



DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION FRAMEWORKS

A Framework for Addressing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Everyday Practice for Occupational Therapy

Introduction

Statement of Purpose

The field of occupational therapy utilizes a variety of frameworks and models to inform the occupational therapy (OT) process for assessment and goal development, and to provide intervention and guidelines for practitioners. This document applies the Occupational Adaptation (OA) model to address diversity, equity, and inclusion within the field of occupational therapy. The model provides a method to identify areas of need and supports the growth of our students, practitioners, and those in academia.

The purpose of this framework is to provide a tool for increasing awareness of the diverse needs of individuals in our professional communities and to provide inclusive occupational therapy practice for all. The occupational adaptational model provides the framework for exploring our own needs as we press for mastery as an occupational therapy practitioner, a student, a fieldwork educator, or a faculty member. This framework guides individuals through understanding their own perspectives as occupational therapy practitioners, fieldwork students, fieldwork educators, or faculty in occupational therapy education. As we press for practice from a perspective of cultural humility, we must recognize the implicit and explicit biases that impact our interactions. The framework also allows understanding the perspective of others and considering the influence of environment and contexts on providing inclusive occupational therapy services.

Key Terms

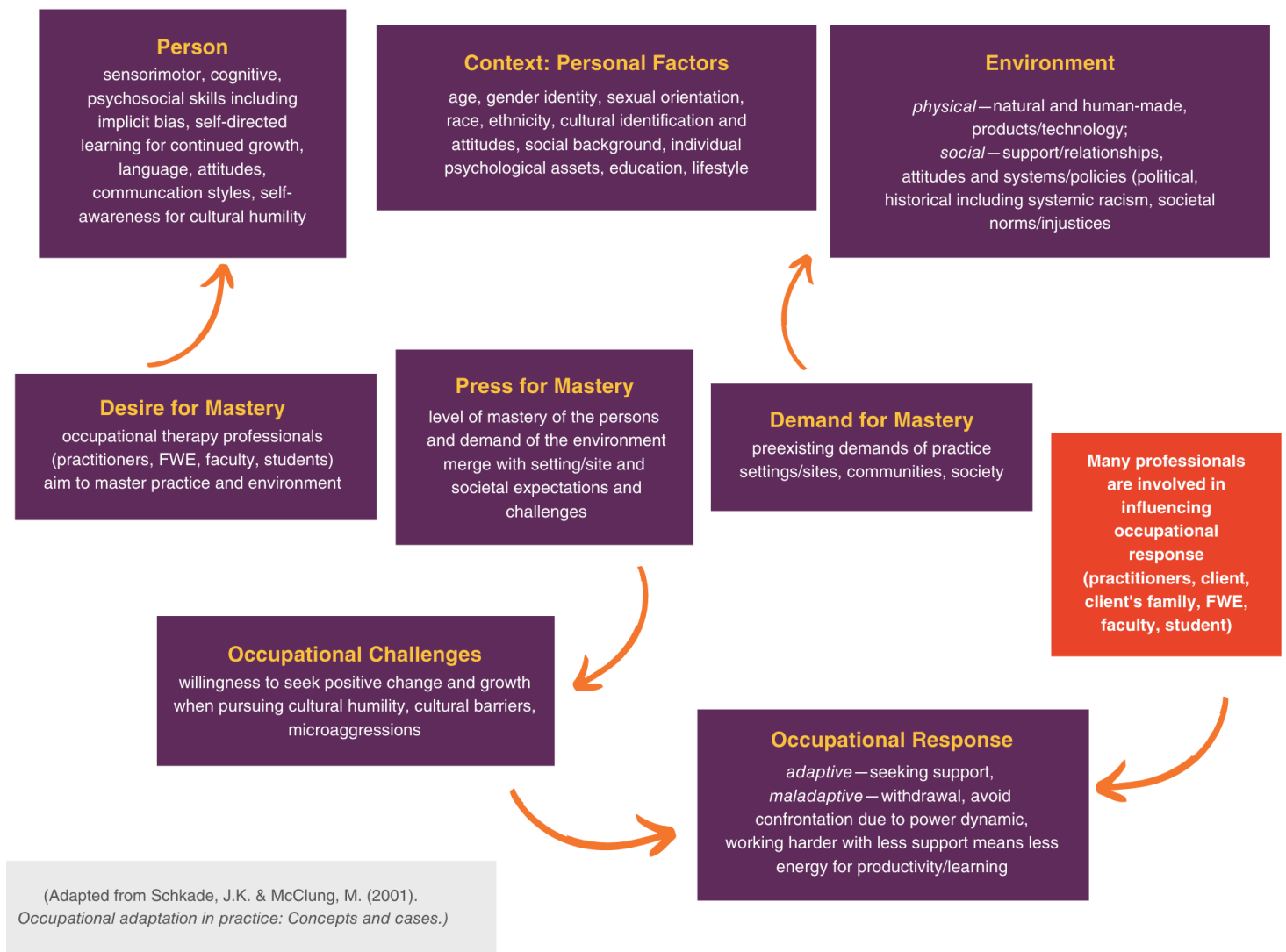
FWE—Fieldwork educator

OA—Occupational Adaptation model. The occupational adaptation practice model serves as a frame of reference combining two domains, occupation and adaptation, in occupational therapy. In this model, occupation is defined as “self-perceived meaningful activities” requiring active participation. Adaptation is defined as an adaptive response to meeting an occupational challenge when an ordinary response does not master the activity. An increase and maintenance of competence in activities are characterized as an interaction between a person and an individual’s environment (Cho, 1992). Viewed as a holistic practice model, OA emphasizes occupational activity, and the importance of relative mastery.

OTP—Occupational therapy practitioner

OCCUPATIONAL ADAPTATION (OA) MODEL

Figure 1



The occupational adaptation model defines person as sensorimotor, cognitive, and psychosocial. These factors can be expanded upon by exploring the performance skills and client factors in the *Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process, Fourth Edition* (OTPF–4; American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2020b).

