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Communities, Occupations and Narratives

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Introduction

All human action is framed within a continuous narrative developed around what people do (Mattingly). This presentation discusses ways that occupational therapists can work with clients to make these narratives more explicit.

Description

Mattingly discusses therapeutic employment as the storymaking between clients and therapists which underpins the engagement of intervention, and describes storymaking as a problem-solving process. With the narrow culture, gender and class base of the occupational therapy profession there is a risk that many stories cannot emerge or may not be recognised. Paradoxically, these invisible stories are about everyday occupational activities, vernacular knowledge, the know-how by which people often experience their identity, their acknowledgement from peers, and their identification with communities and spaces.

Community publishing (which describes many dissemination forms, not merely print) is a practice that developed as a cultural statement of identity by working class autobiographers and autodidacts. It has been concerned with recording personal and community experiences of everyday life and vernacular expression. This knowledge is often not recognised in traditional education, research, or therapeutic practice. Content frequently expresses opposition to the conventions of formal knowledge which would seek to contain and reduce it. People have felt a need to record occupations and identities that are threatened and liminal. Drawing on 30 years' community publishing experience the author presents some collaborative examples of its application, risks and benefits, where occupational therapists can develop community engagements with marginal groups.

Objectives, Conclusion and Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

Participants will gain an understanding of the narrative underpinning of human action; the importance of recognising the vernacular knowledge arising through everyday experience and its centrality to an occupational sense of employment; the challenges arising from vernacular knowledge to the paradox of occupational therapy's holism in combination with a narrow culture, gender and class base, and the potential of community publishing in addressing these issues, not only as a tool for intervention but through the occupational spin off activities that result.