

Occupational Therapy Clinical Education Program

Clinical Educator Tip Sheet

Supporting adult learners

Adult learning theory contributes to an understanding of how adults learn most effectively. Knowles (1980) developed six guiding principles of adult learning. These six principles are presented below, along with some suggestions (adapted from OTPEC-Q 2007) about actions clinical educators can take to facilitate the learning of adults during clinical practice.

1. Adults are internally motivated, autonomous and self-directed

Clinical educators can:

- Show interest in the student's thoughts, opinions, knowledge and their preferred learning style
- Discuss the student's own learning goals for the placement
- Discuss the student's learning goals during weekly supervision giving opportunity for reflection
- Encourage the student to identify their own progress towards assessment criteria
- Suggest projects or tasks that reflect their interests and encourage use of available resources (eg. library, journals, databases, experts, other students)
- Lead the student toward inquiry before giving them too many facts
- Provide regular and constructive feedback

2. Adults bring life experiences and knowledge to learning experiences

Clinical educators can:

- Develop rapport with the student and encourage them to ask questions
- Find out about your student's personal, work and study life
- Assist them to draw on their previous experience when problem-solving, reflecting and applying clinical reasoning
- Facilitate reflective learning opportunities, linking new learning to what they already know.

3. Adults are goal oriented

Clinical educators can:

- Be explicit about the goals for the placement, referring to the SPEF-R and giving examples of demonstrating evidence of attainment in each area.
- Provide meaningful learning experiences and enable the student to make links between these experiences and their learning goals.

4. Adults are relevancy oriented

Clinical educators can:

- Explain the relevance of the decisions you make and actions taken making your clinical reasoning explicit
- Offer choice regarding fieldwork projects or in-service presentation ensuring they are relevant to the student's interests and learning needs.

5. Adults are practical

Clinical educators can:

- Ensure the student is able to engage with practical learning opportunities which can be offered in the practice setting.
- Promote active participation and experience in working with other professionals

6. Adult learners like to be respected

Clinical educators can:

- Take interest in the student, make them welcome and regard them as a colleague
- Acknowledge the experience they bring to the placement
- Encourage expression of their ideas, reasoning and feedback

For more information on using adult learning principles with students, please refer to Part three of the OTPEC-Q Clinical Educators Kit: <http://otpecq.edu.au/resource/index.html?page=65340&pid=65365> or go to: <http://otpecq.edu.au/resource/index.html?page=65375&pid=65340>

References:

Knowles, M.S. (1980). The modern practice of adult education. From andragogy to pedagogy. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Cambridge Adult Education.

Occupational Therapy Practice Education Collaborative – Queensland (OTPEC-Q). (2007). Clinical Educator's Kit. Part Three. Approaches to Clinical Education. Student Supervisors Toolkit - Basic Principles of Adult learning.

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