Throughout the history of occupational therapy, clinical education has been essential to the professional preparation of the entry level practitioner. The evaluation of clinical competence for entry level practice continues to be the primary measure of the effectiveness of Level II fieldwork. For example, the Report of Performance in Student Affiliation (AOTA, 1953-1974) and the Fieldwork Performance Report (AOTA, 1973-1987) have both been used to evaluate students' clinical competence. Now, the latest version of these instruments, the Fieldwork Evaluation for the Occupational Therapist, implemented in January 1987 (AOTA, 1987), is the instrument approved and recommended by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) for evaluating the clinical competence of occupational therapy students.

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However, several key issues warrant discussion for current users of the Fieldwork Evaluation. These key issues are the planning of fieldwork related to items on the Fieldwork Evaluation, rater training, the use of the Fieldwork Evaluation as a midterm and final examination, interpretation of scores, and ongoing evaluation of the instrument.

Planning Fieldwork

The 51 items on the Fieldwork Evaluation were designed to be appropriate for a variety of fieldwork settings without extensive ongoing rater training (Cooper, 1985). This feature was critical because of the large number of new fieldwork educators each year.

The purpose of this article is to provide information regarding the use of the Fieldwork Evaluation by fieldwork educators.

Full descriptions of the development of the Fieldwork Evaluation can be found elsewhere (AOTA, 1986). Information on its reliability and validity is reported in the current issue of the Occupational Therapy Journal of Research (Cooper & Crist, 1988).
items shorter than the evaluation contained in the Fieldwork Performance Report, it could be much shorter still. Internal consistency between items is very high, which means that any one item that includes scores on the Performance, Judgment, and Attitude scales is likely to be identical to the final rating of all items combined. Although the committee considered the reaction a 1-item form would receive, the 51 items remained in the final draft of the form because of their importance as rated by the field test.

As defined in the Fieldwork Evaluation, performance is the level or quality of performance; it is the student’s demonstration of technical skill through doing or action. Judgment is the rationale or justification for performance—knowledge in action. This is the student’s application of theory to analyze and guide therapeutic planning, decisions, and the selection of activities. Attitude is the professional behaviors or attitudes demonstrated during performance; it is the student’s therapeutic and professional conduct. Each of these three categories represents a separate congregation of similar behaviors. Thus, on any one item, student performance may vary across all three scales.

Two further explanations are warranted. First, Performance provides the subcategories of assessment, planning, treatment, problem solving, and administration/professionalism, which are used to specify areas of strength or weakness in specific treatment subcomponents. Second, there is a major difference between the expectation for an occupational therapy student and that for an occupational therapy assistant student in the category of Judgment because the former student must be able to apply theory to practice.

To effectively evaluate and supervise a student’s performance, fieldwork educators must write specific behavioral objectives for each of the items on the Fieldwork Evaluation as they relate to learning activities at their particular site. To limit this overwhelming task, fieldwork educators should develop the objectives for the Performance category first. Across each Performance subcategory, the educator should identify the theories to be applied by the student during the rating on Judgment and state a few general objectives for Attitude. Later, objectives for Judgment and Attitude can be elaborated and even developed into a checklist to monitor the acquisition of skills. Crist (1986) is a useful source for writing objectives. She lists a hierarchical classification of words that parallel Fieldwork Education categories: performance is similar to the psychomotor domain; judgment is similar to the cognitive domain; and attitude is similar to the affective domain. As long as the behavioral objectives specify the expected level of performance, are stated in ways that can be measured, and are appropriate for the resources of the fieldwork setting, Fieldwork Education users should not have to define the 5-point rating scale, since the scale is universally interpreted (Long, 1982).

Field-testing demonstrated that all important tasks related to entry level clinical practice are represented in the Fieldwork Evaluation. Thus, using “not observed” or “not applicable” ratings is not appropriate, as some degree of exposure to each item is expected. Likewise, if an academic program identifies a fieldwork program as not offering training in important entry level skills, the continued use of the fieldwork site should be assessed.

Rater Training
Input on rater training for the Fieldwork Evaluation was discussed by Cooper (1985). The lack of formal support for rater training coupled with the field test of the proposed Fieldwork Evaluation indicated that the form could be self-contained for both rating and scoring. Nevertheless, fieldwork educators have expressed concern that this self-contained form does not contain adequate rater information. This concern can be alleviated by providing in-service opportunities for the fieldwork education staff in a given center to discuss expected student performance related to the Fieldwork Evaluation objectives appropriate for that center, as well as to study resources (AOTA, 1988; Crist, 1986; Frum, 1988).

