

How Do Occupational Therapy Students Develop Action Competence in Activity Groups?

Kari M. Hjelle, associate professor, Bergen University College, Norway, Department of occupational therapy, physiotherapy and radiography. Diana K. Munkner, assistant professor, Bergen University College, Norway, Department of occupational therapy, physiotherapy and radiography. Sissel Alsaker, associate professor, Sør-Trøndelag University College, Faculty of Health Education and Social Work, Program of Occupational Therapy, Trondheim, Norway.

Introduction

Activity groups are a part of our educational program of occupational therapy. The course includes theoretical and practical exercises. In the theoretical paper the students choose activity assessed for patients with different activity challenges in their everyday competence. In the practical exercise the student must lead the activity group and integrate theoretical knowledge.

Aim

The aim of the study was to explore how occupational therapy students develop action competence, and how the pedagogical learning methods can be grounded in educational knowledge like transaction and "learning-by-doing".



Method

12 occupational therapy students participated in two focus groups. Data analyses were conducted following the guidelines of phenomenological meaning condensation.

Results

To be engaged

- coping
- creativity and choosing activity

The students underlined their use of professional engagement and creativity by leading and participating in the different activity groups.

To tie/attach together

- process of discovery
- integrating theory and practice

They learned to integrate theory and practice, and to ground their approaches in conceptual foundations of occupational therapy.

To reflect

- preparing oneself for action
- going through
- thinking afterwards

The learning process of planning and implementing the group activity, promoted reflections among the students according to access the different activity situations, the challenges of group dynamics and how to act, negotiate and reflect-on-action.

Conclusion

In development of occupational therapy students' professional action competence, theory and research knowledge and practical exercise could be more tied together. Using John Dewey's "learning-by-doing" as a framework, learning could be a dialectic process where students integrate experiences, theory and research, observation and action. By acting they have the opportunity to "reflect-in-action", "reflect-on-action" and adjust their knowledge. Our study shows that it is possible for occupational therapy students to learn theory and integrate the knowledge of action by using "learning-by-doing". Because of this we do not see any conflict between learning by theory and "learning-by-doing". However, these two pedagogical methods have to be tied together, being that action competence is an essential part of the profession.