

## **Chapter Title and Author**

Chapter 16: Perspectives in Occupational Therapy Education: Australia

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## **Chapter Objectives**

Upon completion of this chapter readers will be able to:

- Identify the themes present across the Australian education literature.
- Identify opportunities and challenges for education suggested by the themes.
- Draw implications from the themes for future education research in Australia and beyond.

Occupational therapy began in Australia in response to growing rehabilitation needs following World War II and now there are over 20,000 registered occupational therapists (Occupational Therapy Board of Australia, 2018). The first educational programs began in the 1940s (Cusick, 2017), and today there are two entry degrees: the four-year bachelor's degree and the two-year graduate-entry master's degree. The number of education programs in Australia has increased from 14 in 2010, to 44 individual degrees in 2018 (Occupational Therapy Council, 2019); this growth is significant given there are 42 universities Australia-wide (Australian Trade and Investment Commission, 2017). The increased number of programs creates challenges for the profession, including the need for more academic staff who are appropriately qualified, more placements for students, and more employment for graduates (Cusick, 2017).

However, the growth in programs also provides opportunities. More practising occupational therapists may increase awareness of the profession. More programs and academics increases the opportunities to deepen and broaden the evidence-base of the profession and better understand the educational process of becoming an occupational therapist. Indeed, the scholarship of occupational therapy education has been growing. The

increasing body of literature on education has not, however, been mapped to determine emphases, research methods, outcomes targeted, and key themes.

Therefore, a systematic mapping review of Australian education literature published between 2000 and 2017 was undertaken. This chapter presents a small portion of that review—the education-related themes that are across most published articles.

### **Approach to identifying and presenting education themes**

Systematic mapping reviews describe and categorise a body of scholarship to identify gaps and guide future enquiry (Grant & Booth, 2009). The term scholarship refers to descriptive, conceptual, and research publications that address teaching and learning. The protocol for this study was largely based on the approach taken by Hooper, King, Wood, Bilics, and Gupta (2013). For the wider review we asked: what is the state of scholarship on entry-level occupational therapy education in Australia? One sub question, which is the focus of this chapter, was *what themes are evident across the education literature?*

We identified 123 articles published between 2000 and 2017. Sixty-one focussed primarily on practice education and were excluded. Practice education is a particular concern in Australia warranting a separate review. Data was extracted from the remaining 62 articles using a tool that provided a detailed analysis of each paper. One element of the data extraction tool identified the broad themes. We identified areas of emphasis in the education scholarship using the teaching framework and acronym MAKER, developed by Fenstermacher and Solits (2004), which captures the transactive elements of teaching and learning:

M – Methods, skills, techniques

A – Awareness of students’ characteristics, histories and former knowledge

K – Knowledge of the content (the educator’s knowledge)

E - Ends or the goals and motivations for educating students

R - Relationships educators have with students

### **Themes in Australian Education Scholarship**

The common themes across the articles included, *the content that is and should be taught, the characteristics of occupational therapy students, making scholarship relevant to practice education, examining education through student perceptions, and faculty development.*

#### **The Content That Is and Should Be Taught**

Several articles addressed the issue of what content is and should be taught. This theme relates to the K in the MAKER acronym; the ‘knowledge’ to be imparted. While this element in the framework refers specifically to educators’ knowledge of the content to be taught, the articles coded under this theme addressed knowledge or content apart from the educators who teach it, students who learn it, and evidence-based teaching processes that convey it. In other words, curricula content was addressed from an objectivist, deductive perspective, not a transactive perspective in which content is shaped within the interactions between faculty, students, context, and the content itself. The articles studied and made recommendations for particular stand-alone content for curricula: a) person-related factors like neurology (McCluskey, 2000) and mental health (Scanlan et al., 2015); b) environment factors such as technology (Hills et al., 2016) and cultural awareness (Rammussen, Lloyd & Wielandt, 2005); and c) occupation-related content such as conceptual practice models (Ashby & Chandler, 2010) and threshold concepts (Nicola-Richmond, Pepin & Larkin, 2016). Some articles went beyond addressing specific content to considering how challenging it is to decide what content to include and exclude (Farnworth et al, 2010).

#### **The Characteristics of Occupational Therapy Students**

Scholarship assigned to this theme sought to understand student characteristics, histories, prior knowledge, and experience, which is the A (Awareness of students’

characteristics, histories and former knowledge) in the MAKER acronym. Articles emphasised student characteristics and prior experience. For example, in a study comparing students' values of inclusive education based on their country of origin, Mu et al. (2010) discussed how prior experience with inclusion likely shaped how much students valued it. Articles studied the characteristics of students, such as approaches to learning (Brown et al., 2017), levels of altruism (Byrne, 2008), and generation "Y" students (Hills, et al., 2015). Some articles also compared students across programs, disciplines, or countries (Brown et al., 2017). The rationale given for this research was that understanding student characteristics will help tailor student-centred teaching and learning. However, how to apply the findings from these studies to teaching remained largely implicit and general.

### **Making Scholarship Relevant to Practice Education**

Although articles that *primarily* focussed on practice education were excluded, many remaining articles included some consideration of it. This theme related to the E, or the end result in the MAKER acronym (i.e., helping students succeed in or actually change their practice was sometimes presented as the end goal of practice education). Other articles represented practice education as a method, the M in MAKER (i.e., methods, skills and techniques used in teaching), a strategy to teach students about different topics. For example, placement was considered a method to teach and convey professional identity (Ashby, Adler & Herbert, 2016). Ashby and Chandler (2010) identified occupation-focussed practice models taught in curricula and suggested practice education as an additional strategy to teach and disseminate these models to students.

