

Client-centred practice meets the therapeutic use of self: Applying a relational psychotherapeutic approach to enhance occupational therapy practice

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Introduction: Two recent publications (Sumsion & Law 2006) and (Taylor, Lee, Kielhofner & Ketkar, 2009) have expanded knowledge about two key concepts in occupational therapy; client-centred practice (CCP) and the therapeutic use of self. Both articles call for further investigation into these central principles.

Objectives: This paper aims to improve understanding of the therapeutic use of self and the value of CCP in occupational therapy. It also aims to demonstrate how key principles in a Gestalt approach to psychotherapy (Joyce & Sills, 2002) can contribute to this understanding.

Description: The paper reviews i) the article by Sumsion and Law, who extended the primary notion of power in CCP, and developed associated themes of listening and communicating, partnership, choice and hope, and ii) the survey investigating practitioner attitudes and experience of therapeutic use of self conducted by Taylor et al. in sample of 1,000 members of the American Occupational Therapy Association. The paper then examines the relational perspective underpinning Gestalt psychotherapeutic methods and questions if borrowing from this method can support client growth and well-being in occupational therapy.

Results/Discussion: Sumsion and Law assert that increasing interest in CCP has links to evidence-based practice indicating that CCP is one of the keystones of occupational therapy. Taylor et al. found that participants valued the use of self in the therapeutic relationship but felt poorly prepared for practice in this area and considered knowledge and training inadequate. The value of Gestalt methods to occupational therapy is a focus on the present moment to explore the context, or field conditions influencing therapist and client thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Gestalt methods support therapists to pay attention to their own phenomenology in order to understand their experience of the client and improve the quality of the therapist-client relationships.

Conclusion: Key concepts in occupational therapy - CCP and the therapeutic sense of self can benefit from the knowledge and practice of aspects of a Gestalt psychotherapeutic approach.

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy: Further reflection and additional skills in the therapeutic use of self in CCP can enhance contemporary occupational therapy practice.