

Understanding effort and maximum effort - their vital importance to activity participation, being, becoming and occupational therapy

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The Theory of Creative Ability, developed by South African OT Vona du Toit, postulates that effort and maximum effort are essential to mastering challenges during activity participation, for growth in motivation and occupational performance to occur as a result, ultimately influencing health and well-being. This belief in the importance of mastering challenges is echoed in broad OT theory. Mastering challenges requires effort, therefore, therapists need to determine: 1) how much effort a client is capable of; 2) whether s/he is putting-in adequate effort for mastering challenges; 3) how to facilitate effort. However, definitions, descriptions and explanations of effort do not exist in OT theories, assessments, or literature. Subsequently, effort cannot be adequately understood, assessed and measured, or facilitated confidently.

This cross-national Formal Grounded Theory PhD study sought to discover what effort is in relation to activity participation. Interviews and observation were undertaken with a diverse sample of 50 clients and OTs, plus interviews with 24 members of the public. Constant comparison of emerging concepts with other studies led to a formal grounded theory of effort with relevance across diverse cultures.

Effort was discovered to be essential for relating to one's self, the world, and occurs in challenging activity participation. Effort varies from minimal-maximal, reflecting motivation and abilities. Findings indicate the conditions necessary for effort; the process leading to effort, and its observable referents.

This study contributes to understanding how effort for mastering challenges occurs; defines and describes effort for the OT process, and contributes new theory for the OT profession.