



Occupational Therapy and European Social Reform; complacent or contributing?

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Purpose.

To present an argument on how occupational therapists have/have not become involved in social reform.

To question if the Bologna and Tuning Processes underpinned this work.

To consider if occupational therapists are rising to the challenge or being complacent in contributing to social reform.



Relevance

EU 2020 goals:

http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

One of the EU 2020 objectives on social inclusion; which relates to the topic of social reform.

European Year 2015 Year for Development

<https://europa.eu/eyd2015>

Involves the Millennium Development Goals including a future framework for poverty eradication and sustainable development. Social reform is closely linked to this.



Relevance

The presentation links to practice, education and research.

OT practitioners in Europe need to consider social reform in the delivery of their services.

OT Education as it develops throughout Europe, is now more based in each country's social policies and there is a need to embed OT education in the context of social reform.



The Bologna and Tuning Processes:

Led to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) which improved transparency between higher education systems and led to recognition of degrees, academic qualifications and mobility. (European University Association website 2013)

It insisted that higher education should link directly to society and its needs.



The Bologna and Tuning Processes:

TUNING Project is a transparent way to re-design degree programmes, allowing for diversity and flexible degree programmes in a Life Long Learning context (Wagenaar 2010).

It offers

- shared reference points at subject area level,
- a methodology which insists upon consideration of the context in which higher education takes place.



Occupational Therapy Tuning Process.

Outlined by The Tuning Occupational Therapy Project Group (2008).

“subject specific competences describe the graduate occupational therapist”. Kantartzis and Ness (2007).

Offered a way of

- establishing occupational therapy education at an academic level,
- with a shared understanding of the graduate competencies for any occupational therapy education course in Europe.



Occupational Therapy Tuning Process.

Indicated the skills, knowledge and attitudes graduate occupational therapists offer society, especially in relation to social reform such as

- improving rights,
- inclusion and
- participation.

Insisted on evaluation of the societal context in which the higher education is taking place, often revealing social injustice, which can underpin the rationale for the occupational therapy education.



Occupational Therapy in European Social Reform.

- As Eastern European countries joined the European Union they underwent social and educational reform.
- Lead to initiatives to develop 'new disciplines', including, occupational therapy.
- Was a need to reform their social sectors to promote the welfare of their citizens and spur economic growth (van Bruggen in Kronenberg at al 2011).



Occupational Therapy in European Social Reform.

Rationale for occupational therapy development in “new” countries emerged. (van Bruggen in Kronenberg et al 2011).

- Commitment of EU to human rights and democracy.
- WHO Social Determinants of Health.
- Aim of EC to tackle health inequalities within/between European countries.
- Bologna Process leading to the European Tuning Process.
- WFOT: Occupational Therapy to facilitate the right of occupational participation for all and to reduce occupational injustice, occupational deprivation and occupational apartheid.
- Need to meet occupational needs; which can be defined as essential determinants of health and well being.



Social Reform. Social Justice

Social Reform; any type of reform (or gradual change) that directly affects society.



Social Justice recognises humans as social beings who need equitable access to opportunities and resources.



Occupational Therapy

There is a suggested move away from the individual toward community and population for occupational therapy (Watson and Swartz (2004).

Occupational Therapy and Occupational Science research suggests that occupation is necessary for human existence (Whiteford and Townsend in Kronenberg et al 2011 p67)



Occupational Therapy in European Social Reform.

The Tuning process encouraged us to consider the context when planning higher education which revealed much social injustice in some of the eastern European countries.

The development of occupational therapy education and practice in these countries focused on

- sustaining and reinforcing commitment to solidarity and occupational justice.
- to strengthen inclusive communities (van Bruggen in Curtin et al 2012).



Occupational Therapy in European Social Reform.

Marginalization,
Social exclusion,
Dependency.



Translate into occupational terminology:

- occupational injustice,
- occupational deprivation,
- occupational apartheid.

(van Bruggen in Curtin et al 2010).



One pressing question

Why has occupational therapy not responded with more enthusiasm to these obvious social issues?

- With Bologna insisting upon consideration of society's needs.
- With Tuning telling us to assess the contextual factors in which higher education of occupational therapists takes place.

It would seem apparent that occupational therapy should address this and work towards social reform.



Partnership Working



Some evidence that occupational therapy is involved in social reform:

- Occupational therapists can be viewed as agents of change (Watson and Swartz 2004)
- They are working in partnership with communities.

Partnership working enables different groups of people to

- collaborate,
- Cooperate,
- coordinate to solve problems and exchange resources (Van Bruggen in Curtin et al 2010).



