

Portfolio as a method of documenting the development of professional competences on the example of occupational therapy

Portfolio jako metoda dokumentowania rozwoju kompetencji zawodowych na przykładzie terapii zajęciowej

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Abstract

Documenting the development of professional competences nowadays seems to be a challenge. How to do it? Are there any tools that help you collect and systematize evidence of your own professional development? Employees nowadays often ask themselves these questions. Keeping a portfolio may be the answer to this search for a way to collect information about your professional progress.

The purpose of this article is to characterize the method of documenting the development of competences which is the portfolio. Portfolio is a tool that stimulates reflection on the current and desired level of competence as well as facilitates planning of professional development. The idea, essential for keeping a portfolio, is primarily supporting reflective learning through the analysis of knowledge and experience acquired by an individual. This tool also allows you to show the development of a person, especially their professional development and the positioning of its individual elements on a timeline. The recommended starting point for conducting it should be the education preparing for professional work. A portfolio may be kept in a traditional hard copy form i.e. a specific “photo album” or due to the progressive development of computer techniques – in an electronic form, as an e-portfolio. Keeping a portfolio allows not only to collect and systematize data in the area of professional activity of a person – it also facilitates their potential recipients (e.g. employers) to quickly find out what competences a given person possesses. In order to better illustrate the contents presented in this article, the characteristics of the portfolio have been prepared by referring to the specifics of the profession of the occupational therapist emphasizing that the implementation of systematic and thorough professional self-assessment is extremely important especially in the context of the occupational therapist’s responsibility for the quality and reliability of actions taken towards the recipients of occupational therapy.

Keywords: portfolio, e-portfolio, competences, occupational therapy

Introduction

The term “competencies” is interdisciplinary. It means that it is used in various scientific disciplines, e.g. law, management or psychology. The interdisciplinary nature of this term is also reflected in the multitude of its definitions. Some exemplary

categories of competences include: cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, educational, and professional competences [1]. The concept of competence is most often considered at the employee and organizational level [2], where it is understood as a predisposition in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes, ensuring the implementation of professional tasks at an effective and/or distinctive level, in accordance with the standards required for a given position [3].

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For the purposes of this paper, we compare competences and the method of documenting them the professional functioning of people preparing for practice and practicing the profession of an occupational therapist.

Competences in occupational therapy

The definition of competences in occupational therapy is promoted in Europe primarily by two organizations of occupational therapists. ENOTHE (European Network of Occupational Therapy in Higher Education) and COTEC (Council of Occupational Therapists for the European Countries), which in 2003 initiated The Tuning Occupational Therapy Project Group.

The Tuning Project is closely linked to the Bologna Declaration, which outlined the framework for the common higher education policy in Europe [4]. The Tuning Project assumed that competences represent a dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive skills, knowledge and understanding, interpersonal, intellectual and practical skills as well as ethical values [5]. The Tuning Project describes two types of competencies: general and subject-specific. General competences envelop transferable skills common to all university programs, e.g. research skills, foreign language skills, teamwork or interpersonal skills, decision making skills and critical thinking skills. They are considered particularly important for undertaking professional work and fulfilling civic duties [6].

The Tuning Project lists 54 competences, which are classified in the following groups [4]:

- Knowledge about occupational therapy
- Occupational therapy process and professional inference
- Professional and friendly relationships
- Professional autonomy and accountability
- Scientific research and development in occupational therapy
- Management and promotion in occupational therapy.

These competences are the basis of constructing educational programs in the area of occupational therapy so that they comply with the minimum WFOT (World Federation of Occupational Therapist) standards, which should facilitate the recognition of the obtained learning outcomes and the transition to the next stages of education.

It is also worth mentioning that since 2018 Poland has been a member of WFOT and COTEC, and the training programs in the area of occupational therapy conducted, among others, by the University of Physical Education in Wroclaw, the University of Physical Education in Krakow or the University of Physical Education in Warsaw which were prepared with an emphasis on presenting the students with the way to achieve competences specified in The Tuning Project. The development of training programs based on the competences required from the graduates ensures that all teaching, learning, and assessment methods focus on achieving these outcomes. Students actively work on

developing their competences, and after starting the professional careers, they have the basis of assess their development as part of their continuing (lifelong) education. Referring to competences also makes it easier to define the aspects of practice that occupational therapists would like to develop.

Creating a uniform list of competences that occupational therapists should possess facilitates the assessment of their qualifications both by the bodies responsible for recognizing academic degrees and in situations where an occupational therapist intends to work in another country. At the local level, competencies can be used as a workforce planning tool, which means that employers, based on the competency model, have the ability to determine the level of service they require from an occupational therapist. They can also use them in the recruitment process by determining what competencies are required for a given position.

