Cross-cultural construct presentations as a way to develop occupational science and occupational therapy students’ knowledge and cultural sensitivity

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Background

↑ effects of globalization and technology
  • Internationalizing education (Horton, 2009; Sood et al., 2014; Tupe et al., 2015)
  • Technology-infused learning spaces (Taylor, 2009; Temple, 2008)

↑ need for cultural sensitivity of health professionals
  • Relevance and inclusiveness of ideas (Gerlach, 2015; Hammell, 2013)
  • From competence to critical consciousness (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009)

↑ need to understand the politics that govern occupation
  • Developing practitioners who understand and use critical, justice-focused OS/OT constructs to guide their practices

Design of synchronous online video interactions
Six 60-120 minute sessions involving student-led construct presentations about one of four critically-focused OS constructs:
  • Occupational identity (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009)
  • Occupational possibilities (Laliberte Rudman, 2010)
  • Occupational choice (Galvaan, 2015)
  • Occupational consciousness (Ramugondo, 2015)

Presentations included students’ understanding of:
  • Main elements of construct
  • Contextual example of construct
  • Discussion of construct vis-à-vis occupational justice

Followed by opportunities for cross-cultural class discussions regarding theoretical application in different contexts

Findings

“...getting to know each other as students of the field was interesting in that we were able to relate on a human level that was influenced by the mutual connection to occupational therapy and science.” (UCT)

“...the question and answer sessions allowed us to ask basic and complex questions that we would have otherwise [not] had the opportunity to ask.” (SLU)

“The concepts made way more sense when applying them to my culture and explaining things from an emic perspective to the [South African] students, then trying to comprehend their [examples] on the same concepts allowed me to view the meaning from an etic view.” (SLU)

Benefits
  • Humanized peers, moved beyond cultural stereotypes
  • Illustrated how constructs are taken up across contexts

Challenges
  • Can be awkward or uncomfortable to start
  • Technological difficulties disrupt flow

Research on interactions

☑ Anonymous, voluntary 6-item qualitative survey about the interactions that explored:
  • Students’ understanding of the purpose of interactions
  • Influence of the interactions on students’ conceptual/knowledge development
  • Students’ suggested improvements for interactions

☑ Directed content analysis  (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005)
Session Title: Cross-cultural construct presentations as a way to develop occupational science and occupational therapy students' knowledge and cultural sensitivity

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Background: This poster describes an international exchange between 52 U.S. occupational science students and 40 South African occupational therapy students that occurred in 2016. Through instructor-facilitated sessions, these undergraduate students connected via six 60 to 120-minute video conferences embedded in existing coursework. During the exchanges, small student groups presented their respective understandings about occupational identity (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009), occupational possibilities (Laliberte Rudman, 2010), occupational choice (Galvaan, 2015), and occupational consciousness (Ramugondo, 2015); discussed their application of these constructs to self-chosen, contextually-relevant examples; and made connections between these constructs and ideas about occupational justice. The exchanges also provided an opportunity for students to ask questions about international peers’ cultures, contexts, educational experiences, and views on occupational therapy practice. **Method:** 21 U.S. and 16 South African students voluntarily completed an anonymous 6-item electronic survey after the end of the exchanges to describe: their understandings of the purpose of the interactions; the ways in which the interactions were or were not learning experiences for them; and what they learned about specific concepts through the interactions. A directed content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) guided our analysis of students’ survey responses. **Discussion:** Our findings show that both student groups perceived the exchanges as a way to humanize what they were learning about an occupational perspective, while sensitizing them to the fact that dominant Western cultural ideas that are prominent in occupational science and occupational therapy literatures do not always translate across international contexts. **Implications:** Collaborations, such as the one described, offer the potential to promote cross-cultural understandings and also allow students the opportunity to explore how occupational science and occupational therapy constructs might be taken up across different contexts.

References


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