Occupational Therapy as Art and Science: Should the Older Definition Be Reclaimed?

Suzanne M. Peloquin

Suzanne M. Peloquin, PhD, OTR, is Associate Professor, Department of Occupational Therapy, School of Allied Health Sciences, The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston, 301 University Boulevard, Galveston, Texas 77555-1038.

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The Older Definition: An Affirmation of Character and Excellence

The descriptive phrase “art and science” affirmed a blend of practice epistemologies and functions that derive from older practices; in doing so it suggested its ethos and moral excellence. Mosey (1981) described the art of occupational therapy as the capacity to establish rapport, to empathize, and to guide others to make use of their potential. She described its science as the gathering of data to develop, verify, or refine new theories. More recent research on clinical reasoning has affirmed and elaborated on this older characterization of practice with the newer language of interactive, conditional, and procedural reasoning (Fleming, 1991). Seen as an art and science, occupational therapy enacts the excellences of each older practice while endorsing yet another excellence that characterizes their coexistence.

Art and science are kindred and complementary, and occupational therapy moves fluidly between them. Any characterization that calls a profession both art and science implies that if the practices of art and science are dual and distinct, they are not dichotomous. In fact, much within the general literature on art and science argues their common features; that literature resonates strongly with occupational therapy practice. Koestler (1964) saw the fundamental link between art and science as the...


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