

0878

Phenomenological Study of Occupational Therapists' Working Experience in Educational Institutions
Keywords: school-based occupational therapy, phenomenology, self-directed learning, educational institutions, occupational therapist

Wichita Kesaraksa, Soisuda Withayakorn, Sarinya Sriphetcharawut
Kawiaanukul school for intellectual disabilities, Chiangmai, Thailand

This research was aimed to study working experiences of occupational therapists in educational institutions for children with special needs. Data collection was conducted with three key informants who had more than 5-year working experiences and used to work in a hospital setting, special schools for the handicapped and Centre for Special Education. Data were collected within a six-month period via in-depth interviews and observations of their work in Special School for Children with Intellectual Disability, Divisional Centre for Special Education and Provincial Centre for Special Education. The analysis started from a verbatim transcription followed by data analysis using Heideggerian phenomenology(1962).

The concept of self-directed learning was found in the results. Self-directed learning was referred to learning and preparing oneself to be ready to work in educational institutions. It was about learning to provide service of occupational therapy in educational institutions. This involved learning educational environment and adjusting service delivery and procurement of necessary resources. Key informants applied occupational therapy process as a tool to provide therapeutic activities in educational institutions; used activity synthesis pattern and non-human environment as a therapeutic media; altered the method of service from one on one practice to simultaneous multi-client service to handle a higher number of clients; arranged therapeutic sessions according to school hours of educational institutions; and tapped resources from simple types of media.

The second area of discussion was centered on the role of occupational therapists in educational institutions. They performed the dual duty of a teacher and an occupational therapist, so called "occupational therapy teacher", in which their role followed the regulation and assignment from the institutions. The informants also showed signs of professionalism such as communication skills. The working performance of these informants was explained through the Person-Environment Occupational Performance Model to show a correlation between workplace environment, working styles and roles of key informants. The research findings helped both occupational therapy students and occupational therapists. The service methods of occupational therapy from this study could be applied in occupational therapy student trainings and were useful for the preparedness of occupational therapists to work properly in their organizations.