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Students' negotiation of practice education in Occupational Therapy: A case study

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Introduction: Unequal attainment of educational outcomes among population groups remains a reality across education levels in South Africa and the rest of the world. This is due to among others the complex process of negotiating access to a secondary discourse that seems to devalue knowledge and practices of others who are different from the mainstream. In Occupational Therapy in South Africa there is under-representation and a trend of underperformance among African students in elite universities. However, the learning processes and experiences of these students have not been explored within the profession. The focus of this study is on practice education, which is a fundamental component of the occupational therapy curriculum, through which students are socialized into the profession in a process of using theory in practice. The aim of this study is to describe and explain the learning process that students who are African language speakers engage in as they navigate practice education in an Occupational Therapy curriculum.

Method: A single instrumental qualitative case study design was adopted. Through purposive sampling four participants were recruited. Semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and document reviews yielded the data. Methods of analysis included Discourse Analysis, thematic Analysis and genre analysis.

Results: Preliminary findings suggest a complex process of negotiating different ways of knowing, interacting and using language.

Conclusion: There is a need for development of contextually relevant occupational therapy curriculum and for educators to development pedagogic practices that embrace and value diversity.