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More than words can say: Decolonising occupational therapy terminology

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Occupational therapy thinking is primarily conveyed in English. When this thinking is translated into other languages, the process involves deconstructing the meaning behind an English term, making sense of it within another sociocultural situation, and reconstructing the meaning using another language. For some terms, this process can be challenging. Addressing the challenges provides opportunities to explore new ways of thinking not often used in the English speaking world. The new thinking gleaned from non-English speaking cultures can be used to enrich professional reasoning and enhance the global development of occupational therapy.

Learning objectives:

Consider the role of language in occupational therapy thinking and practice.

Explore how language represents and expresses culture.

Identify problems arising when occupational therapy terms are translated from English into other languages.

Share experiences of working on occupational therapy terminology across multiple languages.

Develop a deeper understanding of own relationship with the language of occupational therapy.

Reflect on new ways of occupational therapy thinking in transcultural contexts.

Teaching methods:

The session incorporates a variety of teaching methods, including presentations, small group discussion and structured exercises. Participants are offered opportunities to explore their own understanding of occupational therapy terminology and to identify issues specific to their own language(s).

The authors give a brief presentation on the terminology work with which they have been involved in Europe, Africa and China. This includes the issues addressed, methods used and outcomes. The presenters highlight their own key learning from these projects.