As mentioned before, universities in Poland offering occupational therapy programs such as the University of Physical Education in Krakow, the University of Physical Education in Wroclaw or the University of Physical Education in Warsaw, base them on the competences highlighted under The Tuning Project in accordance with the latest global trends in the preparation of educational programs. The ongoing monitoring of student development takes the form of a portfolio. These universities offer a course with the same name that is taught throughout all semesters of study.

It should be emphasized that the process focused on the development of competences should be carried out throughout the whole of one's professional life, and competences can form the basis of continuous professional development.

The characteristics of a portfolio

Many people in Poland probably associate the concept of a portfolio with the profession of a photographer who puts their best photos in a special photo album in order to showcase their skills and tools. This metaphor can be used to describe portfolios that medical professionals, including occupational therapists, can prepare. But their "photo album" will contain "photos" depicting them and their life, and more specifically, their competences.

The portfolio is a tool that stimulates reflection through self-assessment, participation in educational classes, and planning of professional development [7].

Supporting reflective learning by analyzing acquired knowledge and experience is the goal that, at the academic level, primarily guides the ongoing recording of the process of improving competences. In the case of professionally active occupational therapists – a portfolio is a form of documenting gained experience, reflections on therapeutic practice, and knowledge acquired during continuing education. Portfolios can help clinicians to show and record details of their commitment to the continually improvement of their competences in an integrated and coherent

manner and to place them on the timeline [8]. Keeping a professional portfolio, therefore, sanctions the implementation of the systematic and thorough professional self-assessment, which is extremely important in the context of the occupational therapist's responsibility for the quality and reliability of the actions taken towards therapy participants. Occupational therapists, therefore, have an ethical obligation to maintain and continually improve their professional competences in the provision of services that fall within the area of rehabilitation [9, 10].

Universities offering occupational therapy programs in Poland provide portfolio classes which consist in the fact that during the educational process students regularly assess the development of their competences according to the scheme developed in The Tuning Project or the scheme devised by their own institution, assuming that the assessed competences are compatible with the so-called "Tuning competences". According to the scheme proposed as part of The Tuning Project, each of the 54 competences is assessed using a 10-point scale, where one means that the assessor considers that their competence is insufficient, and 10 means that person has mastered it. This assessment is carried out on an ongoing basis and is supported by the collected evidence. In general, the evidence includes: feedback from occupational therapy participants, teachers, specialists and supervisors: photos, audio recordings, certificates, participation in scientific events and meetings. A written reflection of the interested parties themselves plays a significant role as well. In the literature concerning portfolios the following evidence is distinguished:

- Documents created, for example, during a short training course. Written reflections about books that a person has read. Reflections on further research and plans for exploring the literature on the subject, etc.
- Documents related to ordinary everyday events, usually not kept in writing, e.g. transcripts of recorded sessions with the client/caregiver, which show a newly acquired technique or the use of newly acquired knowledge. Such a document may also include a description of therapeutic process followed by a reflection on the course of intervention.
- Documents prepared by someone else and concerning the work of a practicing specialist an assessment done by colleagues, references, etc. and items especially prepared for the portfolio, such as notes, journal entries, drawings and sketches, photos, action plans, and reflections on experiences [11].

For example, a student or professionally active occupational therapist assesses one of their basic competences, which is the ability to plan and manage time. Their rating is 5. The evidence for the development of competences at a given level is self-reflection, an opinion of a teacher or supervisor on e.g. the implementation of specific research or a professional project, the certificate of completing a course in time management, and an opinion of an occupational therapy participant (from the facility

where clinical classes are carried out or from the workplace). Each competency may be assessed an infinite number of times. Assigning 10 to a given competence in the assessment means achieving mastery, and thus it is a rather impossible accomplishment for an occupational therapists just starting their professional careers.

It was mentioned that the assessment of competences may look slightly different than The tuning scheme. For example, at the Bronislaw Czech University of Physical Education in Krakow, students systematically carry out self-assessments on a 10-point scale, referring to the directional learning outcomes in the area of occupational therapy, which include 31 effects outcomes related to knowledge, 43 related to skills and 14 to social competences (attitudes). Additionally, they supplement the list of 31 general competences. Much emphasis is placed on student reflection. To facilitate its implementation, individual portfolio "bookmarks" have been proposed. They include:

- knowledge and skills – students reflect on the knowledge and skills acquired in the course of education;
- competences and goals – students fill out competency tables in order to analyze the increase of their competences over time, they present evidence and add their own reflections, they also construct educational goals related to the individual competences;
- internships – students describe their reflections on internships; clinical classes;
- supportive therapies – students refer to therapies that can support the practice of occupational therapy, e.g. music therapy, dance therapy, horticultural therapy, dog therapy, and others;
- literature and films – in this bookmark students enter their own reflections on books, articles, and films related to occupational therapy.

E-portfolio

In the era of modern information technology advancing at an incredible pace, it is not only possible to digitize data, but also to make it available to a wide audience. Occupational therapists who have a hard copy and/or an electronic portfolio (e-portfolio) also have such opportunities.

