Occupation: Form and Performance

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As used both in everyday language and in the literature of occupational therapy, occupation is an ambiguous term. This article defines occupation unambiguously as the relationship between two things: occupational form and occupational performance. Each occupational form has an objective nature independent of the individual engaged in the occupational performance, in turn, is the action elicited, guided, or structured by the preexisting occupational form. Although occupational form may be said to predict or explain occupational performance, the nature of occupation is not deterministic. A series of figures in the paper graphically depicts how the individual’s interpretation of an occupational form (its meaning) depends on the individual’s developmental structure, and how occupational performance depends on the individual’s sense of purpose. The dynamics of occupation are such that occupational performance impacts on subsequent occupational forms and promotes adaptations in the individual’s own developmental structure. The framework explained here can be applied to different levels of occupation, depending upon the unit of time used by the analyst. A table presents an extensive set of examples oriented to a specific occupation. Recommendations for future scholarly inquiry are made.

As used in everyday language, occupation and its verb root occupy are ambiguous terms. The same ambiguity marks other terms of key significance to the profession of occupational therapy, including activity, play, and work. On one hand, each of these terms refers to actual performance, or doing. On the other hand, each of the terms also refers to a preexisting format that guides the human performance. For example, on one hand we can speak of the occupation or activity of baseball as an established format of rules, procedures, locus, and equipment that preexists and is independent of the actual doing of any specific person. In contrast, we can also speak of a person being occupied as a way of describing the actual doing of a series of activities over a 2-hour period (e.g., the person throws a ball, hits a ball, runs, talks with teammates, etc.). Is occupation the format of the game (the structure) or is it the playing of the game (the doing)?

The ambiguous use of these terms appears in the language of occupational therapists also. We speak of work in the abstract as an occupation, and we also speak of a particular worker’s behavior as occupation. We speak of art forms and crafts as activities, and we also speak of the specific actions taken by a particular person as his or her activity. This type of ambiguity is common in the everyday usage of words and is documented in dictionaries, such as Webster’s Third New International Dictionary (s.v. “occupation” and “occupy”). However, such ambiguity can inhibit the development of a profession. One of the first steps in any logical inquiry is to ensure that everyone knows exactly what is being discussed.

Figure 1 eliminates the ambiguity in the term occupation. Occupational form is the preexisting structure that elicits, guides, or structures subsequent human performance; occupational performance consists of the human actions taken in response to an occupational form. The term occupation, then, need no longer be used ambiguously (to refer to either form or performance); occupation can be thought of as the relationship between occupational form and occupational performance. As used in the framework presented here, the term occupation always refers to the occupational performance of an occupational form (i.e., the doing of something or the engaging in something).

Occupational Forms

An occupational form is an objective set of circumstances, independent of and external to a person. The individual’s occupational performance (the doing) can be understood only in terms of the environmental context in which the performance takes place (that is, only in terms of the occupational form). Almost all
human contexts are full of richness and variety—the
typical occupational form is multidimensional. An oc-
cupational form not only tends to have many facets,
but also frequently has a preestablished order in the
arrangement of its many facets.

Broadly, each occupational form has two types of
dimensions. First, each occupational form can be
described objectively in terms of physical stimuli
present in the immediate environment of the indi-
vidual at any given point in time. These stimuli include
(a) the materials, including the number of objects,
their spatial interrelationships, and the physical char-
acteristics of each object; (b) the environmental sur-
round, including the location, the features that sepa-
rate the immediate environment from the “outside,”
and potentially competing materials on the fringes of
the immediate environment; (c) the human context,
including the movement, speech, and appearance of
all those in the immediate environment; and (d) the
temporal context, including the occupational form’s
relationships to prior and future events, and the step-
by-step changes in the physical environment over the
course of the occupation.

