

0065

## **Experiencing the Occupational Therapy curriculum - students perspectives**

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Education for occupational therapy students present challenges for educators as they aim to assist students to integrate theory and practice to become competent practitioners. There is a constant drive to provide more effective opportunities and strategies in an educational environment which has many constraints. The development of skills, knowledge and behaviour in becoming occupational therapists is central to professional identity and enhancing and developing the students' practice throughout their program of studies and their career. In order to do this, an understanding of how students experience and perceive the curriculum can be valuable.

This paper will discuss the findings of Phase 1 of a study exploring how students link theory and practice within an occupational therapy program and discuss how students experience the occupational therapy curriculum. This ethnographic study used three forms of data collection of which phase 1 is presented here.

The study was approved by the ethics committee of the university in which the data collection took place, and the University of Newcastle in the United Kingdom.

A diamond ranking exercise was conducted with groups of students from years 1, 2 and 3 of the BSc (Hons) program and from Years 1 and 2 of the accelerated pre-registration program. This exercise provided students with the opportunity to rank the teaching and learning strategies and methods that best assisted them in their learning experience and in their efforts to link theory and practice. The activities and discussions were video recorded. The results were obtained from the completed ranking exercises and an analysis of the discussions.

Unsurprisingly practice placement experiences were valued highest however the student discussions and debates on the value and contribution of other teaching and learning methods including the role of staff, seminars and discussion groups, activities and even assessment provide insight into the student experience of the occupational therapy curriculum.