

0500

Occupational therapists: Sharing a sharper image of ourselves around the world

Judith Friedland

University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Introduction: I believe that occupational therapists around the world continue to struggle with their image. Although our discipline is well-established, many practitioners, and almost all students, lack a clear sense of identity; practitioners are enthusiastic about what they do and students are excited about what they are learning, but both groups often feel awkward explaining to others (and to themselves) just what lies at our profession's core. The result is a profession that still has to promote itself and often has to struggle to maintain its rightful place. **The Objectives** of this presentation are 1) to argue that the reason for this unfortunate situation is that our history - nationally and internationally - is not adequately known to us and as a result we lack a clear understanding of the epistemology of our discipline, and 2) to describe opportunities for research that emanate from the profession's epistemological base. **Methods:** the literature (including the "grey literature") and my own personal experiences as an academic and a clinician will provide the data for a content analysis. The analysis will be made within the relevant social, political and economic context. **Results:** analysis of the data will support the argument that the knowledge base of students and practitioners is lacking and that identity issues are a problem. **Conclusion:** Greater value must be attached to the study of our history and more time must be devoted to it in our educational programs. Historical research must be supported at the graduate level and efforts at comparative history must be made. The epistemology of the profession must become known to ourselves before it can be known to others. Only then can the ontology of the profession be critically analysed. While we may not wish to stay true to our roots in all instances, knowing those roots is a first step toward informed debate. **Contribution to practice:** Enhancing knowledge of our history will result in a stronger sense of identity and a sharper image for all occupational therapists. With that confidence, we will make greater strides toward meeting our profession's potential.