Researchers comparing traditional and electronic forms have pointed out that electronic format is easier to use than the hard copy format i.e. thanks to quick access to collected data and its transfer. In addition, according to research results, users of the electronic format are generally more motivated to keep records, they also spend more time completing portfolios than the hard copy format users [8, 12].

Keeping of the electronic version of a portfolio is facilitated by specific software. Polish occupational therapists can use publicly available software. For example, Mahara offers software for free preparation of an e-portfolio.

Currently, due to the complicated position of the occupational therapist profession in Poland, keeping a portfolio or an e-portfolio is generally not obligatory. Graduates from colleges offering the program are encouraged to continue keeping the portfolio they started during their studies.

In countries where a portfolio is an obvious way to document competence development, occupational therapists receive accurate guidance on how to keep a portfolio.

In Europe, e.g. in Great Britain, in accordance with the requirements of the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), healthcare professionals, including occupational therapists, have to implement certain professional development standards [13]. A portfolio, including its electronic version, is to facilitate the collection of data on the professional functioning of occupational therapists. The HCPC has specific forms that can be used to record methods of professional self-improvement. Specialists also need to keep a more complete reflection on each educational activity they undertake. These records may become part of the current Continuing Professional Development (CPD) portfolio. If the HCPC or a future employer wants to get information on learning and development of an occupational therapist - they reach for the documentation collected over time.

Keeping an e-portfolio is recommended worldwide, not just in Europe. The website of the New Zealand Association for Occupational Therapists – Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand (www.otboard.org.nz) - contains detailed information regarding e-portfolios together with a user guide for software users supporting the preparation of an electronic version of this document. The link to the portfolio can be found on the organization's website. Supervisors of an occupational therapist may view the portfolio after prior agreement with the person concerned. In New Zealand, it is recommended that the e-portfolio cycle would last for over two years, during which the occupational therapists would be involved in each area of competences.

Conclusions

Currently, documenting the development of professional competence is not only challenging, but necessary. Documenting the development of professional competences, often constituting a standard that applies in WFOT member countries, should also apply to Polish occupational therapists. The answer to the question *in what form this documentation should be kept* is a portfolio. Depending on the preferences of a person, collecting data on their professional development may take a traditional or electronic form. A portfolio is not only designed for gathering relevant information, but also presenting them to potential employers, supervisors, and recipients of services. It is advised to start keeping a portfolio while preparing for a given profession. Nothing, however, keeps people who have not yet started to keep a record of their professional development from creating a portfolio of their own.

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Streszczenie

Dokumentowanie rozwoju kompetencji zawodowych w dzisiejszych czasach wydaje się być wyzwaniem. W jaki sposób tego dokonać? Czy istnieją narzędzia, które ułatwiają zbieranie i systematyzację dowodów dotyczących własnego rozwoju zawodowego? Pytania te nierzadko stawiają sobie współcześni pracownicy. Odpowiedzią na te poszukiwania sposobu zbierania informacji o swoim progresie zawodowym, może być prowadzenie portfolio. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest scharakteryzowanie metody dokumentowania rozwoju kompetencji jaką stanowi portfolio. Portfolio to narzędzie pobudzające do refleksji dotyczącej aktualnego i pożądanego poziomu kompetencji oraz ułatwiające planowanie rozwoju zawodowego. Ideą, istotną dla prowadzenia portfolio jest przede wszystkim wspieranie refleksyjnego uczenia się poprzez analizę zdobywanej przez jednostkę wiedzy i doświadczeń. Narzędzie to umożliwia także pokazanie rozwoju osoby, szczególnie jej rozwoju zawodowego i umiejscowienie jego poszczególnych elementów na osi czasu. Portfolio może być prowadzone w formie tradycyjnej, czyli papierowej przyjmując formę specyficznego „albumu”, jak również, odpowiadając postępującemu rozwojowi technik komputerowych – w formie elektronicznej, jako e-portfolio. Prowadzenie portfolio pozwala nie tylko na gromadzenie i systematyzację danych dotyczących obszaru funkcjonowania zawodowego danej osoby – ułatwia także jego potencjalnym odbiorcom (np. pracodawcom) szybkie rozeznanie jakie kompetencje dana osoba posiada. W niniejszym artykule dla lepszego zobrazowania przedstawionych treści charakterystykę portfolio sporządzono odnosząc się do specyfiki zawodu terapeuty zajęciowego podkreślając, że realizowanie systematycznej i wnikliwej samooceny zawodowej, jest niezwykle istotne szczególnie w kontekście odpowiedzialności terapeuty zajęciowego za jakość i rzetelność działań podejmowanych wobec odbiorców terapii zajęciowej.

Słowa kluczowe: portfolio, e-portfolio, kompetencje, terapia zajęciowa
