Deconstructing Hierarchies: Service Users as Co-Teachers in Occupational Therapy Education

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Introduction: While occupational therapy currently tends to view itself as operating based on a client-centered, collaborative approach, studies often reflect a gap between rhetoric and practice. It seems that the pedagogy of occupational therapy faces new challenges fuelled by these tensions. One way of resolving this is by including service users with disabilities as co-teachers in the classroom. This approach may open a dialogue for students and leverage the development of new knowledge that sets the foundation for an authentic, collaborative client centered practice.

Objective: To present a new pedagogic standard which moves away from the medical model and toward a collaborative, client-centred approach. This standard supports embracing the respect for, and partnership with, people receiving services and replace previous practice patterns. The ultimate objective is to strengthen the legitimacy of the professional and sustain clients' independence.

Approach: The pedagogy centers on a co-teaching approach consisting of simultaneous teaching partnership between a faculty member and a service user. In addition, our teaching is based on continuous dialogue created in the classroom, where occupational therapy students learn from collaboration with service users.

Practice Implications: This framework provides the students with a unique opportunity to explore and experience different viewpoints, broadens their professional perspectives and contributes to the development of their professional identities as collaborative occupational therapists.

Conclusions: Students and co-teachers can participate in the challenging experience of integrating theoretical knowledge with lived experience, thereby augmenting the development of a new and inclusive knowledge base.