Welcome to the tenth issue of 
Spotlight on Occupation

Research and understanding occupation have come a long way since the 1970’s when qualitative research methodologies were rarely used outside of anthropology and sociology and the RCT ruled. However as Wright-St Clair points out, we still have some reflexive ground to cover. This message is echoed in the following two reviewed articles. The work of Kuipers et al., highlights the risk of continuing to attempt to measure constructs which are poorly understood. Wright-St Clair et al. describe the careful and explicit interpretation that was required in order to use the same tool with two different cultural groups. Importantly, as demonstrated by the number of JOS downloads, research regarding occupation is being read.


Feel free to hand SPOTLIGHT on to anyone who might be interested in it. Previous issues are available at http://www.aut.ac.nz/study-at-aut/study-areas/health-sciences/occupational-science-and-therapy/spotlight-on-occupation-newsletter

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The case for multiple methodologies

Author: Wright-St Clair, V.

Summary: The question here is how can we know occupation in its fullness and roundness rather than having a narrow, shallow view? The answer that variety in research is the spice of life or in this case the roundness of occupation. Evidence provided shows how research in occupational science is both growing in quantity and variety, but very slowly. In order to have robust knowledge there is a need to be aware of what the purpose of doing occupational science research might be. To be relevant we need to be asking ourselves how occupation matters to humanity. A place to start our questioning is the core assumption that there is a relationship between health and engagement in occupation for individuals, families, communities and populations. Due to the huge diversity of what there is yet to study, there is a call to use the full repertoire of methodologies available to us.

Comment: As individuals we may make pragmatic research choices based on what will help us pursue our personal passions or the needs and questions arising from our own practice. However to ensure occupational science makes a rich and diverse contribution to knowledge we need to connect our own passions with a more coordinated research agenda.


Descriptions of community by people with spinal cord injuries: Concepts to inform community integration and community rehabilitation

Author: Kuipers, P., Kendall, M. B., Amsters, D., Pershouse, K., & Schuurs, S.

Summary: Based on research that shows community integration is, for people with spinal cord injury (SCI), a strong predictor of quality of life, this project explored what community ‘is’. Of the 690 people randomly selected from a Queensland, Australia SCI database, just over one third (270) participated in the telephone interview-based study. All were aged 15-55 at time of injury and lived in their local community following acute hospitalisation; 40% had complete quadriplegia, 81% were male, 41% were in the paid workforce, half lived in cities and 61 of them lived alone. Four constructs emerged from their descriptions: Community as ‘place’, particularly the geographic terrain; as ‘social integration’ which was predominantly about relationships; as ‘independence’, chiefly access and transport related; and as ‘occupation’, mostly about community facilities and activities. .../
Descriptions of social integration and relationships revealed the most positively valenced emotions, whereas stories about access and transport showed the most negatively valenced emotions. Considering terminology, the notion of ‘integration’ into community is less helpful than that of community ‘participation.’

Comment: Practice aimed at community-based rehabilitation for individuals following SCI may be best focused on building participation in family, social and friendship relationships; coupled with a social justice approach aimed at positively influencing public policy and local government actions to enhance access through transport and environmental design.


Journal of Occupational Science

Supported by: AUT, UniSA, USC

Summary: The Journal of Occupational Science performed well in 2011, with 9,452 full text downloads. Most of that traffic is from the US (1,068 downloads), the UK (853) and Canada (457), with the Canadian Knowledge Network, St Catherine’s University, the University of Ottawa, and USC amongst the institutions most often accessing JOS publications. Kantartzis and Molineux’s article, The Influence of Western Society’s Construction of a Healthy Daily Life on the Conceptualisation of Occupation was downloaded most often, followed by Kuo’s A Transactional View: Occupation as a Means to Create Experiences that Matter. Hearty congratulations to those authors! The JOS Editorial team are confident that its 2013 Special Issue on Participation & Health will likely find this study useful when thinking about service design. It highlights the value of understanding how culture, in this case indigenous and non-indigenous culture, underpins important occupations for older peoples’ participation items.


Studying Occupation

Lecturer: Clare Hocking. AUT offers two papers focusing on occupation, both available on campus or by distance.

Participation & Health explores the relationship between things people do and their health, which involves understanding why people do what they do, and how that contributes to competence and satisfaction, builds identity, conveys culture, and structures society.

Enabling Participation explores how occupation can be put to work to restore and promote health.

Qualification: Certificate of Proficiency, Honours degree, Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma of Health Science (Occupational Practice), or a Masters degree.

Entry Requirements: All health professionals can enrol. Those with a Bachelors degree can enrol direct into the Masters, holders of a Diploma or Health Department Certificate initially enrol into the Postgrad Certificate or Diploma. Contact: clare.hocking@aut.ac.nz

Doing what’s important: Valued activities for elder New Zealand Māori and non-Māori

Authors: Wright-St Clair, V. A., Kepa, M., Hoenle, S., Hayman, K., Keeling, S., Connolly, M., Broad, J., Dyall, L., & Kerse, N.

Summary: This New Zealand study examines the feasibility of using the World Health Organization International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to code important occupations, self-chosen by older Māori and non-Māori. The results show that domestic life, particularly gardening, cooking, keeping a tidy house and shopping, interpersonal relationships, and community, social and civic life occupations were similarly important for men and women. Doing things like supporting family, attending functions, family gatherings, or taking care of mokopuna (grandchildren) were most important for Māori, whereas visiting with, or talking to, family were important for non-Māori. Overall, the researchers found that the ICF is a useful tool for coding older New Zealanders’ self-nominated important activities. However, they found careful interpretation of culturally specific activities was required when applying the ICF’s standardised activities and participation items.

Comment: Anyone working in the social, health or disability fields with a focus on enabling older peoples’ occupational engagement will likely find this study useful when thinking about service design. It highlights the value of understanding how culture, in this case indigenous and non-indigenous culture, underpins important occupations for older people.