

WATSON RESEARCH PROJECT

Project title: (provisional) **CULTURALLY RELEVANT OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY**

Project purpose:

This projects' purpose is twofold. I intend to try and capture from selected occupational therapists something about their understanding of culture, the place that this has in their work and how they attempt to make this relevant to their clients' diverse worlds of meaning. The drive to attempt such an ambitious project is an invitation to present a paper together with suitable illustrations, on the topic of the relevance of culture to occupational therapy practice at the 14th Congress of WFOT in July 2006.

Literature review

Hellman (1994) views culture as a set of guidelines which individuals inherit as members of a particular society and which tells them how to view the world, experience it emotionally and how to behave in it in relation to other people, to supernatural forces or gods and to the natural environment. It also provides them with ways of transmitting these guidelines to the next generation- by the use of symbols, language, art and ritual (p2-3).

No human activity is free from cultural influence (Swartz, 1998). The importance of cultural sensitivity and the influence that it has on effective and equitable occupational therapy is therefore very important. This has been recognised professionally (e.g. Blakeney, 1987; Dyck, 1989; Jamieson, 1985; Krefting, 1992; Krefting & Krefting, 1991) and assumes increasing importance now that easy intercontinental travel, communication and globalisation are realities. However, while the presence of universalising influences such as ethics and human rights create common ground, the building of a single occupational therapy system to suit culturally diverse societies is far too simplistic (Iwama, 2003). This means that both current professional theory and practice need to be challenged within cultural livelihood figurations and life-world contexts. This speaks of cultural relativism, where truth relative to each individual within his or her environment, is based on the discourse of his/her society (Winch, 1964).

Jackson's (1998) discourse on the place of role theory in occupational science raises a useful perspective for the study of culture. It would be fascinating to list the roles, tasks and activities of different cultures from around the world, but this would not prove as interesting or informative as an attempt to understand how people conduct their occupations. Jackson provides the example of the

role of a father as opposed to 'doing' fathering to illustrate the above point. To 'do fathering highlights doing and agency'; an occupational focus would therefore reveal multiple interpretations.

The identification of the complex nature of occupations, the social and interpersonal dimensions, invisible aspects and symbolic significance should be explored by occupational therapists to reveal variations according to individual experiences, material resources and cultural ideologies (DeVault, 1991).

There are many ways that occupation can and should be studied (Clark et al, 1991; Yerxa et al 1990). This literature study will seek to uncover the meaning that occupations hold within cultures and a deeper understanding of clients' cultural thoughts, values and practices, with a view to how this can and should influence occupational therapy and add authenticity and value to practice.

Protocol (with respect to the South African aspect of the study only)

1. Explore the literature relating to serving individuals, groups and populations within the varied South African society to ascertain current thinking and understanding of the cultural significance and meaning of everyday occupations.

2. Interview occupational therapists in Cape Town

2.1 Define the sample: Purposeful and convenient, with maximum variation to obtain data from participants of different ages, educational background, experience, practise interest and exposure, and representative as far as possible of the demographic profile of the profession in the Western Cape Province. The target will be 15 occupational therapists

2.2 Prepare the questions. (In brackets: my guide to the formulation of each question)

- i) Has your thinking about your work as an occupational therapist changed since you qualified? (*Has experience, both as a therapist and a South African citizen, informed practice, and if so how?*)
- ii) How does this inform what you do- what are the beliefs and values that guide your work now? (*What shared or personal orientations underpin the behaviour of the group: OT's*)

- iii) How does your understanding of culturally related issues inform your practice?
(*What informs cultural sensitivity and are cultural processes viewed as dynamic and evolving or static?*).

2.3 Conduct the interviews and transcribe the data

2.4 Analyse the data within a phenomenological paradigm, incorporating clusters of meaning and textual descriptions provided by the participants.

2.5 Conduct a workshop with the participants to explore the findings, focussing on confirmability and transferability

2.6 Write up the results, including information gleaned from the workshop, formulated within a critical theoretical framework, based on reference material within and beyond occupational therapy.

3. Prepare graphic material to illustrate the topic and support the presentation. This will probably be based on a cultural metaphor, but a decision can only be taken once the lecture preparation and the data analysis reach a clear stage of development. A graphics expert will assist with production of the final product.

4. Write the paper and prepare the lecture, including the illustrative material

5. Make the paper and power point presentation or other graphic material available within South African occupational therapy circles.

Deliverables:

- There is no distinctive mental health orientation to this proposal; the work will form part of a keynote address at the WFOT Congress 2006, which WFOT will publish.
- On the other hand the topic is of paramount importance to all South African occupational therapists whatever their field of endeavour, where no attempt to find a unifying professional approach to culturally relevant practice has so far been attempted. Should this application be regarded favourably some adjustment for the occupational therapy mental health audience could no doubt be made after the lecture has been delivered and made available, together with the visual material, for presentations in South Africa.
- At least one additional Journal article will be written because not all the information will be used for the WFOT lecture