Overview of Professional Reasoning

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Definition of Professional Reasoning:
“Professional reasoning is the process that practitioners use to plan, direct, perform, and reflect on client care.” (Schell, 2009). “Whenever you are thinking about or doing occupational therapy for an identified individual or group, you are engaged in professional reasoning. It is not a question of whether you are doing it, only a question of how well.” (Schell, 2009)

Types of Professional Reasoning:
- **Scientific**
  - Diagnostic: Concerned with the cause or nature of the condition
  - Procedural: Consideration of the use of intervention routines for identified conditions
  - Hypothetical-deductive: Involves development of hypothesis (induction) and testing of the hypothesis (deduction)
- **Narrative**: With narrative reasoning, the client is the main character, not the disease. It involves understanding the meaning that a disease, illness, or disability has to an individual and considers their values, goals, past experiences, roles, etc.
- **Pragmatic**: Considers all the practical issues of treatment.
  - The Practice Context: Examples: organizational culture, rehab funding, practice trends
  - The Personal Context of the OT: Examples: clinical competencies, preferences, values, demands outside of work
- **Ethical**: Ethical reasoning considers the question, ‘What should be done?’ It considers the principles of:
  - Autonomy
  - Beneficence and Nonmaleficence
  - Justice
  - Veracity, Fidelity, Confidentiality
- **Interactive**: Interactive reasoning focuses on the interaction with the client and of people that are important in the client’s world. It focuses on the therapeutic relationship between the OT and the client and involves the “Therapeutic use of self”: Example: Use of praise or touch to encourage or motivate a client
- **Conditional**: Conditional reasoning involves modifying interventions in response to changing conditions. It also involves imagining what the future of the client would be like and revising therapy to suit this vision. It requires experience and is seen in OT’s at the expert level.

Influence of Personal Factors on Professional Reasoning
- Knowledge
- Skills
- Past experience – Reflection on those experiences
- Ability to observe, empathize, communicate effectively, and listen well
- Repetition of experiences with Reflection
- Use of whole body – ears, eyes, nose, touch
- Awareness of your own values, beliefs, and assumptions
Tools for Reflection and Development of Professional Reasoning

- Other clients
- OT colleagues, other OT students, and other professionals
- Theories, models, and frameworks
- Relevant case studies, journal articles or books

“In problem identification and problem solution, practitioners blend theories with their own personal and practice experiences to guide their actions. Theoretical knowledge helps the practitioner to avoid unjustified assumptions or the use of ineffective therapy techniques and to reflect on how his or her own experiences in therapy are similar to or different from theoretical understandings.” (Schell, 2009)

Tips for Development of Professional Reasoning While on Fieldwork

- Develop your knowledge in the area of practice that you are working in.
- Develop your observation skills – see, feel, smell, hear
- Develop your listening skills
- Ask your preceptor about the reasoning behind certain interactions/interventions with clients. Think about this yourself even before you ask!
- Talk through your reasoning processes with your preceptor.
- Reflect on each day – what surprised you, what you learned, etc. Try journaling!

Reflection Questions for Students

- Which problem area should take priority?
- How effective were the assessment/ treatment procedures? What theory or model were they based on?
- What did you expect in the session with the client? What was different than what you expected?
- Did you change from the original plan for the intervention? Why?
- How could you apply what you’ve learned here to another client or health population?

References