

Healing work: Intersections for decoloniality

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Occupational therapy as a profession has an indisputable and impressive track record of enabling occupational engagement and participation, for individuals and groups with impairments or disabilities, by addressing performance components or adapting environments. Theorists in occupational therapy and occupational science have however, in recent years, called for contextually situated practice. 'Impact' in occupational therapy, must be assessed with this call in mind. Context includes, but goes beyond the immediate physical environment, as well as socio-cultural conditions and practices at micro levels. Gross economic inequality, as an ongoing and de-humanizing consequence of colonialism, racism and a global capitalist neo-liberal agenda, can therefore not be ignored as part of contextually situated occupational therapy practice. Introducing a critical conceptualization of debility, in ways that render this notion as distinct from disability, and drawing from the historical roots of the profession, this keynote address will argue that occupational therapy, as contextually situated practice, may be well placed to advance healing work or decoloniality, in ways that not only benefit individuals or groups, but can impact society. The paper will showcase examples from South Africa, where occupational therapists have sought out meaningful collaborations, or maximized on existing connections with other professions or disciplines, social movements and civil society, in order to advance decoloniality (healing work). These examples will help illuminate opportunities for the potential future growth of occupational therapy, while at the same time highlighting critical signposts, where potential traps for re-inscribing coloniality, remain.