Becoming an occupational therapist: An interpretative phenomenological analysis

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Why
What

- To explore the journey that the student occupational therapist undertakes throughout their undergraduate occupational therapy professional education programme

- To explore how the student’s professional identity develops during their undergraduate education
Professional identity: Why is this still an issue for Occupational Therapists?

- Struggle to manage the dichotomy between medically driven epistemology and person-centred ontology (Clouston & Whitcombe, 2008)
- Moving beyond statutory services
- Generic working
- Commercialisation of health care

*Complex especially for newcomers*
How

- Longitudinal analysis of one undergraduate student from enrolment through to graduation
- Interviewed five times throughout the journey
- Situated the narrative against focus groups at end of each year
Using an occupational perspective to understand professional identity formation

Occupational identity: “becoming who we are through what we do” (Christiansen & Townsend, 2014)

“Doing, being, becoming and belonging are essential to survival and health. Or d+b3=sh” (Wilcock, 2007 p.5.)
Themes

- Establishing occupational coherence
- Managing occupational adaptation
- Developing a new identity
Establishing occupational coherence

- Develop occupational coherence over time

But I just feel as though my whole life fulfilment is complete now whereas before I felt that there was always something missing and this has now bridged that gap, you know, so....

(Betsy, focus group 1, lines 333-335).
Establishing occupational coherence

Making sense of occupational history

I still think the, there’s no, people still don’t understand how powerful occupation is and I think that’s our key...that’s what we are, that’s our identity, occupation how can we use that and I still think that needs more promotion

(Mark, focus grp.3, lines 480-484)
Dealing with many challenges

everything’s sort of coming together but at the same time I’m feeling very 
daunt, daunted about everything

(Lizzie, 2.1, line 395)
Managing occupational adaptation

- Adapting to a changing sense of self agency and competence.

*I think at first it’s terrifying because you don’t think, you know, I don’t, I didn’t feel like I knew enough to do it, but then when you actually get given it and you have to do it, you realise that you do know*

*(Eva, focus grp. 3, Lines, 611-613).*
Developing a new identity

- Occupational identity was congruent with their personal values.

  "it’s just the differences that you can make......to somebody’s life are like really important"

  (Lizzie, 2:1, line 496)

- When I see someone progress or something, that we’ve done, I just get so excited, I can hardly contain myself... and I think that’s more than money.... and to me that’s a good job

  (Elaine, focus gr. 3 1232-1244)
Developing a new identity

► Belonging to the cohort
But I think, when, if you’re struggling there’s always gonna be someone else struggling as well and I think the more open you are the more support you get. (Ellie, focus grp3. line 1072)

► Belonging to the team
it’s really good when you’re out on placement ....and somebody actually says you’re gonna be a fab OT .....(Betsy, Focus grp 1. line 454-458)

► Belonging to the profession
I had no idea that that was, that was out there when I started so I think it’s just building, you know your awareness of it as a, as like a community (Ellie, focus grp.1, lines 1137-1142)
Developing a new identity

I am an Occupational Therapist!

It’s been amazing and it’s been hard and brilliant and we’ve got a job out of it, well not a job, but we’ve got a profession out of it

(Eva, focus grp.3. lines 1910-1911).
So what?

- Using our own concepts
- Occupational perspective throughout
- Developing occupational coherence: increase reflection, understand transitions
- Impact of occupational experiences: role in terms of consistency and resilience
- Congruency in terms of values
- Understanding the transition: explore possible selves
- Autonomy on practice placements
- Belonging
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References


References


