

Critical pedagogy in occupational therapy education: Transformative learning experiences in cross-cultural settings.

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Introduction

In many global urban centers there is an increase of culturally diverse individuals with varying beliefs about health, illness, disease, and wellness. This demands a healthcare workforce prepared to work effectively with people who think, value, and act in diverse ways. Transformative learning and critical reflection can be used to foster culturally sensitive skills in occupational therapy students. This paper will describe how transformative learning is used with occupational therapy students in cross cultural settings with an emphasis on international immersion experiences.

Objectives:

- Illustrate how tenets of critical reflection, transformative learning, and constructivist learning are used with students in cross cultural settings.
- Describe the relationship between developing cultural sensitivity and transformative learning.
- Explain process of developing sustainable and reciprocal partnerships.
- Provide evidence of transformative learning through samples of student reflections.

Description/Report

In the past 10 years, I have worked with over 100 students in a variety of cross cultural settings (in the United States with displaced immigrants from Burma, Somalia, and Ethiopia; and through immersion experiences in the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Peru). Throughout my experience, I have developed and honed a process in which to prepare students for intentional learning and immersion. This transformative learning process is inclusive of preparatory readings and discussion, structured critical reflection throughout the learning experience, and a public sharing upon re-entry. Critical pedagogy is at the core of this process.

Results/discussion

When students are asked why they want an international experience, the response often times is about the desire to help others. International experiences focused only on health care delivery perpetuate this narrow focus and miss the opportunity to grow through the exploration and revision of one's own beliefs and practices as a global citizen. However, in order for this to occur, the expert model needs to be deconstructed and habits of self reflection and critical questioning fostered.

Conclusion/Contribution to the practice:

An increased awareness on the part of occupational therapists of the role that critical reflection and transformative learning in occupational therapy curriculum is crucial toward developing entry level practitioners prepared to work in diverse health care settings.