FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR

Personal Professional Journeys

It’s possible that you are reading this shortly after returning from the AOTA Annual Conference and Expo in Minneapolis. For those who were not able to attend, let me tell you a little about what the experience of “conferencing” is like—at least for me, a veteran of at least 20 conferences.

In my early days as an occupational therapist, I attended Conference to hear about the newest assessments and interventions, to get a look at the individuals whose names are always in the occupational therapy literature, and to understand more about where my profession is going. As a home-care therapist, this was only one of a handful of opportunities to be with like-minded individuals and stay in touch with what was happening in my profession. I usually came home from Conference with new shoes (there is always shopping involved) and fatter (eating is a main event too), but recharged about ideas that I thought were exciting and new.

As the years went on, I began to present my ideas at Conference and in doing so, joined a network of occupational therapists who have similar interests. Currently I attend only selected sessions, but spend the majority of my time networking with colleagues and meeting new people. This is extraordinarily valuable to my professional growth as gives me the opportunity to learn more about what other occupational therapists are thinking and doing, plus learn a bit about myself in the process. I’m convinced that if you feel stalled or are disheartened by the work you are doing as an occupational therapist, try attending Conference to boost your enthusiasm.

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Occupational therapists seem to need to talk with other occupational therapists about what they are doing. Even my husband had noticed and commented on the fact that when occupational therapists get together, they talk about their work (what he actually said was, “You all sound like a flock of birds calling “O’Tea. O’Tea.”). This tendency was confirmed by Mattingly and Fleming (1994) in their findings about clinical reasoning processes described by occupational therapists. For the first time, this “underground practice” of reasoning, that includes talking to other therapists about clinical puzzles, seemed acceptable—even the right thing to do. Recognizing the importance of talking about practice, my colleague Laura Gitlin and I built in monthly debriefing sessions for occupational therapists working on our grants to discuss their thinking and knotty clinical problems. Attendance at these meetings was always very high and everyone agreed on their importance, both in terms of therapy itself but also as a mechanism for professional growth.

Evidently this love of talking about self and practice has been apparent to Conference planners for some time since the annual Plenary Session is always an awe-inspiring presentation of personal or professional growth. As I listened to the 2003 Plenary Session (The Heart, Mind, and Soul of Professionalism in Occupational Therapy) presented by Dr. Wendy Wood, I thought about how uplifting this type of thinking would be for all occupational therapists, not just those who could attend Conference. I had just accepted the position of AJOT editor the week prior, so I asked Wendy Wood if she would consider being an associate editor for a new department that focuses on professional growth. This department is an invited forum for the personal and professional journeys of individuals who have demonstrated exemplary leadership in the field over the course of a substantial career, whether as clinicians, researchers, educators, or some combination. Dr. Wood captured the vision of this department in her letter of invitation to our first invited scholar, Dr. Betty

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Hasselkus (to be published in the July/August issue of AJOT), when she wrote:

As an invited contributor, I am asking you to share some of your wisdom, gleaned from a tested and honorable career, with the rest of us. In your estimation, the wisdom you share should be such that it might help other occupational therapists find ways to sustain and grow firm persuasions in the value of their work, no matter the nature or severity of the struggles they will invariably encounter. How you share your wisdom and relate it to the themes in my [2003] plenary, or suggest new ideas and themes, is entirely up to you. I ask only that you share something of your “personal professional story,” relate your story to the Department’s focus on a firm persuasion in our work, and tell it as a scholar.

To my delight, this new AJOT department, entitled “A Firm Persuasion in Our Work,” is launched in this issue with Dr. Wendy Wood’s 2003 Plenary Session. If you read nothing else in this issue, be sure to read that magnificent article, which makes a major contribution to realizing the vision of AJOT to “develop the clinical scholarship of the profession” (see my editorial in AJOT, 58(2), 2004).

Reference

Call for Papers
Disability Studies and Its Implications for Occupational Therapy

Articles on disability studies and its implications for occupational therapy are requested for a special issue of the American Journal of Occupational Therapy. The purpose of the special issue is to enhance understanding of disability studies as a field of inquiry with direct implications for occupational therapy. Manuscripts will be selected for quality and contribution to a dialogue between disability studies and occupational therapy. Of particular interest are articles that: 1) address how understanding of disability within occupational therapy can be informed by disability studies, 2) document client perspectives and/or client experiences of occupational therapy, 3) demonstrate how disability studies concepts can be integrated into occupational therapy services, and 4) document sociopolitical barriers that create disability and how they can be removed. Inquiries are welcome and guest editors are willing to provide feedback to assist manuscript development. Manuscripts are due to the guest editors at the address below by August 1, 2004. Please submit manuscripts for review to:

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