Second, each occupational form has a sociocul-
tural reality that exists independently of any specific
individual but that depends on social or cultural con-
sensus. Each level of society has its own values,
norms, sanctions, symbols, roles, and practical guide-
lines for interpreting the physical aspects of occupa-
tional forms. For example, at the cultural level, there
are definite rules governing the symbolic interpreta-
tion of speech utterances. Or, at a community level,
a specific building may symbolize something recog-
nized by all who see it. Or, at a much more basic level
of society, the family, there may be specific norms
governing household objects. Other levels of society
include the universal (cross-cultural) level, subcul-
tures, political units, regions, institutions, organiza-
tions, and friendship circles.

The sociocultural reality of an occupational form
might be highly prescribed (ritualistic) or might be
loosely organized with much sanctioned opportunity
for typical variations or individual interpretations.
In addition, though the sociocultural reality of an oc-
cupational form might include norms for a typical per-
formance, the actual occupational performance of an
individual at a particular time might or might not
conform to those norms. The sociocultural reality of
an occupational form depends on group consensus,
but the consensus is seldom unanimous. Further-
more, the individual encountering an occupational
form may or may not be familiar with its sociocul-
turally defined norms and processes (this is a matter of
accluarlation).

As presented in this paper, an occupational form
is a specific environmental context as opposed to a
medium. A medium is a hypothetical set of occupa-
tional forms that vary from circumstance to circum-
stance. For example, weaving is a socioculturally de-
finite medium that can vary considerably from situa-
tion to situation depending on the materials (the type
of thread and loom); the environmental surround (the
nature of the setting, whether one is in one’s own
home, at school, or at work); the human context (the
type of instructions given and the presence or ab-
sence of other weavers); and the temporal context
(the occupations preceding and following the weav-
ing as well as the step-by-step physical changes occur-
ring during the weaving).

Occupational Performance

The term performance means to go through or to
carry out something, and occupational performance
means to go through or carry out the occupational for-
mer. Occupational performance is the doing, the ac-
tion, the active behavior, or the active responses ex-
hibited within the context of an occupational form.
Usually, occupational performance is observable to
others in the environment (because the response by
the doer typically involves behaviorally observable
movement). Such responses include gross as well as
fine patterns of movement, speech and related vocali-
izations, ocular movements, facial expressions, and
all other voluntary (nonreflexive) movements and
postures made possible by motor control. Occasion-
ally, occupational performance may be covert (e.g.,
an individual may mentally solve a puzzle not requir-
ing any observable response).
As is implied by the arrow in Figure 1, occupational form precedes occupational performance in time. This does not mean that all of the occupational form always precedes all of the performance; on the contrary, as will be seen later, performance at one point in time frequently alters the occupational form guiding subsequent performance. What it does mean is that, at any point in time, occupational performance is guided by a preexisting occupational form, even if the preexisting occupational form is not entirely complete.

Although the arrow in Figure 1 implies temporal precedence, it leaves open the possibility of different types of relationships between occupational form and occupational performance. Changes in occupational forms frequently cause changes in occupational performances. For example, seemingly small changes in the form's materials or instructions can cause large changes in performance. The identification of possible relationships between occupational forms and occupational performances is a matter for empirical research as well as theoretical inquiry. A science of occupation would include research investigating the relationships between the degree of structure in typical occupational forms and the degree of predictability in the occupational performances. Also, the relationship between occupational form and occupational performance could be studied as a "match" or a "mismatch" to the requirements of the preexisting occupational form. Furthermore, performance could be investigated as a function of "press," a term used by Barris, Kielhofner, Levine, and Neville (1985, p. 45) to describe novelty, challenge, or arousal-eliciting properties.²

Meaning and Occupational Forms

Occupational form can be said to predict or have an effect on occupational performance, but it cannot be said to determine or control occupational performance. Determinism is a false position for several reasons, and one of the primary reasons is that the effect of the occupational form on the occupational performance depends on the individual's interpretation of the form. The concern for the individual's interpretation of the environment has been a major theme in the profession from Slagle (1914, p. 19) to Kielhofner (1985, p. 19). This interpretation is an active process on the part of the individual, and potentially the individual's entire developmental history can be brought to bear on that interpretation. The same occupational form may be interpreted differently by different individuals depending on all the factors that have contributed to each individual's current state of development (Cynkin, 1979, p. 123).

