

Fact Sheet: Occupation and Occupational Therapy

Occupational Therapy Clinical Education Program

The Occupational Therapy Clinical Education Program

The Occupational Therapy Clinical Education Program (OTCEP) strives for continuous improvement in, access to and the quality of clinical education for pre entry students and new graduates within Health and Hospital Services across the state. OTCEP provides support to students, their clinical educators, new graduates and their supervisors and produces high quality, evidence based clinical education resources.

How to use this factsheet

This fact sheet is one in a series with each factsheet aiming to:

- provide a summary of literature and evidence on a key topic for the occupational therapy profession;
- guide reflection on the topic for future learning;
- refresh or extend knowledge; and,
- stimulate discussion and exploration of the topic.

The reflective questions in this factsheet prompt an exploration of practice and the potential for translation of knowledge in practice. This learning activity can be completed by individuals or in learning groups and teams.

Topic: Occupation and occupational Therapy

Occupation forms the basis of occupational therapy's contemporary paradigm emphasised in the following three conceptual foundations:

1. The importance of occupation to health and wellbeing
2. A focus on occupational problems or challenges within occupational therapy

3. The use of occupation to improve health status as a defining feature of occupational therapy (Kielhofner 2009, pg. 49).

Taking a historical perspective, occupational therapy has evolved from its original paradigm. However, occupation remains central and can be described as the *'dominant construct which characterises how occupational therapists understand humans, dysfunction and interventions'* (Molineux 2004, pg. 3).

Defining occupation is challenging due to the term being part of a common language and not able to be controlled by occupational therapy (Dickie 2009). Many definitions have been proposed including:

'Our occupations are all the active processes of looking after oneself and others, enjoying life, and being socially and economically productive over the lifespan and in various context' (Townsend 1997, pg. 19)

An occupation is a specific individual's personally constructed non-repeatable experience' (Pierce 2001, pg. 139).

As an alternative to a definition, Molineux (2010) advocates for an understanding of the nature of occupation which he presents as having five key characteristics, summarised briefly below:

1. Active engagement- physical and or mental
2. Purpose- of the occupation to the individual
3. Meaning- unique to the individual
4. Contextual- multiple and impact on the occupation
5. Human- a uniquely human characteristic.

Hocking (2009) identifies that occupations contribute to health and well-being by:

- Keeping people alive by enabling them to meet biological needs

- providing physical activity, mental stimulation and social interaction to keep bodies, minds and communities in good health
- enabling people to express themselves, develop skills, experience pleasure and achieve the things they believe to be important.

It would appear that the contemporary occupational therapy paradigm considers occupation as a core tenant of occupational therapy. While defining occupation is challenging, the characteristics of occupation have been articulated. Occupational therapists enable individuals to optimise their engagement in occupation while using occupation as a means to achieve this (Wilding 2010). In taking an occupation focussed approach, occupational therapy is able to reach its full potential (Crabtree 2000).

Reflective Questions

1. Describe the term 'occupation' as it relates to your current practice.
2. How would you describe the term 'occupation' to a friend, a family member, a client or a member of the multidisciplinary team?
3. Consider a client you are currently working with. In what ways are you enabling him/her to optimise their engagement in occupations? What occupations are you using as part of your practice to enable this?

Would you like to explore the occupation further?

1. Request a copy of the OT Key Concept Learning Resource titled: the *Nature of Occupation* by contacting your local OT CESO or email OTCEP@health.qld.gov.au
2. Explore the references and activities within the above Key Concept Learning Resource or the references documented at the end of this factsheet.

The OTCEP has produced a series of OT Key Concept Learning Resources available for use by individuals or groups as a reference guide or as a workbook. The learning resources address the key concepts identified in the Occupational Therapy Clinical Capability Framework (OTCCF). The OTCCF is an integrated and coordinated framework for clinical education and training for occupational therapy in Queensland Health. It has been designed as a resource to support clinical development for occupational therapists with different levels of experience. Contact OTCEP@health.qld.gov.au for more information or see the OTCEP QHEPS site (*soon to be updated*) <http://paweb.sth.health.qld.gov.au/qhot/otccf.asp>

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