

I DO, THEREFORE I UNDERSTAND: INTRODUCING OCCUPATION ANALYSIS THROUGH EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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INTRODUCTION

Occupational therapy is based on an understanding that humans are occupational beings. Enabling occupational therapy students to understand the central place of occupation, as both means and ends of practice, is vital to the theory and practice of their training (Gray, 1998). Within the occupational therapy profession, this is referred to as “developing an occupational perspective” (Hemmingsson & Jonsson, 2005; Kirsch et al., 2009; Njelesani, 2014; Whiteford & Townsend, 2011). While there are differing interpretations of the expression “occupational perspective,” it generally includes a range of common constructs. For example, (i) an occupational perspective is seen as relevant across multiple levels, from individuals to the wider society and embedded communities (Wilcock, 2007); and (ii) contextual factors are usually considered, most notably the occupational interaction with the environment in its multiple variations (physical, social, cultural, political and virtual) (Townsend, 1997). In addition, it is usually acknowledged that occupations can be (iii) connected to health and wellbeing/Hauora (Hemmingsson & Jonsson, 2005). (iv) In order to understand an occupational perspective, it is necessary to take into account both occupational form, function and meaning; and (v) engagement in one’s occupation contributes to a sense of being, becoming and belonging (Hitch, Pepin, & Stagnitti, 2014; Huot & Ruman, 2011; Wilcock, 2007).

If an occupational perspective is indeed a ‘cornerstone’ of the occupational therapy profession and the clinical reasoning of practitioners, the question must be asked: How are occupational therapy students educated to not only understand, but also practice with an occupational perspective?

This article examines a first-year degree course, Foundations of Occupational Therapy, taught in the revised Bachelor of Occupational Therapy program (2018) at Otago Polytechnic. As the name suggests, Foundations of Occupational Therapy (hereafter *Foundations*) is intended to provide base, or platform knowledge, for first-year students, to which they can refer, and build on, throughout the program. *Foundations* introduces the concept of an occupational perspective and provides theoretical and experiential learning opportunities to assist students to develop their own understandings.

What follows is an examination of how experiential learning was used in *Foundations*, developing students’ understanding of an occupational perspective through course teaching, practical workshops and occupation analysis.

Experiential learning is essentially learning through doing or, more specifically, reflecting on doing (Felicia, 2011). It is a powerful and proven approach to human learning which has enabled our evolution as a species. Aristotle recognised the link between learning and doing in ancient Greece, while Kolb was central to the contemporary framing of experiential learning in education (Kolb, 2015). Experiential learning is an essential component for action-

competent students and eventual therapists. Action competence facilitates the development of competencies (skills and understanding) that enable students to take critical action (Tasker & Hipkins, 2000).

The success of an experiential approach is measured, in this situation, by teacher and student feedback and assessment quality, as well as by feedback from those facilitating the workshops. A critique is provided of the workshops, followed by recommendations for future delivery.

A HISTORY OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AT THE OTAGO POLYTECHNIC OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SCHOOL

The School of Occupational Therapy at Otago Polytechnic has, since its inception, committed itself to a strongly practical curriculum. This is evident in traditional occupational therapy student fieldwork placements, engagement in occupation-based workshops on campus and participation in local community-based programmes in Dunedin and, more recently, Hamilton (Caulton & Dickson, 2007).

Being a student at the Occupational Therapy School means there is an expectation that community involvement moves beyond participation. Pairs or groups of students are tasked with facilitating events or projects that meet occupational needs. The ability of students to be effective in this facilitation is dependent on them having an occupational perspective they can apply. Since the founding of the school in 1990, an occupational perspective has been fostered in students through courses with titles such as Occupation, Therapeutic Occupation, Participation in Occupation, Human Occupation, and Occupational Science. Specific fieldwork placements have taken an occupational approach to community engagement and partnerships, notably Fieldwork Two (in multiple incarnations over the second and first years of the Bachelors programme) and Fieldwork Five. In addition to these courses, emerita lecturer Rosemary Caulton edited and produced *The Occupation Journal* from 1993 to 2003. This journal documented engagement in occupation and stories from practice, highlighting the importance of meaningful occupation for both clients and humanity in general.

Foundations is thus a continuation of the school's focus on occupation. It is situated as an experiential approach to education.

FOUNDATIONS OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: CONTINUING AN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH

Foundations of Occupational Therapy is a Year one /semester one course. The term “foundations” was chosen to emphasise the role of the course in laying the foundations on which occupational therapy practice will be built throughout the three-year degree.

