

Crossing Borders: Are OT's Walking with Humility and Mutuality?

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Crossing borders with students into the frontier of an urban city is a privilege. When we cross borders, we expand our knowledge of and relationship with marginalized populations. We spend time getting to know the local people, learning from them who they are, their life struggles, their gifts. We walk humbly with respect, finding similarities as well as differences in our lives. We learn together from each other. We discover ways to dismantle unjust fences through advocacy. Through crossing borders, we meet men, women and children who are poor with humility, respect for their culture and a passion to understand and respect them as individuals and as a community. To do this however, we must empty ourselves of who we are to go beyond our own histories to be humble guests at their table and strangers among the people we serve.

Over the past 25 years, more and more occupational therapy researchers, educators, practitioners and students have participated in cross-cultural experiences both locally and internationally. The foci of these trips vary from investigative research, volunteer and service to education and employment. As occupational therapists, we strive to be culturally responsive practitioners and researchers. Yet, when crossing borders internationally, how many of us walk humbly, with respect and ready to learn from those we hope to serve?

This qualitative study will explore seven cross-cultural overseas experiences organized by occupational therapy researchers, educators &/or practitioners. The purpose of the study is to a) uncover the preparation, purposes, learning activities and outcomes of overseas cross-cultural experiences, b) compare and contrast similarities and differences in experiences and contexts, c) discover if and how participants learn in mutuality with local people, d) discover insights from these experiences that impact OT's professionally and personally.

Results & conclusion: Research in process

Contribution to the practice/evidence base of occupational therapy

Through this study, our profession will better understand the purposes and processes of how occupational therapists prepare for and engage in crossing borders in overseas cross-cultural experiences. We will discover lessons learned that will inform our research, teaching or practice and guide our design of future experiences.