

SPOTLIGHT ON OCCUPATION

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AUT



Editors (L-R) – Valerie Wright-St Clair, Clare Hocking, Jenni Mace & Sandy Rutherford

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WELCOME TO THE 21ST ISSUE OF SPOTLIGHT ON OCCUPATION

The theme of the September 2017 Occupational Science Europe conference – “Occupation as Common Ground” – runs through this issue of Spotlight. The conference itself will be in English, being the language the diverse communities of Europe use to talk to each other. Tokolahi’s intervention for children taps into the common ground of occupation – the means through which we all experience inclusion and positive self-esteem. Robinson’s critical examination of toilet training practices concerns an occupation common to all, revealing the extent to which it is culturally shaped. Finally, Van Steenwinkel et al. consider the layout of people’s homes, a common ground in that all occupations are embedded in and responsive to their physical context.

Feel free to hand SPOTLIGHT on to anyone who might be interested in it or contact Deb to be added to the distribution list deb.webster@aut.ac.nz. 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>

Meeting in Diversity – Occupation as a Common Ground

Convenors: Professor Ulrike Marotzki & Professor Silke Dennhardt

Summary: On 8th & 9th September, the 4th Occupational Science Europe Conference will be held in Hildesheim, Germany. The convenors aim to create a meeting space for lively, cross-disciplinary debate around six key themes, including: Diversity, Justice and Social Transformation; Concepts for Understanding Occupation; Occupation in and Throughout Everyday Life; and Paid Work, Voluntary Work, and Unemployment. They’re encouraging submissions from people both familiar with the concept of occupation and from other disciplines who have something to add to the conversation, to promote exploration of new perspectives on occupation. By encouraging thinking across disciplines and beyond traditional modes of thought, they hope to strengthen understandings of occupation as the common ground for occupational scientists and therapists.

Comment: Launched by a network of researchers and practitioners interested in studying occupation from different perspectives, OS Europe will be based outside the UK for the first time. While selected papers from the conference will be published in the Journal of Occupational Science, there’s nothing like being part of the conversation as it unfolds. A “must-do” occupation for 2017!

Website: <http://blogs.hawk-hhg.de/ose/>



Cluster randomised controlled trial of an occupational therapy group intervention for children designed to promote emotional wellbeing

Author: Ema Tokolahi

Summary: This trial investigated the effectiveness of a preventative occupational therapy group intervention (Kia Piki te Hauora: Uplifting our Health and Wellbeing) designed to improve occupational participation and self-esteem, and reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, in children aged 11–13 years. Fourteen clusters (schools), equating to 151 participants, were randomly assigned to the intervention or control condition. Significant positive effects were found on child-rated satisfaction with their occupational performance and teacher-rated child anxiety. No evidence was found to support the effect of the intervention on anxiety and depression symptoms, self-esteem and wellbeing, by completion of the intervention.

Comment: This was the first known cluster-randomised controlled trial to investigate an occupational therapy intervention promoting emotional wellbeing in a non-clinical sample of children. The findings were promising in regards to the impact on children’s perception of their occupational performance. A longer period for follow-up would enable better understanding of the benefits for children’s occupational performance, mental health and wellbeing. Recommendations are made to redesign the intervention as an embedded intervention in the classroom, co-taught by teachers and including parental involvement.

Reference: Unpublished doctoral thesis available via the AUT library: <https://aut.researchgateway.ac.nz/>



Toilet training discourses in 1950s Aotearoa New Zealand

Authors: Rita Robinson, Clare Hocking, & Deborah Payne

Summary: Rita analysed published books and articles to explore how toilet training practices in Aotearoa New Zealand shifted during the 1950s, when toilet training became redefined as a task with great emotional importance. Using poststructural Foucauldian genealogical methodology she revealed that although defecating and urinating are instinctual biological functions, toilet training is a socially constructed task. This article describes how the new knowledge about children's maturation that was being generated by psychologists, and ideas from psychoanalysis that framed successful toilet training as dependent on mothers' emotional responsiveness, changed what mothers do. In prioritising attunement between mother and child, this scientifically informed view of mothering produced a shift towards later toilet training that enabled opportunities for childhood agency to emerge. Rita's inquiry highlights the social construction of knowledge and how beliefs which enable or limit people became intertwined with mastery or lack of mastery of excretory practices. As a result, children who fall outside defined norms become "othered", which alters their occupational experience and opportunities.



Comment: Occupations dealing with body waste continue to be an undescribed area of occupational engagement, shaped by invisible discourses that cover up areas of exclusion and occupational injustices. Children with developmental delay or behavioural issues are at risk of being infantilised if they do not master using the toilet at the same time as their peers. Equally, children perceived as incapable of being toilet trained are not given the same opportunities to develop competence. We all manage excreted body wastes in one way or another; should this not be an occupation that binds us together rather than separates us out? These findings prompt therapists to question the assumptions about children's capability, which deny them opportunities to learn to toilet independently.

Reference: (2016). *New Zealand Sociology*, 31(7), 94-114.

PREVIOUS ISSUES ARE AVAILABLE AT:

<http://www.aut.ac.nz/study-at-aut/study-areas/health-sciences/occupational-science-and-therapy>

Offering architects insights into experiences of living with dementia: A case study on orientation in space, time, and identity

Authors: Iris Van Steenwinkel, Chantal Van Audenhove & Ann Heylighen

Summary: Written by architects, this article looks at how physical and social aspects of her home supported an older woman with dementia to carry on with her usual round of meaningful occupations. It also illustrates how familiar patterns of occupation and her husband's presence in the same space served to allay her anxiety. Using the concept of "accommodating places", the authors give a detailed account of the layout of the house, including current and previous use of the spaces within it. The discussion addresses both engagement in daily occupations and opportunities for togetherness and privacy, showing how "being present, related and part of" social relationships helped her to remain oriented to meal times, solitary and shared occupations, and the domestic tasks she engaged in and enjoyed.

Comment: It is interesting to see architects dwelling with concepts occupational scientists and therapists think of as implicitly occupational; orientation to time, place and person, and continuity and adaptation of occupational patterns as a person's capacities change. While not identified as such, the discussion provides a rich transactional perspective of the research participants, their situation and shifting occupations over time.

Reference: (2017). *Dementia*, Online early. doi:10.1177/1471301217692905

STUDY OCCUPATION

Study options for those wishing to explore participation and its relationship with health with AUT include the *Specialist Readings* and *Special Topic* papers, where students work with an academic advisor to pursue an individual learning pathway. Contact Clare Hocking for details.

Entry requirements: All health professionals can enrol. Those with a bachelor's degree can enrol direct into the master's. Holders of a diploma or Health Department Certificate initially enrol into the postgrad certificate or diploma.

Qualification: Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma of Health Science (Occupational Practice), or a Master's degree.

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