

Growing from Dilemmas: Developing a Professional Identity through Collaborative Reflections on Relational Dilemmas with Role Partners

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Educators are challenged with nurturing future generations of occupational therapists and helping them navigate the complex transition from ‘students’ to ‘therapists’. Based on the perception of growing from conflicts and exploration, the current study focuses on developing the professional identity of occupational therapists through a pedagogical method of collaborative reflection on relational dilemmas. The study describes the implementation of this method in a course for occupational therapy undergraduate students entitled “Supervision on Professional Development”, which applied a group supervision and peer learning framework to reflect on students’ fieldwork experiences. The study is based on analyzing 392 dilemma cases and 196 texts of personal reflection on classroom work. The qualitative data analysis of the case studies revealed six overarching relational dilemmas novice therapists are often called upon to deal with when working with role partners (patients, patient’s family and colleagues from other health professions). Analyzing the personal texts of reflection highlighted the effectiveness of collaborative reflection in developing a professional identity. The collaborative reflection on relational dilemmas experienced by the students in their fieldwork was found to help students in bridging the gap they often experience between theory and practice. It is suggested that this method can be adapted in undergraduate courses and in group supervision programs of other health professions’ education as well.