



# Fostering Student Success at a Level II Pediatric Fieldwork Placement

Kathleen M. Austin MOT, OTR/L; Kerry Burokas MS, OTR/L;  
Amy O'Connor MS, OTR/L; Stacey E. Szklut MS, OTR/L

## Introduction

Clinical fieldwork is a valuable and intensive learning opportunity for occupational therapy students. It provides students with the chance to utilize experiential learning, a key component in developing higher-level clinical skills required for entry-level practice (Coker, 2010). Despite proficiency in academic coursework and the desire for success, many students struggle to meet expectations in specialized fieldwork settings. In order to best prepare for a pediatric fieldwork placement, students should review relevant academic materials, understand context-specific professional behaviors, and increase their comfort in interacting with children. In doing so, students are more apt to approach a Level II fieldwork placement with increased confidence and competence, resulting in more successful outcomes for both the students and their clients.

## Academic Preparedness

- Progression of Development
  - Motor milestones
  - Play skills
  - ADLs/IADLs
- Theoretical Frames of Reference
  - Piaget & Cognition
  - Vygotsky & Social Interaction
  - Bandura & Social Learning
  - Maslow & Hierarchy of Basic Needs
  - Sensory Integration Theory
  - PEO Model
  - Model of Human Occupation
- Common Diagnoses/Conditions
  - Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
  - Cerebral Palsy
  - Down Syndrome
  - Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)
  - Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD)
  - Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
  - Anxiety
  - PTSD/Trauma
  - Avoidant/Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID)



Preparing for a fieldwork placement in pediatrics often requires additional learning outside of the classroom. In an outpatient clinic setting, students are often expected to review sensory integration theory, as well as developmental feeding and motor milestones. In addition, they may be instructed to familiarize themselves with common diagnoses and conditions.

## Professionalism

- Dress code
  - Comfortable yet professional- when in doubt, ask someone!
- Preparedness
  - Do your homework and be organized! Set deadlines, complete recommended readings, ask questions, and do your research
- Timeliness
  - Punctuality, attendance, and completing documentation
- Self-presentation
  - Confidence, willingness to learn, and approachability
- Social interactions
  - Interpersonal skills, communication, and non-verbal language