The occupational adaptation model identifies the environment as physical, social, and cultural. Figure 1 reflects inclusion of both the environment factors and context (personal factors) as described in the OTPF–4 to explore application of the model in supporting inclusive occupational therapy practice.

OCCUPATIONAL ADAPTATION (OA) MODEL

Goals and objectives of the Occupational Adaptation Model

- Apply the occupational adaptation model to identify multiple factors related to diversity and inclusion influencing interactions in the profession of occupational therapy:
 - Addressing one's own personal desire to master skills and tools to address implicit bias, microaggressions, macroaggressions within oneself and/or responding to lack of awareness in others (e.g., discrimination, racism, ableism).
 - The occupational therapy practitioners having awareness of the desire for mastery in their client and the impact of personal and environmental factors on their success and ability to master.
 - The above is also applicable to faculty recognizing the desire for mastery in their student and the fieldwork educator recognizing the desire for master in their student.
- Explore how desire for mastery (person) and the demand for mastery (environment) interact for press for mastery in occupational performance to understand diversity surrounding occupational performance. This includes the impact of the context and environment, social expectations, and how they confound the desire to achieve personal growth as it relates to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Understand person factors to include self-awareness of implicit biases through cultural humility, and extend understanding of the environment to include societal, political, and historical contexts influencing the interactions of occupational therapy professionals. (See Case Examples to follow).

Summative List of Recommendations

- The person desires to function masterfully and adaptively, and each person brings sensorimotor, cognitive, and psychosocial skills for occupational engagement (e.g., mental capacity to buffer the effects of microaggressions, implicit bias, stress, and fatigue from racialized trauma).
- Occupational environment demands mastery—environmental influences impact occupational engagement (e.g., social injustice, cultural norms, and beliefs of the organization and/or individual).
- The interaction of desire and demand produces “press for mastery,” resulting from the merger of personal skills and societal expectations and challenges.
- Occupational challenges resulting from societal injustices, systemic racism, or microaggressions will produce either an adaptive or maladaptive response. Many individuals provide support in eliciting an adaptive response to the occupational challenges resulting from diversity.

