



17th ENOTHE Annual Meeting 2011 – Ghent, Belgium

Hanneke van Bruggen Lecture Jennifer Creek

“In praise of diversity”

This talk, the first annual Hanneke van Bruggen lecture, explores the nature of diversity, its importance to occupational therapy and the challenges faced by the profession as it strives to embrace variety and difference.

The talk begins with a discussion of the concept of diversity, considering why it is essential to the survival of both ecosystems and individual species, including human beings. Occupational therapy’s commitment to ‘independence, autonomy and self-determination’ (Duncan & Watson 2004, p. 304) is critically examined, looking at the attitude of the profession towards difference in clients, colleagues and others. This examination leads to the conclusion that occupational therapists value individuality but are not always able to embrace diversity fully in practice, education or research.

Suggestions are given of ways in which occupational therapists might enact their values more fully in practice and education, through respecting individual difference, accepting the risks this brings and avoiding becoming closed in ‘circles of certainty’ (Friere 1972, p. 18). Challenges to greater acceptance of diversity are identified, including environmental constraints and professional anxieties. Examples are used to illustrate the diversity of media, theories, approaches, epistemologies and pedagogies available to occupational therapists when working with divergent client groups.

The talk concludes that the values and skills of occupational therapists allow them to accept and foster diversity but the profession needs to be more confident about promoting its distinctive, individualised approach if it is to be fully effective.

References

- Duncan M, Watson R (2004) Transformation through occupation: towards a prototype. In: R Watson, L Swartz (eds) *Transformation through occupation*. London: Whurr. 301-318.
- Friere P (1972) *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London: Penguin.