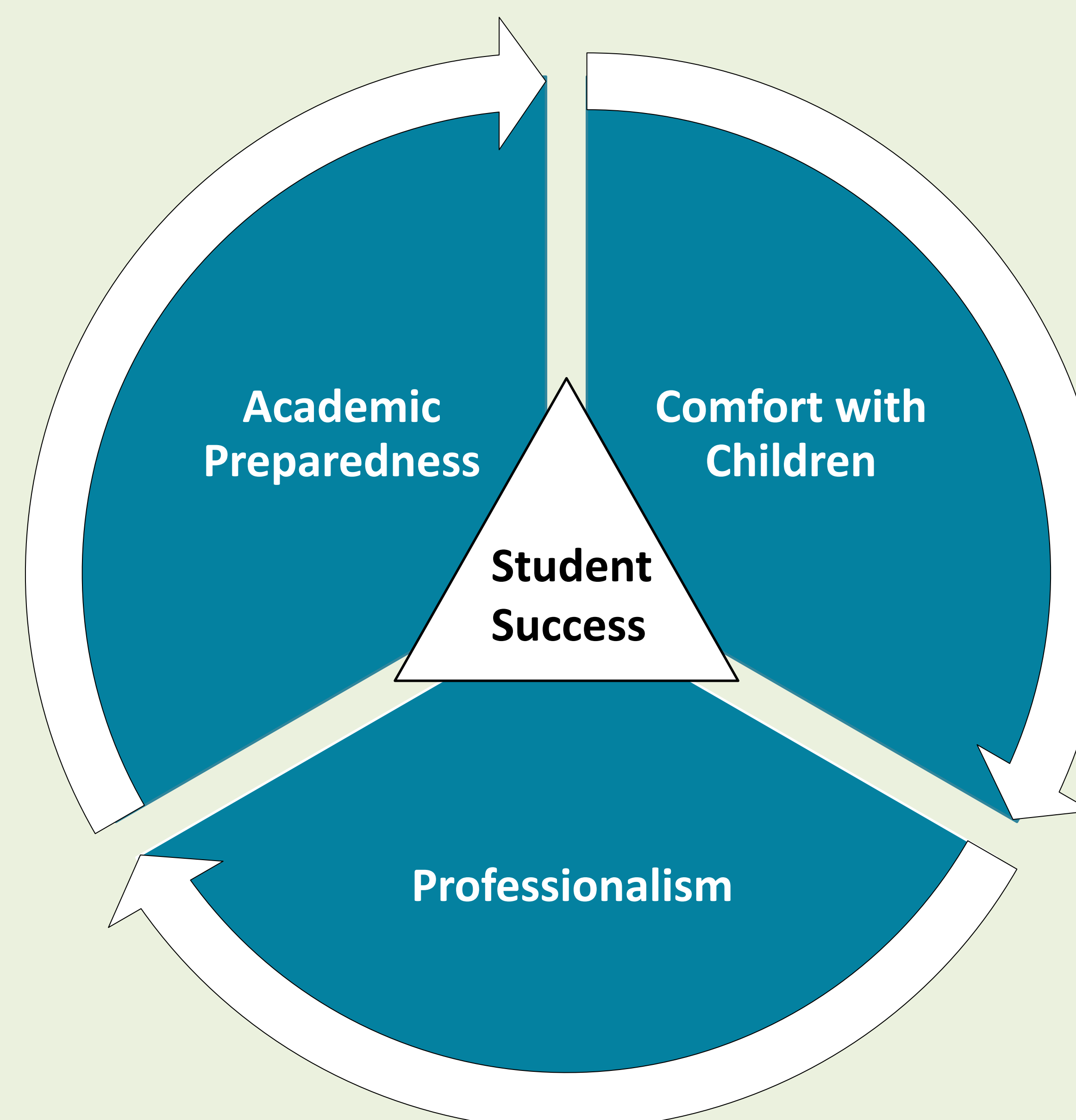
Balancing a comfortable, yet professional, dress code can be challenging for new students in a pediatric placement. It is important to discuss expectations during the interview process in order to ensure practical yet professional attire.

## Comfort with Children

- Playfulness
  - Spend summers and weekends babysitting/nannying
  - Work as a summer camp counselor or youth sports coach
  - Seek out opportunities for clinic observations
  - Apply for volunteer and internship opportunities
- Just-right challenge
  - Meet the child's interests
  - Engage and motivate the child
  - Maintain safety of the child & the therapist
  - Set achievable and attainable outcomes
  - Match the child's current developmental skills
  - Provide a reasonable challenge consistent with current performance level
- Child/family-centered approach
  - Establish rapport with client & family
  - Determine valuable and meaningful goal areas
  - Provide education and support for home programming
  - Avoid clinical jargon/use parent-friendly terminology
  - Play with purpose- connect play to skill and function



Learning to provide the "just-right challenge" takes time and practice. However, it is important for students in a pediatric fieldwork to feel comfortable being playful and silly with their clients in order to help elicit participation and progress. Finding an activity that is child-directed and motivating, but one that also fosters confidence and stretches the clients outside their comfort zones is the key to success.



## References

Andonian, L. (2017). Occupational therapy students' self-efficacy, experience of supervision, and perception of meaningfulness of Level II fieldwork. *The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy, 5*(2). doi: 10.15453/2168-6408.1220

Coker, P. (2010). Effects of an experiential learning program on the clinical reasoning and critical thinking skills of occupational therapy students. *Journal of Allied Health, 39*(4), 280-286. Retrieved from [http://robinsteed.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/112352854/experiential learning.pdf](http://robinsteed.pbworks.com/w/file/fetch/112352854/experiential%20learning.pdf)

James, K.L., & Musselman, L. (2006). Commonalities in level II fieldwork failure. *Occupational Therapy Health Care, 12*(4), 67-81. doi: 10.1080/1003v19n04\_05

Robinson, A. J., Tanchuk, C. J., & Sullivan, T. M. (2012). Professionalism and occupational therapy: An exploration of faculty and students' perspectives. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 79*(5), 275-284. doi: 10.2182/cjot.2012.79.5.3