

Learning through occupational engagement: A framework for undergraduate professional skill acquisition.

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Introduction:

Occupational therapy education requires students to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes to become competent, ethical practitioners (COT, 2004, 2008; ENOTHE 2004, 2008; Hocking & Ness, 2002). However, maintaining a skill element can be challenging in an academically-driven context. The Bologna and TUNING process has placed European Occupational Therapy programmes in a unique position to demonstrate that there is no need to abandon practical therapeutic skills when courses harmonise to a higher education level (ENOTHE, 2004, 2007).

Objectives:

Participants will explore the "Learning through Occupational Engagement" framework, and discuss the value of occupation and enablement focused skill elements in OT education.

Description / Report:

The framework, designed at Bournemouth University, focuses on the value of occupation, occupational performance, occupational identity and task analysis (1st year), developing component analysis and core enablement skills (2nd year) and specialist enablement skills (3rd year) (Townsend & Polatajko 2007; WHO 2001).

This paper outlines the levels and grading of skill development throughout the undergraduate course, focusing mainly on the first year component. First year students concentrate on understanding, analysing, assessing and grading occupations while considering personal and environmental factors affecting occupational engagement (Townsend & Polatajko 2007; WHO 2001). They engage in occupations alongside using a reflective portfolio to document skill development and attitudinal changes. Thus students investigate occupations in daily contexts prior to practice within clinical settings.

Alongside experiential learning, virtual case studies, peer education, community projects, an e-portfolio and reflective workbook are utilised. The structured use of reflection and a portfolio prepares students for their practice placement education and continuing professional development.

Results / Discussion:

The "Learning through Occupational Engagement" framework values occupation and enablement skills. Students develop a sound identity as occupational therapists through a close, concurrent integration between theory and practice elements throughout their undergraduate training.

Conclusion:

This framework facilitates a structured skill development, maintaining occupation as a central tenet of OT education.

Contribution - practice / evidence:

This paper presents a framework and tools, and raises the discussion of how we value and incorporate skill elements into our curricula (COT, 2004, 2008; ENOTHE 2004, 2008; Hocking & Ness, 2002).