

Together on the way - Emerging occupational therapy practice in mainstream schools in Switzerland

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Introduction: Recent changes in legislation reformed special need education in Switzerland, subsequently more and more children with special needs are integrated in mainstream schools.

Health professionals such as occupational therapists are not politically and structurally embedded in the education context. To enable children's full participation in different aspects of being a student such as learning, playing or doing arts and crafts, paediatric occupational therapists have started to work in mainstream schools. This has brought about a change of their practice context.

Objectives: Cultural, political and social factors differ in many ways from countries, where most research has been conducted. The need for school-based research that is situated within the political, and cultural context of a country has been stressed in different studies and is objective of this study.

Method: In a paradigmatic narrative approach five occupational therapists working in mainstream schools participated in semi-structured interviews. Their accounts of their stories and reflections of their work in this emerging context, were thematically analysed.

Results: Three main themes were identified: "bringing in an occupational therapy perspective", "focusing on school related occupations" and "developing collaboration with different inclusion players". The findings demonstrate that occupational therapists found different avenues to contribute in enabling children to participate in everyday life at school learning, playing and being with their peers.

Conclusion: The findings are discussed in relation to current international research and in regard to European countries with a similar political and structural context thus complementing approaches and guiding practice implications to school based occupational therapy.