Capacity Building



Capacity building is also an important strategy and it is the process through which individuals, institutions and societies

- perform functions,
- solve problems,
- set and achieve objectives (United Nations in van Bruggen 2010)

So by considering a cross-sector partnership, capacity building and by being agents of change occupational therapists can perhaps contribute to social reform.



Occupational Therapy in Social Reform.

It could be suggested that The Occupational Therapy Tuning Project laid the foundation for development in and contribution to social reform in Europe.

However, innovative projects had been established in Eastern Europe, prior to the formal Tuning process.

They influenced the occupational therapy tuning process.



Occupational Therapy in Social Reform.

When Tuning was established these projects and their initiators could easily align with general and subject specific objectives.

This project work incorporated

- capacity building
- partnership working
- was developed in relation to social issues.

Occupational therapists can embrace social policy by including issues such as rights, inclusion, employment, social integration and participation in the occupational therapy curriculum (van Bruggen 2012)



Occupational Therapy in Social Reform.

Successful funding applications were gained from the Life Long Learning Programme for two projects;

- Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria.
- Caucasus; Georgia, Armenia.

Aimed to improve participation of people with disabilities in society through the establishment of occupational therapy education and services.



Occupational Therapy in Social Reform.

Resulted in the establishment of four Bachelor degree programmes in Occupational Therapy.

Led to

- the first 100 occupational therapy graduates,
- the creation of services,
- employment of occupational therapists,
- legal regulations of the profession in the different countries



Occupational Therapy in Social Reform.

In addition Romanian and Polish projects gained funding from the European Social Fund (ESF).

In line with the Tuning methodology consideration of the societal environment in which the education was taking place was undertaken, and social issues such as:

- inclusion,
- human rights,
- participation were identified.



Occupational Therapy in Social Reform.

Training of occupational therapy educators was undertaken.

- In order to establish occupational therapy education
- At an academic level
- In universities.

And to produce occupational therapists to tackle such contemporary social issues.



Occupational Therapy in Social Reform.

These projects focused on sustaining and reinforcing occupational justice in order to strengthen inclusive communities and to tackle

- marginalization,
- social exclusion
- dependency (van Bruggen in Curtin et al 2010).



Occupational Therapy in Social Reform.

“Developing occupational therapy education for social reform is not just implementing a good curriculum, training lecturers or allocating skills but it needs:

- organisational engagement,
- system thinking,
- willingness to change”.

(van Bruggen in Kronenberg et al 2011).



Occupational Therapy in Social Reform.

This systems' change or reform can be seen in terms of social reform.

Following the European Commission (2010) this should lead to inclusive growth, which means:

- empowering people
- through investing in skills,
- fighting poverty
- training to build a cohesive society”.



Occupational Therapy in Social Reform.

Occupational therapy therefore developed its education in line with social reform.

Additional social inclusion projects, facilitated by occupational therapists have also been developed, taking social reform forward out with education including:

- Competences for Poverty Reduction (COPORE) (<http://www.enothe.eu/index.php?page=cop/default>)
- Empowering Learning for Social Inclusion through Occupation (ELSITO) (<http://elsito.net/>)
- Euro Education: Employability for all (EEE4all) (<http://www.isv.liu.se/eee4all?l=en>).

These few innovative projects address social reform.



Conclusion.

Therefore suggest that:

Occupational Therapy: has a role to play in social reform.

Some occupational therapists in Europe had been proactive, establishing projects to respond to social needs before Tuning, facilitating alignment to Tuning when it was established.

The Tuning Methodology insisted upon analysis of education contexts, so injustice was revealed.

This ensured that new developments in occupational therapy education contributed to social reform.



Conclusion.

This type of work is not going to solve all problems of poverty, exclusion, hunger and discrimination.

At best it is an example of allowing deeper understanding of ways of practicing and exploring new ideas.

This process recognises human and occupational rights in combination with poverty reduction strategies.

In relation to occupational therapy education it is not about occupational therapy for occupational therapy, but it is about facilitating social reform and change.



Conclusion.

However the question of why so few examples exist in relation to occupational therapy contributing to social reform still persists.

Only a handful of European occupational therapists involved in these developments.

Current funding/organisation of occupational therapy is primarily in health/biomedical services (Whiteford and Townsend 2011).

The challenge to take on social reform requires a collective, courageous, visionary effort for occupational therapy



Conclusion.

As a profession we are urged by Van Bruggen (2012) to take on board that the Euro 2020 (EC2020) strategy offers challenges to develop new approaches to contribute to:

- increasing employment market participation,
- increased participation in inclusive education to promote social inclusion.

So:

**Occupational therapy can contribute to
social reform.**



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