Fine Motor Movements: 
A Progressive OT Screening Approach for Early Childhood

Main Author: Bobbi Greiner, OTD, OTR/L
Contributing authors: David Culhane, Ronna Sears-Fritz, and Kate Martens-Stricklett

Providing an opportunity for students to practice classroom theories and concepts in a meaningful and tangible way is a valuable component of the Department of Occupational Therapy’s curriculum. The real-life application of course material helps students retain information and is a valuable way for the course instructor to assess students’ understanding, integration, and implementation of this material.

In the fall of 2014, the Department of Occupational Therapy, in collaboration with the Office of Interprofessional, Scholarship, Service, and Education, launched a pilot service-learning program for second-year occupational therapy students. Through a partnership with two of Omaha’s parochial elementary schools, St. Pius X/St. Leo and Holy Name, a series of service-learning engagements were established with the aim of offering occupational therapy students opportunities to provide relevant assessment and developmentally supportive activities to students in the schools’ early childhood programs. This pilot program included two parts: 1) developmental screenings, and 2) fine motor workshops designed to promote fine motor and hand skills development. The purpose of the developmental screenings, which took place during the fall semester, was to assess performance in fine motor and writing tasks as well as other skills necessary for kindergarten readiness. Information gleaned from the screenings enabled school staff to identify any student(s) at risk of not meeting kindergarten readiness standards. The development and implementation of the fine motor workshops occurred the following spring semester.

For more information about the partnerships and assignments linked to these service-learning engagements, please, review the Community Engagements CUs below.

**Fine Motor Screenings Fall 2015**

**Fine Motor Workshops Spring 2016**

The screenings and fine motor workshops are designed to coincide with two sequential courses in the occupational therapy curriculum related to pediatric practice. In the first course, students learn about typical childhood development and classroom-based assessment. Students then apply this knowledge in a meaningful way by completing one-on-one developmental screenings for each child (with parental consent) in the participating schools’ early childhood programs. Upon completion of the developmental screenings, occupational therapy students generate a written report for each child that includes screening results, recommendations for further testing (if indicated), and activities that support the child’s continued development and readiness for kindergarten. More than 91 screenings were administered in the fall of 2014 followed by 80 in the fall of 2015.
During the spring semester pediatrics course, students learn about activity analysis and the design and implementation of occupational therapy interventions for children. Students then design intervention activities for use at the fine motor workshops. Following instructor review, students implement these activities during the fine motor workshop service-learning engagements. The workshops consist of 30-45 minute groupings that include play-based games and arts and crafts activities that specifically target the development of fine motor and hand skills. Rather than providing intervention only for children identified as at risk, the workshops are open to each student enrolled in the participating schools’ early child programs so that every child may further develop the foundational skills essential for future success in the classroom and kindergarten readiness. There were 24 fine motor workshops implemented during the 2015 spring semester and 26 are scheduled for implementation in the 2016 spring semester.

Feedback from the OT students and community partners has been overwhelmingly positive. The developmental screening and fine motor workshop program is currently in its second cycle and has been expanded to include a more formal assessment of OT student performance on-site. The developmental screenings and fine motor workshops have resulted in a “win-win” for all participants: OT students feel more confident in the practice of pediatric occupational therapy; faculty are able to assess student application of course material in real-life situations; St. Pius X/St. Leo and Holy Name teachers and parents have access to valuable information to help prepare their students for kindergarten; and parents have a list of fun activities to help nurture their child’s growth and development at home.

The Creighton University OT student cohort in Anchorage, Alaska have also benefitted from this hands-on learning program. Part 1 of the program, the developmental screenings, was initiated in the fall of 2014 and repeated in the fall of 2015. The OT students in Alaska were involved with providing a total of 23 screenings at various locations including Kids Corps Incorporated Head Start, Tanaina Child Development Center, and Providence Child Development Center. Based on the success of pilot program’s first year in Omaha, the fine motor workshop program will be piloted in Anchorage, Alaska in spring 2016. The program’s expansion in Alaska clearly indicates the Fine Motor Screenings and Workshop model is reproducible and valued by all stakeholders regardless of the US region.

This program model hinges on strong community partnerships and key faculty at the various school sites. Without the onsite dedication, partnership and buy in from the elementary school and child care center faculty and administration, this campus to community model would not be possible. We are excited about how this program has evolved and are looking forward to a bright future for all students involved.

To learn more about the Nebraska Department of Education’s Kindergarten Readiness standards please follow the links below.

[Nebraska Department of Education](#)
[Nebraska Early Learning Guidelines](#)