Meaning or meaningfulness is the term to be used in labeling the individual's interpretation of the occupational form.³ Here the meaningfulness of an occupational form refers both to the perceptual sense it makes to the individual as well as to the cognitive associations elicited in the individual. We can describe an occupational form in terms of the presence or absence of meaningfulness (is an interpretation made?), in terms of its degree of meaningfulness, and in terms of the types of meanings assigned to it by an individual. The meaning of the occupational form to an individual may or may not conform to sociocultural norms. For example, a cultural symbol such as a Thanksgiving Day turkey may have no meaning or only an idiosyncratic meaning to a particular person.⁴

Developmental Structure

The meaningfulness of an occupational form depends on the individual's developmental structure. The structure that an individual brings to bear on the concepts in this paper. In this paper, the same phenomena would be classified and arranged in a different fashion.

¹This usage of meaning is different from the term meaningful activity as presented by Sharrott (1983, p. 213). From the point of view of this paper, Sharrott's interesting discussion refers to the creation of future meaning through occupation, not to the meaningfulness of an occupational form. From the point of view of this paper, Sharrott presents an example of adaptation, not meaning.

²Mosey's discussion of cultural and idiosyncratic symbols (Mosey, 1981, pp. 104–105) is relevant here. One difference between the idea of idiosyncratic meaning as presented in this paper and Mosey's notion of idiosyncratic symbols can be seen in her charming example of the family who could not conceive of Thanksgiving without "squash, peanuts, and sour cream." In this paper, the symbolic values assigned to these foods by the family would be considered part of the occupational form internal to any individual. In this paper, the idiosyncratic meaning of an occupational form is always an individual matter. One of the implications of this is that a family member may not yet know how others interpret these foods, or may lose the ability to find meanings in them.
.interpretation of an occupational form is complex, yet the multitudinous attributes are integrated into a working whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. These attributes may be classified in terms of an individual's (a) sensory, (b) motor, (c) perceptual, (d) cognitive, (e) emotional, and (f) interpersonal structural characteristics. Within each of the six structural characteristics are many identifiable attributes. These include abilities, attitudes, beliefs, predispositions, memories, and other qualities (such as the individual's current state of arousal) enabling the individual's responses to occupational forms. Although it is generally easy to classify certain attributes into one of the six categories of structural characteristics, this is not always the case. Certain complex attributes, such as language, love, values, or creativity, are interactions among several of the six identified structural characteristics.

An individual's structure at any given point in time is a function of his or her development. Genetic, maturational, and experiential factors contribute to this development. Furthermore, as Huss (1981) pointed out, each attribute has a physiological basis in the human being; however, little is known at the present time about the physiology of many of the structural characteristics of the human being. Figure 2 shows how the occupational form takes on meaning as a function of the individual's developmental structure.

**Purposefulness**

All occupation includes a sense of purposefulness. This is true for the specific terminology proposed in this paper and for the everyday usage of the term (Webster's Third New International Dictionary, s.v. "occupation"). Figure 2 clarifies the relationship between purposefulness and other aspects of occupation. Purpose is the goal orientation of the individual and the link between the individual's developmental structure and occupational performance. As Breines (1984) pointed out, purposefulness varies from individual to individual. Depending on the meanings assigned to the occupational form by the individual, the individual purposefully organizes his or her structural characteristics in such a way as to achieve a goal through occupational performance. Whereas meaning is constituted by the interaction between occupational form and the individual's developmental history (a "looking back"), purpose is constituted by the interaction between the individual's developmental structure and his or her future occupational performance (a "looking forward"). Meaning involves reflection; purpose involves prediction.