Use as a Midterm Evaluation or Counseling Tool
The Fieldwork Evaluation is to be used for final evaluation of a student’s fieldwork performance. After a review of the literature in the evaluation sciences and a study of problems encountered with the previous fieldwork evaluation, it was recommended that a separate counseling mechanism for ongoing student performance be developed. However, members of the Commission on Education preferred that the Fieldwork Evaluation be adapted for midterm use. As a result, the Fieldwork Evaluation contains instructions for using a satisfactory/un satisfactory scale for midterm evaluation. A formal mechanism for effective methods to counsel students during fieldwork continues to be an issue among fieldwork educators.

As part of the midterm review, the student and the fieldwork educator should together review established objectives and develop a plan or student contract to enable the student to achieve entry level competence by the end of the fieldwork. Objectives achieved previously by the student should be used as reinforcers while performance is being directed toward accomplishing objectives not yet achieved.

If, at any time during the fieldwork experience, the student’s potential for achieving entry level competence by the end of the fieldwork is in question, either the student or the fieldwork educator should contact the school immediately to discuss appropriate action. How the student performs in relation to established objectives should be the basis for fieldwork consultation.

Use as a Final Evaluation
Near the end of the fieldwork experience, the fieldwork educator, using the Fieldwork Evaluation, is to assess the level of skill attained by the student. Ratings should reflect the student’s current level of attainment in performance, judgment, and attitude. Considered as a whole, these ratings reflect readiness for entry level practice.

Since the Fieldwork Evaluation includes only important items, using
the comments section as it was used in the Fieldwork Performance Report is not necessary and may even lead to the comments section's competing with the meaningfulness of the item ratings. The new form does have a comments section, but its substance should be reduced by the awareness on the part of fieldwork educators that all significant behaviors for entry level competence are evaluated by the 51 items. Completion of the comments section is optional, but it can be used to briefly summarize the student's readiness for entry level practice.

Although on the Fieldwork Performance Report the comments section was used to provide supplementary information for future employee screening, its use in this way on the Fieldwork Evaluation would challenge the integrity of the assessment. Assessing the acquisition of clinical skills and assessing employability are two different things. After completing the Fieldwork Evaluation, fieldwork educators should write a separate job reference letter in which they expand on a student's readiness for specific clinical roles and functions.

Interpretation of Scores
Each educational program is required to indicate which of their students are eligible to take the certification examination after satisfactory completion of all required academic and fieldwork requirements. Minimal criterion scores published in the Fieldwork Evaluation for the Performance, Judgment, and Attitude scales are two standard deviations below the mean of the national field test sample (N = 646). Since each academic program has the prerogative to decide what satisfactory completion entails as well as to assign grades, fieldwork educators should be aware of each school's policies regarding the interpretation and use of student scores on the Fieldwork Evaluation (AOTA, 1985). Until fieldwork is removed from the responsibility of the academic program, the issue of who has the final say on a student's fitness for certification will continue to be problematic.

Field-testing demonstrated that, in comparison with the Fieldwork Performance Report, whose scores frequently showed a ceiling effect, the Fieldwork Evaluation better differentiates levels of skill between students. Fieldwork educators must be forewarned that the majority of students are not expected to score consistently in the higher ranges of the evaluation since ratings should accurately reflect a student's level of skill attainment. If students with varying entry level competence frequently receive high scores from the same fieldwork center, this limits information regarding true student performance and suggests that the site may not be offering sufficient challenge.

Continuing Assessment of the Fieldwork Evaluation
It has been recommended that the Fieldwork Evaluation be reevaluated every 5 years to make sure it reflects clinical practice. Regular reevaluation would help control the major cost of a total revision and field-testing. To date, however, there is no specific reevaluation process.

Independent researchers should continue to investigate the reliability and validity of the Fieldwork Evaluation. The results of such research could provide information for periodic reevaluations of the instruments.

Summary
The new Fieldwork Evaluation for the Occupational Therapist has been developed and tested through a series of field tests. With use, careful attention to issues arising from its application, and additional research, the Fieldwork Evaluation can be retained and updated to meet changes in clinical education and evaluation procedures.

References