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Neurology within Occupational Therapy.

Emma Price
Western Michigan University

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The Baccalaureate Project Experience

I can remember first hearing about the baccalaureate project and thinking “I have no clue how I will ever accomplish that.” For me, it was intimidating, because it was a project where all the decisions, research, implementation, everything, came from me. Although I had an amazing professor helping me through the process, at the end of the day it was my project, and my responsibility to finish. However, despite these fears the baccalaureate project turned out to be something that not only grew my foundational knowledge, but also grew me in my confidence and independence as well.

The first step of this project was to figure out what I wanted it to be about. For me, I have always had an interest in neurology, and studying occupational therapy has only made this grow. In our program we have classes where we learn about conditions such as traumatic brain injuries (TBI), spinal cord injuries (SCI), and strokes. Although we learned the foundational information, I remained curious about occupational therapy’s direct role in working with clients with these conditions. Having this interest, led me to decide to find research about said involvement and create a presentation based on the information found. This presentation could be used for future classes but was overall just a source to put the research that was found. Once this was decided, I then had to spend most of my time in class looking for research. From this research I then had to write my literary review, which compiled all my found articles and explained why they were beneficial and valid. However, even with doing this I found myself doing even more research the second semester of this project. The main reason for this is because there is little research about occupational therapy’s direct impact working with these clients. Once I had compiled my research, I began to create my presentation. Then finally, I created my poster that I would use to disseminate at the Barbara Rider Colloquium. The poster explained the overall process of the

baccalaureate project, what my project was about, and what I learned from completing it. Then, as mentioned above, I used this poster to present at the Barbara Rider Colloquium to the occupational therapists, students, and staff that attended. At this event I was not only able to share what I had learned, but also hear from many people ranging from students all the way to people who have been in the field for years.

As I mentioned above, the baccalaureate project builds foundational knowledge as well as leadership skills. On the foundational side, I learned many things while completing this project. First, I gained a greater understanding of traumatic brain injuries, spinal cord injuries, and strokes in general. I learned much more about epidemiology, warning signs, how often they occur, etc. On top of this, I learned certain ways occupational therapy might be involved. I learned about the various assessments and interventions that could be used for these various conditions. Some of these include the Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM), the Assessment of Motor and Process skills (AMPS), among many others. Interventions may include things such as working on activities of daily living (ADLs), cognitive process training, or passive range of motion training. A main takeaway from this is that there are many avenues that occupational therapy could take with these clients, but a large part of it is dependent on the client. Every client is different in their goals, abilities, and work ethic, so as occupational therapists we are going to mold our treatment to fit the client, helping to create the just right challenge. However, even though I found all these amazing things, my main finding was the most shocking to me: there is little published research on occupational therapy's direct involvement with these conditions. One of the main reasons that I had to do so much research is that it can be difficult to find. Now, this is not to say that there is not any research, but that there should be more. I feel as though most of my career I have heard my professors talk about the

importance of documenting information, and keeping records of what is being done. Now, I knew this was important, but I never fully understood why this was vocalized so much until completing this project. Occupational therapy is a field that has been around for many years but has continued to struggle gaining awareness. The main reason for this is because there have been many periods where there has not been documentation of the impact occupational therapy has/can have. This became evident to me when I was researching because I was specifically looking for occupational therapy's direct role in the rehabilitation of these conditions. Often, an occupational therapist would be on the team, but the articles would not tell what they did directly. Seeing this led me to realize how important it is that what occupational therapy does within sessions, and in practice in general, be written down. Whether this be SOAP notes, research being conducted, or by other means, it needs to be recorded. Not only for students such as myself, but more importantly for potential clients, who could benefit from having occupational therapy. If people do not know about occupational therapy, then they cannot grow from it. This is not to say that occupational therapy is the only avenue that can be used but is one that far too many people do not know about. Occupational therapy is something readily available to help clients with these conditions, and many others, but it is our job to help make it known.

Looking at my project now, I would say that it was successful. I was able to gain more understanding on these conditions, find some research on occupational therapy's direct impact on them, and from that create my presentation. However, looking back now, and with the knowledge I now have on this topic, I would go about this project very differently. Although I was proud of my presentation and the information I found, I think I would choose a different approach if I were to take this same idea. Instead of being focused on creating a presentation for the program, although important, I think it would have been very eye opening to somehow have partnered

with a neurology clinic, or hospital, in this project. Now honestly, I am not completely sure how this would have looked. However, I think there would have been a couple of ideas I could have looked into. First, as I said before, I think contacting a neurology clinic, or even an occupational therapist who specializes in this area, would have been incredibly insightful. Not only would I learn more about what occupational therapy does in this setting, but I would have been hearing/seeing it firsthand. On top of this I think it would have been interesting to create some sort of survey that could be sent out to capture communities' awareness about occupational therapy. This could be comprised of questions such as, "have you heard of occupational therapy?" "How would you describe occupational therapy?" etc. Doing something like this would help not only me, but other practitioners to gauge how much awareness there is in various communities about what occupational therapy is, and the impact it could have on their, or a loved one's, life. I think that my project would have still been about occupational therapy within neurology, but also taking the time to learn from practitioners, and clients if possible. Then from there, not only sending out the survey to gain understanding, but then creating something (video, presentation, report), that explains occupational therapy's role with these conditions. Then lastly, I would include different resources people can investigate, and even places to go if needed (hospitals, clinics, etc.). Now, all this to say, I would not have these ideas if I had not done the research of my original baccalaureate project first, which I think speaks loudly for what I learned through this experience. If anything, I would want to take my project further and make it more "client-centered" or community focused than solely looking at educating students. Occupational therapy within neurology is a large topic, and there is room for much further research, which is what makes it so interesting to me.

The baccalaureate project is something that I do not feel I can fully capture with words. It was exciting, while also at times frustrating. It increased my understanding in many areas, while also having me in times of utter confusion. It forced me to take charge of something and see it to completion, even if at times I was questioning what I was doing. Somehow, one project encompasses all those feelings and emotions. However, what I am realizing even more is that this is what it will be like every day in the field of occupational therapy. Some days are exciting, and I may know exactly what I am doing. Other days I may be full of confusion and feel I am lacking in an area. However, no matter the emotions, this project has again taught me one major thing; occupational therapy can and does have a major impact on people's lives, they just need to be made aware of it. I have learned about the need for occupational therapy's role, specifically in neurology, to be made known. Maybe occupational therapy will not have all the answers, but it does offer methods centered around each person to help them achieve their goals. Not only this, but an occupational therapist will have hope and belief in their client, even if their client does not have it in themselves. Occupational therapy is an avenue that could bring hope and meaning to a person's life again, and that is something that should be known.