As used in this paper, the purpose of an occupational performance is always from the point of view of the actor. In other words, the term purpose is restricted to the goal orientation of the individual and does not refer to the goals of others, whether in the immediate environment or not. Another aspect of purposefulness is that the individual may be seeking more than one goal when engaged in a single occupational performance. For example, in performing a particular occupation, an individual may simultaneously be seeking (a) specific changes in the occupational form's materials (a "product"), (b) the praise of a supervisor, (c) money, (d) the tactile sensations of handling the materials, and (e) satisfaction of the need to be productive, leading to confirmation of personal efficacy. Just as all occupational forms are not equally meaningful to an individual, all occupa-

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Figure 2. Occupation defined further, with the relationship between occupational form and occupational performance depending on the meaningfulness of the occupational form to the individual and the purposefulness of the occupational performance to the individual. (Both meaning and purpose depend on the individual's developmental structure.)
tional performances are not equal in terms of purposefulness. Although the goal orientation of an individual is not always perceptible to an outsider, observation of the occupational performance is usually a means of inferring the individual's purposes.

The Impact of Occupational Performance
Frequently, occupational performance leaves an observable effect on the environment. Materials are transformed; others in the environment are influenced; and the sequence of events is altered. As Cubie (1985, p. 148) pointed out, occupation not only depends on the environment, but also serves to create the environment. Therefore, occupation can be said to be dynamic, in that occupational performance tends to affect subsequent occupational forms, which, in turn, tend to affect subsequent occupational performance. The impact of an individual's performance on the environment is another factor refuting the proposition that individual behavior is controlled or determined by external forces.

Figure 3 depicts occupational dynamics. The occupational form at one point in time is interpreted in terms of the individual's developmental structure; upon this interpretation the individual organizes himself or herself for performance designed to achieve specific purposes; and the performance, in turn, contributes to the occupational form at the next point in time. This is depicted in Figure 3 as the "impact" arrow. Of course, other events occurring in the environment, such as the actions of other individuals, also influence the occupational form. Just as the individual is not totally determined by the environment, so the environment, especially if shared with others, is not totally determined by the individual. Occupational performance that orders and sequences subsequent occupational forms in a balanced way was important to Meyer (1922) and is part of what Kielhofner (1977) has termed temporal adaptation.

Adaptation and Occupation
As Fidler and Fidler (1978) stated, purposeful action is the means by which human beings become themselves. Meyer (1922) stated that "It is the use that we make of ourselves that gives the ultimate stamp to our every organ" (p. 5). Meyer used the term adaptation to describe the change process facilitated by occupation; King (1978) also recommended that the term adaptation be used to describe this process.

As depicted in Figure 3, adaptation includes any effect on the individual's developmental structure that is not exclusively due to purely physical means (i.e., physiological maturation or disease). Figure 3 depicts two possible kinds of adaptation. The section of the arrow originating over "Purpose" in Figure 3 depicts a type of adaptation that occurs once the individual has a sense of purpose in relation to the occupational form but before the occupational performance is actually emitted. Gilfoyle, Grady, and Moore (1981, p. 48) cited the accommodation of the individual's own resources to the requirements of the task as one of the major types of adaptation. The exact nature of adaptation may vary depending upon which structural characteristic is challenged (e.g., cognitive structures may adapt somewhat differently from motor structures).

The other possible route of adaptation as displayed in Figure 3 is the effect of the performance itself on the performer's developmental structure. Once the performance is carried out, the individual frequently stores in memory the action and the context of purposefulness in which the action took place. Gilfoyle, Grady, and Moore (1981, p. 48) described the types of associations that can be generated by performance. This memory is incorporated within the individual's structure for possible use in assimilating and differentiating future situations.

