

0780

The Media, Occupational Therapy, and Cultural Brokering

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Cultural brokering has been defined as "...bridging, linking or mediating between groups or persons of different cultural backgrounds to effect change" (Jezewski, 1990). Increasingly OTs must learn to be cultural brokers to effectively influence the development of occupational therapy in culturally relevant directions. Culture is a complex context in which occupations are embedded. Although most clinicians can describe central features of the cultural background of their clients, they seem to have less insight into the cultural underpinnings of the profession. Most occupation-based models of practice have evolved in North America (NA). Like American television, they have spread the world over. In this spread, the NA models often lose cultural relevance.

OT educators are entrusted with the responsibility to prepare students who have values, knowledge and skill sets to work effectively cross-culturally. To be effective with this, educators must be able to reflect on culture in theory applications and clinical reasoning. One tool for this is the incorporation of occupation-based theories in clinical reasoning cases spotlighting cultural values. In a carefully directed case discussion, these clinical reasoning cases can be used to identify and address stereotyping, bias, discrimination, and prejudice. This includes prejudice about occupational choices and values.

As NA television has spread, so have international perceptions of everyday life and occupations in the United States. De-constructing myths about every life and occupational therapy practice in rural NA will be used as a learning tool to present the sometimes misleading influence the popular media has on cultural expectations. This presentation will provide strategies to educate OT's for effective cross-cultural communications emphasizing the importance of cultural brokering at client, community, and societal levels.