

Uncovering reproductions of colonisation within occupational therapy practice: Exploring the utility of institutional ethnography to improve occupational therapy practice in Canadian Indigenous communities

Janna MacLachlan

University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Introduction: In Canadian Indigenous communities, which have endured a long history of colonisation, occupational therapy services are primarily administered by non-Indigenous health professionals. Therapists, while expected to be client-centred, are must also follow guiding texts, including best practice guidelines, evidence-based literature and regulatory, legislative and other institutional guidelines, which may not be in sync with an Indigenous worldview. As institutional ethnography seeks to uncover how texts shape local activities and why things happen as they do, it is a useful approach for investigating the implications of outside texts dictating how occupational therapy practice is enacted in Indigenous communities.

Objectives: This paper explores how institutional ethnography can be used to uncover reproductions of colonisation within occupational therapy practice.

Methods: The concepts of institutional ethnography will be applied to a case study about occupational therapy practice in the Indigenous communities of Nunavut, Canada. Critical reflexivity and a preliminary examination of texts will be employed.

Practice Implications: Governing texts written for national or international audiences do not always account for a diversity of contexts and worldviews. The perceived and real risks of not following governing texts sometimes override client-centred practice values. Imposing values and practices communicated by governing texts that contradict Indigenous worldviews in Indigenous communities may reproduce colonial forces, denying the rights and self-determination of Indigenous peoples.

Conclusions: Colonisation may be reproduced in occupational therapy through practices dictated by governing texts, and may present contradictions with professional values, such as client-centred practice.