There are different types of adaptation. Structural characteristics may be strengthened, weakened, added, eliminated, restored, or simply maintained.
Table 1

Planting a Small Garden (by a 40-Year-Old Man With His 7-Year-Old Daughter): An Abbreviated Example of the Relationship Between Occupational Form and Occupational Performance

**OCCUPATIONAL FORM**

| Physical Aspects | Material: Packages of various types of seeds; a gardening book; tools, including trowels, hoes, and rakes (weight, size of parts, sturdiness, color, etc.); plot of prepared soil; spatial relationships between objects. |
| Surrounded: Sunny spring day; forced in backyard with toys and sandbox; nearby house with typical supports and distractions (telephone, etc.); residential neighborhood sounds (children, slamming screen doors, etc.). |
| Human aspects: Seven-year-old daughter’s presence and the absence of others; the girl’s speech (frequency, duration, volume, pitch, phonetic qualities, and responsiveness); the girl’s movements (garden- or toy-related). |
| Temporal aspects: Events that occur after tilling and shopping and before cleaning up (daily level) and garden care (seasonal level); the moment-by-moment physical changes during the two hours of planting. |
| Sociocultural Aspects: Universal—Crosscultural and historical significance of growing things with regard to self-sufficiency and physical survival; nurturance and the father-daughter relationship; rejuvenation of spring. |
| Cultural Context: Industrialized society’s view of gardening as leisure, particularly among upper socioeconomic classes; society’s norms and values concerning leisure and father-daughter interaction; the culture’s storehouse of knowledge concerning plants, gardening, and tool use; the culture’s linguistic rules for interpreting speech and written instructions, appropriateness of occupation for both genders. |
| Family: Backyard as shared space and family norms regarding child care and scarce leisure time; man’s grandparents’ dependence on, but his parents’ avoidance of, farming/gardening. |

**INDIVIDUAL MEANINGS**

| Sensory—Vision; audition; touch; proprioception; vestibular sensation; smell; general state of arousal (beginning the occupation in a generally underequipped state). |
| Motor—Muscle stiffness, stamina, coordinative structures (these underlying abilities are conceptually separate from the observable performances they make possible—see “Occupational Performance” below). |
| Perceptual—Processing of raw sensory input, including depth, shape, weight, texture, figure-ground, rhythm, body scheme, and spatiotemporal relations of the body scheme to objects (praxia). |
| Cognitive—Memory, associational ability, comprehension of symbols, symbol creation, sequencing and ordering, imagination, evaluation of alternatives, planning, making, and deductive reasoning. |
| Emotional—Capacity for various positive and negative feelings, including a temperamental proclivity for certain moods; the capacity to give affective coloring to meanings and purposes. |
| Interpersonal—Inherent social nature (distinguishing between the human and the nonhuman); his developed proclivities (e.g., dependence/independence, empathy); his way of assuming roles (father, son, grandson, husband). |

**DEVELOPMENTAL STRUCTURE**

| The focal goal sought is a properly planted vegetable garden (he repeatedly imagines the outcome). He seeks to explore this new experience and also to demonstrate a beginning level of mastery. His levels of purposefulness match his levels of occupation: Each movement (e.g., dropping a seed) is goal oriented, and each phase of the occupation is goal oriented (e.g., completing the measurements of the layout). The occupation also is motivated by future goals (the anticipated sprouting, growing, harvesting, and eating of the vegetables). In the long term, he explores gardening as a possibly enduring hobby. A strong purpose is the desire to spend time and communicate with his daughter. Other purposes are relatively weak (e.g., the yard’s aesthetics). |

**INDIVIDUAL PURPOSES**

| Manipulation of the various tools (sometimes against resistance, as in digging), grasping/releasing, reaching, the assumption of various postures (kneeling, squatting), maintenance of postures, joint stabilization, walking, head orientation (to look at the materials or the daughter), laughing, gesturing, and speech. Some speech related to gardening, and some meant to pass along information about his daughter’s grandparents and great-grandparents. An example of a cognitively based, covert operation: measuring and dividing up the plot (though not directly observable, this performance could be inferred through subsequent movements). Notable is the fact that the man’s occupational performance is not the only method that could have been used to accomplish many of his purposes (e.g., some movements could have been performed in reverse order, or the left hand could have been used instead of the right). |