Resources

[AOTA Guide to Addressing the Impact of Racial Discrimination, Stigma, and Implicit Bias on Provision of Services](#) (AOTA, 2021, May 27).

[AOTA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Toolkit](#) (AOTA, 2021)

[AOTA Statement Occupational Therapy's Commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#) (AOTA, 2020a).

[OT is linked to occupational justice, which has an inclusive agenda](#) (Hocking, 2017).

CULTURAL HUMILITY PYRAMID

A Framework for Implicit Bias Awareness and Intersectionality of Cultures

Use of this pyramid addresses:

- Understanding that diverse individuals (whether students or colleagues in work settings) have their own set of challenges and should be met with compassion and equitable practices.
- Learning to address the gaps in our knowledge about cultural awareness.
- Recognizing the importance of implicit/explicit biases, prejudice, and power dynamics throughout occupational therapy.
- Promotion positive change by encouraging engagement to identify individuality and question our own bias.



Note: From Agner (2020) and Vasquez (2020).

OCCUPATIONAL ADAPTATION (OA) MODEL

Case Study for Applying Principles of the OA Model

Case Study for applying principles of occupational adaptation model (purple) from perspective of fieldwork student (green) and fieldwork educator (orange). The case study applies principles of the occupational adaptation model in supporting inclusive fieldwork education. The model is applied considering the desire and demand for mastery of both the occupational therapy student and the fieldwork educator in a Level II fieldwork experience.

Applying Principles of Occupational Adaptation Model

Occupational therapy student desires to achieve competence in the fieldwork educational experience. The occupation is education, which fulfills the role of student and prepares the student for a future role as an occupational therapy practitioner.

The fieldwork educator's occupation is job performance and maintenance in their role as an occupational therapy practitioner.

The student's and fieldwork educator's desire for mastery and level of mastery are influenced by their person factors of sensorimotor, cognitive, and psychosocial skills (Schkade & Schultz, 1992).

The student's and fieldwork educator's attitudes, adaptability, learning style, skill development, and professional identity are examples of person factors that influence desire for mastery.

Fieldwork Student Perspective

Zalia has entered her first Level II fieldwork as an occupational therapy student. Zalia identifies her learning style as kinesthetic, as she learns by doing. Zalia feels competent in her knowledge and skills obtained in the didactic portions of her occupational therapy program. While she required remediation to develop the sensorimotor skills necessary for proper transfer techniques, she has the cognitive skills to clinically reason through a client's situation and progress an intervention plan. Zalia is hoping to improve her comfort level when interacting with clients.

Fieldwork Educator Perspective

Jill has been a fieldwork educator for many years and approaches teaching students through verbal exchange of information. Jill feels confident in her ability to educate students in fieldwork given her years of experience and success with past students.

Her goal in fieldwork education is to foster a positive and successful experience for the student.

OCCUPATIONAL ADAPTATION (OA) MODEL

Case Study for Applying Principles of the OA Model

Applying Principles of Occupational Adaptation Model

The environments and personal factor contexts surrounding fieldwork place demands on the occupations for the student and the fieldwork educator. For example, the student's age, physical limitations, racial identity, and ethnic groups may be some of the contexts the student is bringing to the fieldwork educational experience. Further, the intersection of these contexts is important.

A fieldwork educator who approaches a fieldwork student from a cultural competence perspective, may feel they know how to address the needs of a student with any of these personal factor contexts.

However, an individual who identifies with a specific culture personal factor context may not embrace all the traditions or stereotypes of that specific context, and how those contexts transact will also impact the expression of those contexts (Agner, 2020). The fieldwork educator also brings their own contexts such as age, racial and ethnic identity, education, psychological assets, and spiritual beliefs, which influence the fieldwork experience.

