

**INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION FACTORS IN THE
SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP THAT PLAY A ROLE IN
ENHANCING OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY STUDENTS'
CLINICAL REASONING DURING PHYSICAL FIELDWORK
EDUCATION**

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DECLARATION

Ethical clearance number: 134/2006

I Marianne de Beer, hereby declare that the work on which this thesis is based, is original (except where acknowledgement indicates otherwise) and neither the whole work nor any part of it, has been, is being, or shall be submitted for another degree at this or any other university, institution for tertiary education or examining body.

Signed

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TITLE: Interpersonal communication factors in the supervisory relationship that play a role in enhancing occupational therapy students' clinical reasoning during physical fieldwork education

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ABSTRACT

Learning outcomes for students whose education takes place in the physical field are, among others, knowledge and skills to implement the occupational therapy process. In this process patients' problems are assessed and recorded, treatment planned, implemented, continuously evaluated, and the progress of each such patient professionally recorded. Since this is a process which requires distinct clinical reasoning skills on the part of the student various factors can influence the development of such skills during their training. Many authors are of the opinion that it is the interpersonal communication between supervisor and student which underpins successful fieldwork education.

In this study the purpose therefore was to investigate how the interpersonal communication factors in the supervisory relationship play a role in enhancing occupational therapy students' clinical reasoning during physical fieldwork education.

At the outset a partially mixed, sequential dominant, status-qualitative design was employed. An inter-subjective or interactional epistemological position was adopted in order to generate data from the participants' subjective experiences, and an interpretive approach was used to understand how occupational therapy students and supervisors perceive the supervisory relationship during the formers' learning of their clinical reasoning skills.

Data was generated from four sources. First of all, from focus groups conducted separately with students and their supervisors on completion of the fieldwork block; secondly from semi-structured one-on-one interviews held with students as well as supervisors on completion of the formers' fieldwork block; thirdly from students' Work Habits Reports, and finally by recording the practical exam grades students obtained in the physical field.

To analyse the data both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed. Information obtained from the focus groups and one-on-one interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. After this process, transcribed data was coded and analysed following both a bottom-up and top down approach. The former was carried out by an independent coder and the latter by the researcher herself to determine which interpersonal communication themes and patterns might emerge

from the collected data. A clinical psychologist using the Interpersonal Pattern Analysis, a diagnostic instrument, analysed the audio tapes of 14 supervisors who participated in the focus groups and one-on-one interviews. The themes which emerged from the thematic-content analysis and the Interpersonal Pattern Analysis were compared with the grades students obtained for their clinical reasoning skills in the final practical exam in the physical field.

The findings of this study indicated that supervisors of students who received high grades solved problems effectively, were predominately linear in their approach, showed only limited empathy, were rigid in their expectations and gave only limited confirmation. In line with these findings supervisors of students who received lower grades were also effective in terms of problem solving skills and also gave limited confirmation, but were circular in their approach, showed partial empathy and were flexible.

Finally in respect of the interpersonal approach to human behaviour there is no one role or pattern of interaction that is more effective in all contexts. A style or a pattern that may be highly effective in one kind of relationship may be ineffective in another. What is emerging here though is that a style which is characterised by flexibility and empathy may not necessarily be an effective teaching style, whereas a style characterised by a linear approach and limited empathy did indeed prove to be significantly more effective.

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