**OCCUPATIONAL PERFORMANCE**

| Impact—Concretely, physical changes from the beginning of the occupation to end include: seeds in the ground, seed packages impaled on sticks marking rows, water sprinkler on, soil level and loosely packed, tools back in the garage (tools tend not to be affected much by occupation, whereas other materials are transformed), and daughter in the house, cleaning. Less concrete are the cognitive/affective impacts on the man’s daughter: She now knows something about planting and has memories of doing things with her father (she probably remembers only what she saw as particularly meaningful). |

**OCCUPATIONAL DYNAMICS**

| Adaptation—Minor accommodations to the man’s developmental structure result from assuming novel postures in order to plant seeds without stepping on vulnerable areas, and from applying book knowledge about planting seeds to an actual (and partly unanticipated) situation. In future seasons, the man will be prepared in terms of tool use, guidelines concerning various seeds, and movement in a garden. Another adaptation is relaxation (creating readiness for future leisure and work). More deeply, the occupation provides a context for moving toward resolution in mourning for his father and grandparents, and in sensing his own development as a father and as a contributor within a series of human generations. Although the more significant adaptations of this occupation are in the affective/cognitive realms, the significant adaptations resulting from other occupations may be motoric/perceptual. |
(the effect of maintenance can be thought of as a change from the weakening that would have otherwise occurred without the occupation). Although all occupation has the potential to foster adaptation, the quality and magnitude of adaptation varies from occupation to occupation and from person to person. As Slagle (1914, p. 20) stated, “little common things” from everyday life can become “powerful levers” fostering human development.

Levels of Occupation

The relationships presented in Figure 3 depend on the concept point in time; an arrow connects one point in time to a subsequent point in time. Point in time can be conceptualized at different levels. A point in time may be at an immediate level; for example, the occupational form may be the “catchability” of a baseball flying through the air, with the individual's sensory, perceptual, emotional, and motor structures organized around the purpose of catching the ball. Or, a point in time may be at a somewhat enhanced level; for example, the occupational form may involve a nine-inning baseball game, with the individual's developmental structure organized around the purpose of effective competition. To extend the analogy of the baseball player, a third level of occupation can be thought of as taking place at the level of the baseball season, and a fourth as taking place at the career level. Finally, Figure 3 can describe an entire life of occupation, with socioculturally available occupational forms interacting with an individual's developmental structure to promote purposeful performance and subsequent development throughout the life span. This idea that there are different levels of occupation is consistent with the view of Meyer (1922), who used the term occupation both to describe that which could be performed in a single sitting and to describe long-term patterns. A related concept is the adaptation continuum, developed by Kleinman and Bulkley (1982).

Of course, the user of the ideas in Figure 3 must be clear about the level of discourse. Empirical research conducted at the immediate level should not be automatically generalized to levels employing larger points in time. On the other hand, longer term occupations have identifiable relationships to shorter term occupations. Some of the individual's purposes in an immediate occupation often relate to higher levels of occupation (for example, the baseball player might want to catch the ball not only for its own sake but also to win the game, contribute to a winning season, enjoy a successful career, and so forth). Higher levels of occupational performance are actually made up of lower levels of occupation, and the relationships between occupational performance at the various levels are important areas for empirical inquiry. The reader can imagine a multidimensional version of Figure 3 in which any given occupation is actually made up of lower levels of occupation, and, together with others at its own level, makes up higher levels of occupation.

Although examples of ascending levels of occupation can be given, there appears to be no universally effective way of labeling them. Whereas five levels may work well for baseball playing, different numbers of levels appear useful for other types of occupation. However, one distinction that might be useful in differentiating levels of occupation is between the occupation that typically has an uninterrupted beginning, middle, and end, and the occupation that is seldom completed in one continuous session.

