

Developing a model for contextual practice: School-based occupational therapy as an illustration of mixed methods in natural environments

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Participating in occupations within natural environments improves occupational performance, engagement, meaningfulness, and quality of life. Children spend a majority of their time in school, so the work that occupational therapists (OTs) do with students is an important example of intervening within the natural context. By employing a variety of treatment methods and theoretical approaches in typical environments, OTs provide a stronger, more holistic approach to addressing occupational needs, and facilitating increased occupational engagement for their clients.

This presentation's objective is to use school-based occupational therapy (OT) to illustrate the universal concept within OT of occupational engagement in context and mixing methods to increase occupational performance, and provide evidence regarding the effectiveness of OT. It also opens a dialogue with colleagues internationally to identify and discuss differences and coincidences in OT interventions with regard to context.

Using the International Classification of Functioning and Disability (ICF) as a guide, we utilize evidence to craft a practical model for determining barriers to participation through assessment and strategies for mixing OT intervention methods in natural contexts.

By opening the global discussion on practicing within the school setting, therapists can broaden their scope or gain insight into infusing OT into this area of practice internationally. The model presented serves as a tool to provide OT to clients with diverse needs, blending treatment approaches to maximize gains and move toward improved occupational engagement within natural settings.

Because the school setting comprises a large amount of children's occupational participation, it is important to examine the impact that OTs make in facilitating engagement and developing social, physical, and cognitive skills that are impacted. This discussion is intended as a microcosm of OT across settings, the importance of employing a variety of treatment methods within typical contexts to enhance participation.

We challenge OTs to examine trends in OT and how interventions within natural environments impact occupational performance. Interventions in context, as described by the ICF, provides evidence to the effectiveness of OT by identifying barriers to participation, and promoting health and improving quality of life, which assists in positioning OT as a viable profession within a global market.