE standards for accreditation. The masters' curriculum provides knowledge and skills to practice as a generalist. This often leaves little room to provide the in-depth learning of content and skills needed to effectively address a gap in the services provided by OTs. The use of service-learning opportunities to provide such in-depth education has potential and should be a consideration given the multiple benefits identified above and in the literature on service learning.

This pilot project allowed students the option to choose the experience as a way to meet a fieldwork Level I requirement. With careful planning of service-learning experiences, students should be able to meet the objectives related to fieldwork, or other courses, while at the same time addressing an interest related to their future career. This type of student-centered approach is a value-added to educational programs.

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The use of peer mentoring is an approach to service-learning that has the potential for meeting the needs of both OT student mentors and community individuals with IDD. The perceptions of the mentors can further shed light on inclusive social programs that can be generalized to other college campuses.

Implications for Occupational Therapy Practice

This pilot project was initiated to address an identified gap in OT practice, that of OT's role in transition planning. The benefit of facilitating growth in the mentors' advocacy skills has potential, however, to impact OT practice in multiple areas where the role of OT could be, but is not currently, perceived.

Through this experience, the mentors became aware of stereotypical thinking and how it impacts social inclusion and, most likely, employment of individuals with IDD. Using advocacy with staff and other college students on the college campus allowed the mentors to see the power of such advocacy in facilitating a more inclusive environment. As these OT student mentors gain employment and advance in their careers, such advocacy may be useful in establishing working environments that are accepting of individuals with IDD and are also socially inclusive.

Conclusion

Service-learning has been shown to be of benefit to both mentors and mentees. In this pilot project, potential benefit to the profession was found. By demonstrating achievement of learning objectives related to the knowledge and skills needed by OTs involved in post-secondary transition service, these mentors are better prepared to address the barriers reported to interfere with OT involvement in such services. Additional benefits to educational programs are possible, as seen in this project which met a community need and established a working relationship with a community agency.

One of the peer mentors summarized the experience best in a posting.

> *"I would love to share that this experience has taught me how to think critically and creatively every week. In working with this group for the past two semesters, I have watched myself, my peers, and our mentees all change and grow for the better. For our mentees, this has meant growth towards new goals, which has given us mentors even more motivation to want to be better each week. For us mentors, I have watched us each week come together and challenge ourselves to continue to grow, to think more critically and analytically in our planning, and to be more flexible. And personally, I have found myself always striving to think outside the box, yet remaining as client-centered as possible."*

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