

Occupation-based practice: A potential source of power



What do I mean by occupation-based practice?

Occupation as '*an end*' is the focus on intervention (rather than activity/occupation as *a means*').

Tromly (1995)

Occupation refers to the ordinary things that people do everyday and the way they expend their time, energy, interests and skills in meeting their needs (Townsend & Wilcock, 2004: 244).



Sources of Influence...

- Teachers and Mentors
- Colleagues
- UCT OT Team
- Students
- Literature
- Family and friends



Understading occupation...

- Dichotomy inherent in occupation-based practice; something so unexplainably powerful that is at the same time so ordinary.
- An intervention that will change people themselves, and their lives on a day by day basis, in big ways and small ways and will continue to do so – only the process is mostly unnoticed and unrecognised.



Personal journey...

- Starting point:
 - Activity delineates the domain of occupational therapy practice that makes us unique...
- Opportunity to develop thinking:
 - Occupational therapy as Communication Process (Fidlers)...
- Application in practice:
 - It worked – and I was able to explain why...
- Reading, Teaching, **Research**



The nature of occupational science...

Occupational science as “an academic discipline, the purpose of which is to generate knowledge about the form, the function, and the meaning of human occupation” (Zemke & Clark 1996:pvii).



The impact of Occupational Science on Occupational Therapy practice...

- It has potential to shape occupational practice directly and significantly;
 - the provision of language,
 - a focus on occupation,
 - an interface of varied theoretical perspectives,
 - research directions for the profession and
 - a broad perspective for the development of services across levels of care and sectors.



Back to occupation...

- Occupational therapists' concern with occupational behaviour - concretised as participation in work, leisure, play and personal life skills – together with the role it plays in achievement of wellness has been well debated and documented.
- I believe more research should be done to determine actual impact.



Advantages of Occupation-based Practice: Contextual Relevance

- Relevance accross system levels...



Advantages of Occupation-based Practice: Occupational Justice

- Occupational justice “is about recognising and providing for the occupational needs of individuals and communities as part of a fair and empowering society” (Wilcock and Townsend, 2000) (p.84).
- One advantage of taking an occupational justice perspective is that it “provides materiality to relatively abstract concepts like ‘social justice’” (Swartz, Duncan, Watson and Clarke, 2004:347).



Advantages of Occupation-based Practice: Lenses for Occupational Injustice

- When peoples' occupational engagement is prevented by a set of external limitations on the choices and/or opportunities, occupational injustice will be the result.
 - Occupational Deprivation
 - Occupational Marginalisation
 - Occupational Imbalance
 - Occupational Alienation



Participation in the daily life occupations of a community is recognised as an outcome to advance occupational justice for individuals and communities and “the practical means through which humans exert citizen empowerment, choice and control” (Wilcock & Townsend, 2004) (p.80).



Advantage of Occupation-based Practice: Aligned with Policy Imperatives

- South African Legislation...
- Disability policies...
- Initiatives designed to address concerns identified to be most in need of attention and most deserving of resources...
- Stated priorities...



Advantage of Occupation-based Practice: Needs Fulfillment

- People in each historical era have implicitly or explicitly employed occupation as the mechanism to survive and promote health and well-being. Underlying occupational determinants, such as the type of economy, social structure and belief system shape health (Wilcock 1998, 2001).



Advantage of Occupation-based Practice: Needs Fulfillment

- “Occupations are human pursuits that, at best, fulfil people’s needs and wants. They have the transformational power to bring about development and maturation across multiple transitions when the choices and processes are personally meaningful” (Watson & Fourie 2004)



Advantage of Occupation-based Practice: Culturally Embedded

- Understanding more about what occupies people as interdependent, active agents in culturally defined occupations will shed light on “what holds us together”: an operational definition of social cohesion (Department of Arts and Culture, 2004).
- Occupations associated with culture may be readily incorporated into occupational identity because they reflect who we are in a cultural context (Unruh, 2004).



Advantage of Occupation-based Practice: Source of self-efficacy and identity

- Self-efficacy refers to one's estimation of how well one can execute the actions necessary to deal with life events. It refers to one's sense of personal competence (Bandura, 1982 in Hendricks et al, 2002).
- Agency means that one is capable of exercising control over events around oneself and that this sense of control is vital in the concept of wellness (Ramugondo, 2005).



Advantage of Occupation-based Practice: Relevance

- Intervention...
- Profession...
- Relevance will be understood because of link with outcome...



Advantage of Occupation-based Practice: Occupational Spin-off

- Rebeiro's ideas and beyond...



How to achieve this?

- Name intervention appropriately...
- Formulate occupation-based outcome measures...
- Move from stated occupation-based outcomes to performance components in setting intervention plans (even when these might be offered the other way around).
- Always work with occupational beings...
- Research



- *“I was so depressed, I couldn't do anything properly, it was, .. it was like I'd become a drop out in society, I disappointed my parents, my family. At school I won 5 prizes in standard 9 and 4 in matric, and when I did go to [Name of University] I got a first in [subject]. So I had small achievements, but like, I can't study. So I'm hoping in this job.. ..they will renew my contract so that I can work for at least 10 years, or so, because (short pause) you know, I'm not completely stupid even though I am disabled, I would like a bit of status in my life, and I really would like to get back my self respect.”
[Harold]*



Advantage of Occupation-based Practice: Ongoing impact

- Munro proposed the idea of identity being *punctualized*: a “revealing of each specified identity within the here and now; and in response to the ‘demand’ of others”.
- So, identities would be ready to reveal when ‘called’ forth by the demands of others in specific situations.
- The meaning of ‘challenging forth’ (or ordering of identities) suggest that orders, for identities to be revealed, can be more or less prominent for particular reasons.



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