Indiana State University
College of Health and Human Services
Department of Applied Medicine and Rehabilitation
M.S. Occupational Therapy

Philosophy of Learning

The occupation of learning is a complex adaptive response comprised of infinite interactions between student abilities and the context in which learning occurs. Students enrolled in the Indiana State University OT program are viewed as occupational beings with a desire to master the requirements of becoming entry level occupational therapists. Indiana State University OT Faculty are charged with developing learning environments that engage students in goal attainment. In meeting this charge, the Indiana State University OT faculty must address the breadth of services (domain) as well as the processes of occupational therapy practice.

The ideal learning environment provides a graded contextual challenge that facilitates mastery as indicated by Bloom’s Taxonomy. An environment consisting of the delivery of content and evaluation of knowledge is an important aspect of learning. However, solely relying on learning about occupational therapy is limiting. We believe that students become invested in the process when they are allowed to engage in opportunities. The ability to “do” facilitates the adaptive response and integration of what they have learned. Over time, a transformation in thinking and processing occurs with the accumulation of constructive learning opportunities.

Indiana State University has incorporated a learning philosophy that uses Bloom’s taxonomy as the basis for teaching foundational knowledge through high-order thinking by addressing the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. To accomplish this educational task, we have incorporated numerous learning theories to address Bloom’s domains, as well as differing types of course content, learner focus and desired outcomes. Our objective in teaching is to empower students to become life-long learners and good citizens by enforcing educational accountability, learning to learn and how to access information. Students in our classes are not passive learners and are required to engage in activities.

Our teaching philosophy blends cognitive learning theories (Smith & Ragan) constructivist (Kolb), social cognitive (Bandura), cognitive dissonance (Bruner, Festinger) and cognitive flexibility (Spiro) theories. In order to affect change or growth experiences and knowledge accrual, an emotional relationship must be present to connect the experience to the information (Behaviorist: Skinner, Watson and Thorndike). To provide those emotional relationships with information and knowledge we enact all the theories mentioned above to facilitate activities such as games (jeopardy, life, aggravation, monopoly etc...), group learning, hands-on experiences, real life case reports/study and experiences and student directed learning. Ready access to information via the web for today’s millennial students means that creating a value for retaining information for immediate recall may be difficult. Combining real life situations with self-accountable classroom activities, such as using the lap top classroom to have students answer their own questions, provides a basis for student directed learning and resonance of information through an emotional connection.
Student engagement and excitement in the classroom is a good barometer of educational awareness and knowledge transition. The desired outcome of the interactions between the learner and the deliberate learning environment is that Indiana State University students attain their goal of becoming entry level occupational therapists. In the process of attaining their goals, students become professionals who are collaborative with individual’s seeking services as well as with other professional disciplines who deliver care. Students/future professionals are intrinsically challenged to excel in therapeutic practice demonstrating the responsibilities associated with the emerging role of an occupational therapist.