### **Examining Education through Student Perceptions**

Articles documented students' perspectives on aspects of education, including awareness of their own characteristics and their experience of specific educational methods. This theme crosses the method, awareness, ends, and relationship elements of the MAKER

acronym. Articles about perspectives of learning techniques fall within M (teaching methods). Articles seeking student perspectives on learning outcomes fall within E (ends of teaching). It could also be said that believing in the value of students' perspectives of their education constitutes a particular kind of relationship between educators and students, the R in MAKER. Articles in this theme explored student perspectives on preparation for practice (Doherty, Stagnitti & Schoo, 2009), ability to describe the profession (Turpin, Rodger & Hall, 2012), receiving feedback on assessment tasks (Strong et al., 2012), and inter-professional learning (Larkin, Hitch, Watchorn, Ang, & Stagnitti, 2013). This group of articles contributed valuable knowledge about the student experience in a range of areas. However, student responses to understanding the core philosophy of the profession and teaching methods and approaches that impart this philosophy have not been investigated in Australia.

### **Faculty Development**

This theme includes both K and M in the MAKER acronym, educator Knowledge and Methods. Some articles addressed knowledge of subject matter specifically, such as educators' knowledge of and confidence with teaching Indigenous content (Melchert, Gray & Miller, 2016) and threshold concepts (Rodger, Turpin & O'Brien, 2015). Other articles addressed educators' knowledge and experience beyond the content they teach. For example, the development of scholarship (Fortune et al., 2016), benchmarking of research output (Broome & Gray, 2017), and transition from clinician to academic (Murray, Stanley & Wright, 2014). This group of articles was largely focused on capturing the range of roles academics are required to complete and how they develop those roles. For the majority of academics, though, teaching and learning is a significant part of their responsibilities. No articles explored profession specific teaching methods and approaches to assist academics in performing this aspect of their job.

## Discussion

Reflecting on the themes using the MAKER acronym, the Australian occupational therapy education scholarship has rarely studied the R. Similarly, the M was not a predominant focus, with few articles addressing what educators “do”—the skills, processes and techniques they use. It is often argued that due to occupational therapists’ education of clients, they are well positioned to be educators. However, it cannot be assumed that occupational therapists know how to effectively educate university students without additional knowledge and skills, what has been called “pedagogical content knowledge” (Shulman, 2013). Just as students must integrate theory and skills into practice, occupational therapists must integrate education theory and skills to become effective educators. Further, academics must integrate educational theory, methods and evidence with the profession’s core philosophy (Hooper & Rodger, 2016).

Overall, with little attention given to methods in general, profession-specific teaching methods, theory and processes appear to be taken for granted or overlooked in Australian education scholarship. This oversight was apparent given the themes that were more prominent across the articles: content, characteristics of students, practice education, student perceptions, and faculty development. For example, the *content* theme included studies of “related knowledge” (Kielhofner, 2009) but did not discuss such knowledge in terms of how it relates to occupation. Very few articles in the content theme addressed teaching the concept of occupation beyond teaching conceptual practice models and threshold concepts. Thus, profession-specific teaching has not been adequately addressed in Australian education scholarship.

Similarly, articles in the *student perceptions* theme provided information about how students perceive learning but has not explored how students perceive profession-specific teaching methods and processes. Articles in the *faculty development* theme have elucidated

aspects of becoming educators. Little work, however, has addressed how to support educators in delivering evidence-based education that is centred on the core philosophy of the profession. Articles in the *practice education* theme sought to use practice education as a means for learning certain content and to change practice. Few articles examined profession-specific teaching and learning in the practice context.

Therefore, there is a need to conduct inquiry in profession-specific teaching methods and approaches as they relate to the themes identified: *content, student characteristics, practice education, student perceptions, and faculty development*. Future inquiry can support evidence-based, occupation-centred education and how programs develop curricula that are congruent with the profession's organising concept of occupation.

### **Implications for Occupational Therapy Education**

- There is a need for occupational therapy academics to inquire into discipline-specific teaching and learning methods and approaches across multiple aspects of education.

### **Key Reflection Questions**

1. How can occupational therapy academics broaden research to study, develop, and share profession-specific teaching practices nationally and internationally?
2. How should occupational therapy academics integrate educational literature so that it is contextualised within the profession?
3. What might occupational therapy scholars investigate about profession-specific teaching and learning to support current and future academics?
4. How do occupational therapy educators design learning congruent with the profession's organising concept of occupation?

## **What led you to become an Occupational Therapy Educator?**

Melanie Roberts

I grew up surrounded by family members who worked in education so it is no surprise that I ended up educating my first student six months post-graduation. Following on from this I continued to educate students on placement and then I had the opportunity to work as an educator in a health service and then in new occupational therapy programs. Through these experiences I have gained a great deal of professional satisfaction and growth from working with students which is ultimately what drew me to teaching in the first place and still does!

Matthew Molineux

When deciding what to do after high school occupational therapy was my first choice, but teaching was on my shortlist so it has always been interest. As a clinician I worked with students on placements and fairly early on became a clinical lecturer when I was working in London, UK. This role enabled me to work with students both on placement and also in university-based courses which I designed and taught. It wasn't long after that when an opportunity came to move into education full-time and I have pretty much stayed there ever since – without regrets.

Barb Hooper

I was an educator of sorts from a young age. On the farm I grew up on was an old abandoned schoolhouse, complete with classrooms, desks and chalkboards. I taught imaginary students and reluctant neighbours. As I got older, I taught Sunday School classes and flag corps routines and neuroanatomy reviews. When later given an opportunity to fill in for an occupational therapy faculty sabbatical, it was a natural fit. I was a naïve practitioner-educator intent on setting students on a better learning course than they were getting from the academics! I've learned a great deal since.

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