The course is presented in three modules: humans as occupational beings; student engagement in occupation; and introduction to occupational therapy models and frameworks. The course outcomes state that at the completion of the course, it is expected that students will be able to:

1. Discuss the significance of occupation to health and wellbeing
2. Articulate the whakapapa of occupational therapy practice
3. Interpret a variety of situations using models or frameworks of occupational theory
4. Apply the concepts of the occupational therapy process to simple scenarios

An occupation perspective is introduced in module one via readings, lectures, film analysis and engagement in practical class-based activities. In module two, students engage in a range of workshops which provide the basis

for Assessment One of this course, an occupation analysis. The premise is that the student reflects on their own experience and draws on research to understand the engagement of others in the chosen occupation, and associated links with health and wellbeing/Hauora.

The structure of the assessment is adapted from the third edition of the American Occupational Therapy Association's "Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process" (2017). This framework seeks to describe the central concepts that ground occupational therapy practice, while building a common understanding of the basic tenets and vision of the profession. A breakdown of the applied sections of the framework is included in a later section of this paper (Assessment One: Occupational Analysis).

Module three links foundation knowledge to the occupational therapy problem-solving process and practice frameworks. These frameworks include the Model of Human Occupation (Kielhofner, 2002); Person, Occupation and Environment; and The Associated Canadian Model of Occupational Performance (Law, Cooper, Strong, Stewart, Rigby, & Letts, 1996). Students are tested on this knowledge through Assessment Two, an exam.

The *Foundations* course is intended to scaffold students into Years two and three, where they will engage in courses entitled "Informing Practice: Occupation" and "Complexity in Practice: Occupation." These courses build students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in regard to the use of occupation as a means or an end, where 'ends' are defined as goals and 'means' are the ways that these goals are achieved. Fieldwork placements allow the testing or application of this learning.

The remainder of this article focuses on module two of *Foundations*, where engagement in occupation is used as the basis for experiential learning – hence the paper title, "I do, therefore I understand." It describes the specific set of activities that underpinned the course in 2018.

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW AND EXPERIENCES (MODULE TWO)

Module two of *Foundations* involved preparing students to complete a range of activity workshops. The workshops ran in weeks five and six of the course and were all approximately three to four hours in length. Each student had to choose two workshops from a list of seven topics. They were prompted to challenge themselves when making their choices by choosing topics they were unfamiliar with or that were outside their comfort zone.

The workshops were facilitated by experts. Students were given introductory information about their chosen workshops, including multimedia and written resources. These resources included fiction and nonfiction accounts, technical information, films and documentaries, and articles that linked occupation to health and wellbeing/Hauora.

What follows is a brief overview of the workshops that were on offer to Dunedin students in 2018.

Art project: This workshop was facilitated by a Master of Fine Arts graduate who has an interest in community-based art projects. Students who attended this workshop at the Otago Polytechnic Art School worked in the medium of textiles (fused materials). The work of individual students was brought together to make a combined artwork which hangs in the Occupational Therapy School.



Figure 1. Student works from the art project, part of module two of the Foundations of Occupational Therapy course, 2018.

Basic baking: The focus of this workshop was to introduce students with limited baking experience to some simple recipes. This workshop was run in the Occupational Therapy School's kitchen by one of the course coordinators.

Parafed sports: This workshop was made up of two one-hour sessions facilitated by members of the Halberg Trust (<https://www.halberg.co.nz/>) and Sports Otago (<http://www.sportotago.co.nz/>). Students were introduced to adapted sports and had a chance to play alongside children and young adults who are associated with the Halberg Trust.

Making with Hatch: Hatch (<https://hatch.education/>) is an organisation which focuses on project-based learning to promote problem-solving and creativity. It is based at Otago Polytechnic and runs a number of programs for primary-aged children. Projects involve engineering, design and construction. For this workshop, students designed and constructed objects that incorporated textiles and electronics.



Figure 2. Student work from the Hatch workshop, part of module two of the Foundations of Occupational Therapy course, 2018.

Circus arts: This workshop was run by one of our Year two occupational therapy students who has extensive experience in circus arts performance and teaching. It was run at the Otago University Clubs and Societies building, using their resources. Students were introduced to circus tricks and performance routines.

Horticulture: Students attended the Otago Polytechnic horticulture department for this workshop. They were involved in propagation activities, as well as creating activities which utilised plant products and produce.

Beach activities: This workshop was run at Brighton Surf Club just south of Dunedin. Here students were given an overview of the occupations entailed in surf lifesaving, after which they experienced water-based activities and a selection of competitive surf lifesaving events.