9 This thorny problem of smaller units of occupation within larger units of occupation, all with their own levels of purposefulness, may explain the difficulty that occupational therapists have had in defining occupation. Understandably, a would-be definer wants to be able to give an example of what one unit of the thing being defined is like. Where does one unit of the thing begin and end? The problem with occupation is that an immediate occupation, such as steering the wheel of a car, is nested within the intermediate occupation of a trip, which is nested within higher and higher levels of occupation. The proposed solution within this article is to use the same term occupation for each level, but this proposal is different from that advanced by the Russian psychologist Leont'ev (1978) and discussed by the occupational therapy authors Lyons (1983) and Allen (1987). In analyzing “the general structure of activity,” Leont’ev (pp. 62-74) proposed three levels: activities (linked to motives); actions (linked to purposes and the achievement of goals); and operations (linked to the modification of conditions). In this article, the phenomena Leont’ev calls activities, actions, and operations can all be termed occupations, albeit at different levels, and the phenomena Leont’ev calls motives, purposes, and the goal-oriented modification of conditions can all be termed purposes, albeit at different levels. The justification for this paper’s economy of terms is that the model presented in Figure 3 works as well with lower levels of occupation as it does with higher levels. Therefore, why should the same term not be used? Regardless of terminology, Allen (1987) makes the excellent observation that occupational therapy authors tend to focus only on one level. For example, she suggests that authors in the area of occupational behavior/human occupation tend to focus on higher levels, whereas many writers within the area of physical disabilities have tended to focus on lower levels.
Conclusions

1. Thinking of occupation as a relationship between occupational form and occupational performance enables a systematic analysis of the nature of that relationship. The intent is to begin to raise what Slagle (1922, p. 16) termed occupational analysis (often called activity analysis) from its status as a set of techniques within the profession of occupational therapy to a scientific status with its own theoretical structure and empirical possibilities. Writings on occupational analysis, whether from Tracy (1907–08), Dunton (1931), Fidler (1948), Llorens (1973), Cynkin (1979), or Tiffany (1983) can be readily interpreted in terms of the model presented in Figure 3 and in terms of the example presented in Table 1.

2. The relationships between occupational form and occupational performance (the nature of occupation) is dynamic, not deterministic. The dynamics of occupation are such that (a) the effects of the occupational form depend on the meanings assigned to the form by the individual; (b) occupational performance is furthermore influenced by the individual’s multilevel sense of purposefulness; (c) prior occupational performance affects subsequent occupational forms; and (d) the individual’s purposefulness and performance promote adaptations in his or her own developmental structure.

3. Occupations can be analyzed at different conceptual levels depending on the unit of time used by the occupational analyst. These levels range from the most immediate level of a particular act; to the level of a multistep occupation with an uninterrupted beginning, middle, and end; to higher levels descriptive of long-term roles and entire life spans.

Recommendations for Future Inquiry

1. Given the description of occupation presented in this paper, the next logical step is to define therapeutic occupation. What are the relationships between the occupational therapist and the occupational dynamics depicted in Figure 3?

2. The framework for thinking about occupation presented in this paper readily prompts empirically answerable questions, and the science of occupation requires research. What types of research methodologies are suited to answer the questions raised within this framework for thinking about occupation?

3. Past research, conducted both within the profession of occupational therapy and by other professions, can be classified in terms of the framework presented in this paper. Which past research has spoken to which aspects of Figure 3?

4. Because the intent of this paper is to provide an overall framework for thinking about occupation, much of the richness of many aspects of occupation has necessarily been excluded. Historical inquiry as well as further theoretical work could examine and expand on each of the concepts presented in Figure 3.

5. The description of occupation presented here is not the only way to conceptualize occupation. Other frameworks include those by Barris et al. (1985), Clark (1979), Katz (1985), Kielhofner (1985), Llorens (1976), Mosey (1981, chap. 8), and Reed (1984, chap. 16). There is a need to compare and contrast the various frameworks in terms of completeness, clarity, internal logic, adherence to historical conceptions of the profession, generation of frames of reference to guide clinical practice, and promotion of research.

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