Fieldwork Student Perspective

Zalia is a Black female and is 24 years old. She was raised in an urban, middle class neighborhood and lived in a household with her parents—a white mother and an African American father and two older siblings. Her father was raised in Nigeria, and English is his second language. Zalia's family did not speak English very often in their home.

She is the first member of her family to go to college and pursue a graduate degree. In her first year of occupational therapy graduate school, she was considering dropping out because she could not afford the tuition. Zalia is confident with herself but often finds herself not speaking up during situations of conflict in her program. She rarely met with faculty for office hours and was able to complete the didactic portion of her curriculum with a strong academic record.



OCCUPATIONAL ADAPTATION (OA) MODEL

Case Study for Applying Principles of the OA Model

Applying Principles of Occupational Adaptation Model

The fieldwork educator also brings their own cultures such as age, racial and ethnic groups, and spiritual beliefs, which influence the fieldwork experience.

The physical environment of the fieldwork site places demands - for example, accessibility needs for the student with physical limitations becomes a factor. The social culture of the fieldwork site also impacts the student's press for mastery in fieldwork education including work dynamics, ethics of the organization, values, and communication styles.

The attitudes, systems, and policies of the fieldwork site are also factors in the demand for mastery— social norms, beliefs, work dynamics, support and relationships among co-workers and authority/subordinate positions, communication styles, and behavioral expectations of staff at the site.

Other demands on the mastery of fieldwork education from the fieldwork site include time constraints in real-world practice, deadlines for documentation, pace of setting, and productivity demands.

Fieldwork Educator Perspective

Jill is a white female and is 48 years old. She has lived in the same metropolitan community all her life, including attending a local university for her occupational therapy degree. Jill only has experience speaking English.

Jill attended graduate school after her sibling attained a law degree. Jill has always been able to speak up for herself and has high expectations for her own work and expects the same work ethic in those around her.

She enjoys her current position as a team occupational therapist and thrives in the fast-paced environment of her setting.



OCCUPATIONAL ADAPTATION (OA) MODEL

Case Study for Applying Principles of the OA Model

Applying Principles of Occupational Adaptation Model

The environment is not just limited to the fieldwork site's physical location, but also includes social, historical, and political influences (Lucas & Washington, 2020). These may be societal expectations and challenges that are interacting with the student or fieldwork educator. For example, when societal injustices occur, stress can occur for individuals and may impact how a student or fieldwork educator carries out their daily activities, such as decreasing attention to task.

Fieldwork Student Perspective

She is at a Level II fieldwork site in a metropolitan community that is fast-paced, and she has observed quick communication that occurs among team members throughout the day.

The occupational therapy department has mostly white and female practitioners. A few of the other rehab staff are males and one speech language pathologist's ethnicity is Hispanic. A sign in the staff office says, "When facing adversity, work harder."



OCCUPATIONAL ADAPTATION (OA) MODEL

Case Study for Applying Principles of the OA Model

Applying Principles of Occupational Adaptation Model

As the student's desire to master the fieldwork educational experience interacts with the demands of the fieldwork site environment and personal factor context, a **press for mastery occurs**. For example, the student is striving to meet the expectations of the fieldwork setting, to meet the demands of the academic program, and to demonstrate professionalism. Further, the student must adapt clinical reasoning based on the specific client situations and the setting demands. The student's knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired in the didactic academic program interact with the fieldwork environment to accomplish mastery in the fieldwork experience.

As the student transitions from the didactic program environment to the fieldwork environment, occupational challenges may occur when the student's capabilities are not able to meet the demands of the fieldwork environment or when role expectations differ between the fieldwork student and the fieldwork educator (Garrett & Schkade, 1995).

Fieldwork Student Perspective

Zalia has goals at this Level II fieldwork to be more outgoing both with colleagues and when establishing rapport with her clients. Zalia often chose different clothing and styled her hair differently while attending classes in her program to fit in with her predominantly white peers. She is continuing this in her fieldwork setting after reading the professional dress code and appearance policy for the site.