Figure 3. Images from the beach activities workshop, part of module two of the Foundations of Occupational Therapy course, 2018

ASSESSMENT ONE: OCCUPATIONAL ANALYSIS

On completion of their two chosen workshops, each student selected one experience to focus on when writing up Assessment One – an occupation analysis using a set framework (an adaptation of The American Occupational Therapy Association’s “Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process,” 2017). Students had 2500 words in which to demonstrate their understanding of their chosen occupation, and they were expected to draw on both their own experiences and the references provided. Appendices could be included, such as specific instructions and recipes, supporting media links or articles, images and transcripts of interviews undertaken by the students. Assessment One was worth 40% of the course grade.

The following sections made up the framework analysis:

Occupation classification and description: In this section, students provided a classification and description of their chosen occupation. A short referenced statement identified the key elements of their chosen occupation and included the categorisation of the occupation. These categories could include games, sports, crafts, performance and art.

Occupational purpose: Here students described an example of successful engagement in their chosen occupation. This included the end goals, and whether these could be measured. It also included a consideration of the potential range of purposes or intentions adopted by individuals dependent on factors such as age, gender, social or competitive approach, and whether the occupation was considered a pastime or an income-generating activity.

Context and environment: Students commented on cultural, personal and political aspects of their selected occupation, providing at least one example of each related to their own experience of the occupation involved. The environmental analysis required students to provide examples of physical, virtual and social elements of the environment in terms of their relevance to the requirements of their occupation. They were encouraged to consider the environment in terms of affordances and pressures, boundaries and restrictions.

Occupational requirements: For this section, students focused on a specific technical feature of their chosen occupations – e.g., a recipe, set of craft instructions or rules for game play. Having made their choice, they documented equipment and material requirements, as well as tips and traps and set processes and rules.

Occupational performance patterns: Students identified one example each of a habit, routine, role and ritual associated with their occupation. Examples could be personal (relating to someone they know) or drawn from their research.

Values and beliefs: This section provided the students with an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the work to themselves, and others, through a review or interview. Students could choose to interview someone involved in the chosen occupation, providing a summary of the personal values and beliefs central to their work, and the meaning they derived from it. Alternatively, they could review a film, book (fiction or nonfiction), documentary or podcast related to the occupation.

Significance of occupation to health and wellbeing/Hauora: The final section of the assessment related directly to the course outcome of identifying the link between occupation, health and wellbeing/Hauora. To do this, students provided some brief commentary on an academic article (qualitative or quantitative), a media source (a website, blog, magazine, or newspaper article) and an organisation (a group recognising the link between occupation, health and wellbeing/Hauora). References and links for these sources were required both in the text and on a separate reference page.

WORKSHOP AND ASSESSMENT FEEDBACK

Following the workshops, students completed feedback and reflection sessions. These classes allowed students an opportunity to reflect on their experience while considering how they would apply their experience to Assessment One. This also provided the lecturer with an opportunity to review the different activity workshops that were offered in 2018, taking student feedback into account. In addition, *Foundations'* teaching staff collected feedback from workshop facilitators and reviewed all workshop sessions for module two, as part of a formal course review. After the completion of the Foundations course, feedback was collected via Otago Polytechnic student surveys.

A review of feedback elicited the following themes:

WORKSHOPS

- Students found most of the workshops to be challenging and rewarding. They were able to see the application to Assessment One after the reflection sessions.
- The clear majority of students felt they had gained knowledge and skills from the workshops, which also gave them insight into why people engage in those particular occupations and the meaning and purpose attached to them.
- A small group of students felt they did not personally “enjoy” a workshop experience, but they could, to differing extents, understand why others might engage in the occupations pursued in the workshop.
- Students valued workshops where the facilitator shared their experiences and helped guide them through activities. Many students enjoyed the workshops which linked to community groups, such as the Halberg Trust and the Brighton Surf Club.

ASSESSMENT ONE

- There was a range of assessment results. Most of the students passed the assessment and there were several exceptional assignments.
- Students who failed this assessment, or did poorly, noted that they found the link between the workshop experience and application to a framework problematic. In retrospect, they understood that more effort was required, including greater depth of reflection, correct application of framework terminology and the use of credible source materials (academic and non-academic). Setting expectations for work standards was an issue identified in the course review.
- Most of the students valued the opportunity to research multimedia sources and carry out semi-structured interviews with people involved in various occupations. This research often elicited much valuable information. A commonly identified issue was the difficulty of editing this information to fit the word limit of the assessment, while appreciating how appendices could be used.
- Students felt that the framework guided their reflection, research and documentation.
- Students saw the assessment as valid. The framework allowed them to draw on their experiential learning, helping them understand what taking an occupational perspective might entail.

