

Collective Occupations: A Vehicle for Building & Maintaining Working Relationships

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Introduction: Although the assertion 'Human beings are social animals' may be widely recognized, it points to a human quality that is often taken for granted. It is also generally acknowledged that success in any sphere of life often hinges on relationships that work. Yet, it seems there is no single profession that specifically focuses on how to build and maintain working relationships. This may partly be because the Modern world, including the occupational therapy profession, appears to have largely bought into, entrenched and promoted individualism. This worldview stresses that the interests of an individual should take precedent without regard to how this may impact on the social health of the collective. Collective goals seem to have been mostly ignored or seen to be in competition with the advancement of the individual. In Africa, it is the ethic of 'uBuntu', focusing on people's allegiances and relations with each other, that holds potential for informing culturally appropriate practices in order to meet collective local needs.

Objectives: ●Critically appraise the individualistic focus in occupational therapy literature ●Propose an operational definition of collective occupations ●Offer a critical understanding of 'uBuntu' ●Share possibilities of what collective occupations can be in order to foster working relationships ●Offer recommendations for occupational science research and occupational therapy practice.

Description: This paper will review how occupational therapy has traditionally approached both the study and the use of human occupation as a medium of change primarily from individualistic perspectives. This focus will be problematized against examples of collective occupations that seem to foster relationships that work for people across the life span, who are faced with contextual challenges in the Southern hemisphere.

Contribution to the practice of occupational therapy: Considering their unique perspective of humans as occupational beings, occupational therapists may have a significant contribution to make if they were to explore collective occupations as a vehicle for and maintaining working relationships.