

Adding to the professional body of knowledge: the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy

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Introduction: Occupational therapy is making the transition from a research emergent to a research active profession. This change is vital for the credibility and sustainability of the profession. Discipline-specific, postgraduate degrees provide ideal opportunities for creating knowledge as part of this process. The presentation will explore how this ideal is realised on the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy. Students on this transnational programme conduct a semi-independent research project which culminates in a thesis: an article written for a specific, peer-reviewed journal, with an extended introduction and reflective discussion.

Objective: To investigate how postgraduate research adds to the body of knowledge about occupational therapy and occupational science.

Methods: A systematic review design using documentary evidence. The documents were the 100 theses produced between September 2001 and February 2009. A data extraction form was developed to collate details about the research topics, methodologies and cultural contexts.

Results: Most students did small scale, primary research using a variety of methods including interviews, focus groups, observation and questionnaires. Some students embarked upon larger international projects, usually as members of an existing research group. Occupation was the most common topic and encompassed occupational adaptation, performance, engagement, balance, deprivation and transition. Participation and occupation were studied from a variety of socio-cultural perspectives, such as refugees and indigenous people living in remote, rural communities. Other topics included reliability and validity studies of assessments, outcome studies of therapeutic strategies, vocational integration/work and activities of daily living.

Conclusion and contribution to OT: The focus upon occupation shows that the Master's degree is contributing to professional knowledge. This finding confirms the programme philosophy, which is to place occupation at the core by integrating the scientific and applied disciplines. However new knowledge needs to be accessible to others, and to be built upon. This has been achieved over the last seven years through dissemination (28 articles have been published and 13 more are under review) and doctoral studies (15 graduates have started PhDs with 3 completing).

Petticrew M. & Roberts H (2006) Systematic reviews in the social sciences. A practical guide. Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Theses abstracts available at www.ot-euromaster.nl/academic_output.htm