After 2 years in her academic setting, Zalia felt she finally was able to submit documentation that met her professor's standards. She adapted to the standard in her academic setting to read the written feedback she received and make changes to her writing. She communicated with professors primarily through email and rarely participated verbally in class or went to office hours. The fieldwork site requires primarily verbal interaction such as verbal group report with the team to start each day.

Fieldwork Educator Perspective

Jill has experience in her training during her occupational therapy practice to be culturally competent. From this training, she feels she has extensive knowledge about various cultures, and she has engaged in numerous self-awareness activities about her own cultural identity. She recently read an article about cultural humility in practice and is trying to understand how this may impact her role as a fieldwork educator.

She recently completed an implicit bias activity and identified the impact of power dynamics as she explored cultural humility. Jill recognizes that she has implicit bias that may influence her interaction with Zalia. She has become aware that there is a power dynamic between the fieldwork educator and fieldwork student since Jill has influence over Zalia passing this fieldwork experience.

OCCUPATIONAL ADAPTATION (OA) MODEL

Case Study for Applying Principles of the OA Model

Applying Principles of Occupational Adaptation Model

As the person factors and environment of the student interact with the fieldwork educator, the fieldwork site, societal demands, and the mastery of the occupations for fieldwork, **occupational challenges** are encountered that influence the press for mastery.

A challenge may be situations of academic stress such as difficulty attaining a specific skill proficiency. A challenge may be cultural barriers such as language or social differences between the student and the site. A challenge may come from a microaggression that the student encountered walking into their fieldwork setting for the day.

Fieldwork Student Perspective

During the first weeks of her Level II fieldwork, Zalia was struggling to adapt to the fieldwork educator's preference for in-person meetings where Zalia had to verbally report her plans for her client sessions. The timeline for submitting written reports such as documentation was also much quicker than she had experienced in the academic setting. Zalia felt she had to document nearly perfectly and was often staying at her fieldwork much later than another Level II fieldwork student at the site.

In the 4th week at her site, Zalia spent an evening watching news and social media reports of the shooting of a young Black male and protests that were occurring in several communities. Zalia arrived at her site the next day prepared to have a higher client caseload as her fieldwork progressed in expectations. Several team members were discussing the news stories and protests from the previous evening and a colleague stated she wished the news would quit covering these stories and she did not understand why these stories were being shared.

Zalia had difficulty staying on time with her larger case load and was unable to verbally state the intervention plan for two clients when reporting to the fieldwork educator. She was informed she needed to have better performance, or her midterm evaluation would reflect her difficulties.

Fieldwork Educator Perspective

Jill has never been a fieldwork educator for a student who was Black. She was concerned that her own implicit bias may impact the fieldwork experience. She was also concerned about microaggressions that may occur in the setting as the department had little experience in working with individuals from diverse racial or ethnic cultures.

Jill was also feeling unsure of her own skills as a fieldwork educator when one of her recent students failed a Level II fieldwork.

OCCUPATIONAL ADAPTATION (OA) MODEL

Case Study for Applying Principles of the OA Model

Applying Principles of Occupational Adaptation Model

From these occupational challenges, the student is going to generate an adaptive or maladaptive occupational response. An **adaptive response** may be seeking support from peers, faculty, the fieldwork educator, or family. It is important to note that the lack of control for a student when facing discrimination limits the likelihood of having an adaptive response (Dubose, 2017).

An adaptive response from a fieldwork educator can be supported through being aware of the needs of diverse occupational therapy students. For example, weekly progress review meetings can be opportunities to have conversations about the cultures presented by both the fieldwork educator and fieldwork student and foster a supportive environment (Brown & Chin, 2019; Eklund et al., 2014).

A **maladaptive response** may be to not seek help because the student has invested a great deal of time and money and they just need to get through the fieldwork experience. Fear of confronting a power dynamic can also result in a maladaptive response for a student. When maladaptive responses occur, a student will often work harder with less support and have less energy available for learning (Brown & Chin, 2019).