DISCUSSION

The workshop experiences and Assessment One appear to provide a valid approach to teaching an occupational perspective, providing a base for Year two and three courses, where an occupational perspective will be applied to scenarios and be used on fieldwork placements. Developing an occupational perspective is important to enable students to become action-competent occupational therapists, recognising the value, meaning and purpose of occupations for those with whom they work (Hemmingsson & Jonsson, 2005; Kirsch et al., 2009; Njelesani, 2014; Whiteford & Townsend, 2011). Taking this perspective will assist them to be effective in their adaptation, advocacy, grading, goal setting (ends) and use of occupation in practice (means).

The ‘doing’ of the workshop activities, followed by the structured analysis of Assessment One, provided students with a guided learning experience, as well as a point of reference for future theory and practice experiences. Students were asked to reflect on occupation through their own experience, as well as seeking understanding of why others engage on multiple levels across society and culture (Wilcock, 2007). This involved the analysis of form,

function, purpose and meaning of occupation to themselves and others, while also considering the occupational interaction with the environment (Hitch, Pepin, & Stagnitti, 2014; Huot & Ruman, 2011; Townsend, 1997; Wilcock, 2007). Importantly, the learning experiences in this course guided students in making the link between occupation, health and wellbeing/Hauora, occupational therapy's chief domain of concern (Hemmingsson & Jonsson, 2005).

At the time of writing, the first year of students in the revised curriculum are still to complete their courses. The *Foundations* course is an intended point of reference for their Fieldwork Two community placements, where students will work in groups to facilitate an event for communities which meets a recognised need. Review of this course and student feedback will provide a clearer picture of the linking or scaffolding of experience.

Review of the Foundations course has resulted in several proposed changes for 2019, focused on enhancing students' experiences, outlining assessment expectations and improving reflective practices. With first-year courses, there is an emphasis on scaffolding academic and reflective expectations. In 2019, there are plans to provide assessment examples that detail application of the framework to a given occupation and set expected standards for student work. These examples are likely to be drawn from this year's student works (with consent). In addition to this, teaching sessions and online content will be strengthened to provide examples of framework application – for example, asking students to clarify the differences between occupational roles, routines and habits. Currently, students are introduced to reflective practice in another Year one course, Professional Practice. Although links are made between this course and *Foundations*, there is an identified need to strengthen reflective practice. This will mean building on the introduction offered by Professional Practice and the use of a reflective cycle (Gibbs, 1988). Gibbs' reflective cycle is a theoretical model often used by students as a framework in coursework or assignments that require reflective writing.

In regards to the workshops that will be offered in 2019, there are plans to strengthen community links and engagement, while retaining those workshops where students felt they learned core applicable skills (e.g., basic baking). Community connections in 2019 may include local Men's Sheds groups, SuperGrans, Age Concern and the North East Valley Project. As with the circus arts workshop this year, we will continue to draw on the expertise of our current students (Years two and three). This will not only enable the sharing of expertise, but will also involve facilitators who have knowledge of *Foundations* and the expectations of the course.

As the revised curriculum rolls out for Years two and three of the Bachelors program, there will be a need to monitor, and later audit, experiential learning and the teaching of an occupational perspective. This will take the form of course reviews and student feedback, and will also involve research and documentation of the practices pursued across the year courses. Ideally, in this way it will be possible to identify continuity and scaffolding of learning, as well as gaps and mismatches in application and teaching content. The end goal of this process is for graduates to be able to apply an occupational perspective to their practice, where action is taken, and justification given, based on reflective reasoning (action competence).

The review of the Foundations course conducted in this article has its limitations. Although there are strong indications of the worth and effectiveness of *Foundations* in building an occupational perspective, the validity of these findings is limited by the methodology applied. This discussion is based on findings collected from feedback and review, which was guided by the set procedures and systems of Otago Polytechnic and the School of Occupational Therapy. There are plans to use a formally research methodology to review the effectiveness of both the Foundations course and the associated fieldwork placement in Year one of the Bachelors program (Fieldwork Two). This would involve capturing student perceptions before, during and following course completions, providing more detail and enhanced validity regarding the worth and effectiveness of courses.

CONCLUSION

An occupational perspective is central to occupational therapy practice. A competent therapist needs to recognise when, why and how engagement has been affected following incident, illness or disability. Therapists also need to reflect on the impact of these changes on a person's occupational identity. This entails a focus on understanding what individuals and communities 'do' and how meaning and purpose is attributed to occupation. Therapists become effective practitioners through gaining the kind of understanding that enables them to use occupation as both ends and means.

An introduction to the framework for occupational analysis is supported through the use of different kinds of literature, constructivist teaching and experiential learning experiences. Review of the first year of this course has provided positive feedback, indicating that students are engaged and are learning to apply and reflect on occupational perspectives.

As the revised Bachelor of Occupational Therapy program rolls out in Years two and three in 2019, there will need to be research and review of how this learning is scaffolded, with the goal of graduating action-competent therapists.

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