Fieldwork Student Perspective

Adaptive Response: Zalia reached out to her mentor in the Coalition for Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity (COTAD) mentorship program and discussed how she was feeling about the recent societal events that had occurred and how they were impacting her performance at fieldwork. She also spoke with a family member. From these discussions, Zalia was able to create a plan to speak with her fieldwork educator.

Maladaptive Response: Zalia spent more time in the department creating intervention plans and preparing documentation. She continued to have difficulty taking verbal feedback from the fieldwork educator and making changes to her performance in sessions. Zalia was fearful of speaking to her fieldwork educator about her needs because she didn't want anything to interfere with her midterm evaluation.

Fieldwork Educator Perspective

Adaptive Response: Jill sought support for working with a student who was African American to ensure that she was aware of the diverse needs and how to be an inclusive fieldwork educator. She sought input first from Zalia by asking what her learning needs were and specific questions to facilitate a discussion about race and culture that may support the fieldwork experience for both Jill and Zalia.

Maladaptive Response: While Jill had explored her implicit bias in previous activities, she neglected to remain aware of these biases in her role with Zalia. She tried to focus on articulating her verbal information more clearly in the hopes that it would improve Zalia's performance.

Case Study Summary

Many individuals are involved in eliciting occupational responses from a student on fieldwork. This is not just the responsibility of the student. Fieldwork educators, academic fieldwork coordinators, other practitioners at the site, and faculty all have the potential to influence a student's occupational response.

IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING

Assessments, Resources, and Self-reflection Activities

Bias Training:

As individuals and occupational therapy practitioners our own biases impact the care we provide. Examining these biases is important in working to reduce health disparities for populations.

- Complete your personal implicit bias assessments for race, disability, and transgender from the [Project Implicit site](#).
- Read the Preliminary Information, then click on “I wish to proceed.”
- Next you will find a page with several Implicit Association Tests (IAT) - choose the assessment you wish to complete (recommendations: race IAT, disability IAT, and transgender IAT). Each assessment takes about 10 minutes to complete.
- Similar to personality type indicators, the results from implicit awareness are not definitive and may be influenced by other factors related to the test.
- Reflect on your results and respond with what you will do to continually examine your biases indicated from each IAT and how implicit bias has occurred in your fieldwork/healthcare experiences.

Learning Opportunities:

- Review the [definitions of terminology related to social justice](#) (AOTA, 2021).
- Apply ways to combat bias, discrimination, microaggressions, privilege, race, and social justice to health care practice.
- Watch [The Gardener's Tale](#) to further define racism (Nobis, 2014).
- View the [National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine's \(NICABM\) video on moving from cultural competence to anti-racism](#) (Bryant-Davis, 2020).

Things to Consider:

After viewing the NICABM video, take a moment to do the following activities.

- Consider how your own bias may influence how you interpret another individual—whether that person is Black, wealthy/poor, indigenous, a person of color, has a disability, lesbian, gay, transgender, queer, White— particularly in your role as an occupational therapy practitioner.
- Write a response to a client asks you, “What are your thoughts about the impact of racism (or White supremacy) on occupational therapy?”
- Engage in hard conversations with work colleagues on specific strategies for managing microaggressions (go beyond just defining microaggressions).
- Develop advocacy strategies for responding to microaggressions (as a witness of microaggression or when the target of microaggression).
- Develop strategies for acknowledging our own microaggressions (perpetrator).
- Implement advocate training for all.
- Adopt policies and procedures that evaluate and create avenues of changing organizational culture to eliminate the status quo of racism—built around the cultural humility pyramid.
- Require bias training for all.

IMPLICIT BIAS TRAINING

- Adopt holistic policies and procedures for recruiting, hiring, and retaining diverse faculty and for ensuring holistic admissions in educational programs.
- Create resources for all to support DEI.

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**Author: Kelly Erickson PhD, OTR/L, Chair, Occupational Therapy Department,
The College of St. Scholastica, Duluth, MN**