



# Defining Occupation in the Forensic Setting – and does it matter?

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# Why this question?

- appraising how occupation-focused my practice is
  - **am I facilitating occupation or something else?**
- the difficulty of providing authentic occupation in the secure setting
- the centrality of occupational issues in the rehabilitation of offenders
  - **our outcomes are everyone's outcomes**
- MSc Occupational Science research
  - forensic patients' perceptions of occupation

# Outline

brief overview

- definitions
- appraising definitions in the forensic context
- is occupation possible in a forensic setting?
- semantics or rigour?

# Definitions of occupation, purposeful activity and activity

- manifold definitions
- complexity of the subject
- ‘occupation’ chosen by our founders to be both comprehensive and ambiguous
- widening definitions over time, particularly from occupational science
- 3 terms used interchangeably
- hierarchy
- meaning

# Hierarchy as difference

- Occupations, activities, tasks and skills relate to each other in a hierarchy in which occupation is the highest category
  - Skills contribute to the completion of task stages which can be chained together in short sequences to complete a task. Tasks are performed in sequences that make up activities, which relate to other activities which, together, support occupations. (COT 2003)

# Meaning as difference: definitions of occupation

- Occupation is a synthesis of doing, being and becoming which is engaged in not only by individuals but also at community, national and international levels for cultural, social and political purposes (Wilcock 1998)
- Occupation is a highly individualised, complex, multi-dimensional phenomenon in which human beings realise their sense of life's meaning (Clark and Larson 1993).
- Purpose, meaning, context, personal style and preferences, identity

# Meaning as difference: definitions of purposeful activity and activity

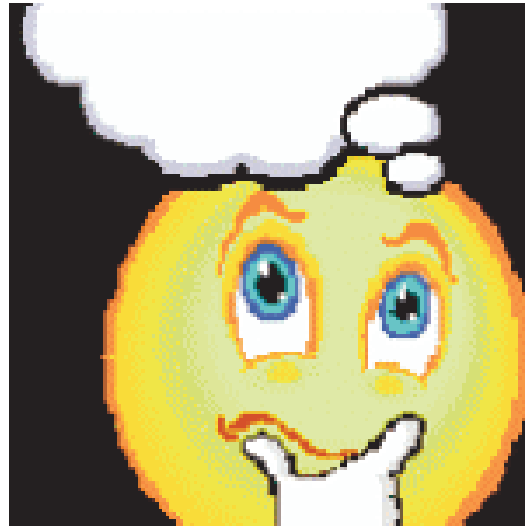
- Purposeful activity (1)
  - appear the same as occupations
  - lack of attention to context
- Purposeful activity (2)
  - not previously part of patient's lifestyle
  - purposeful but not always meaningful
- Activity
  - neither purposeful nor meaningful
  - reductionist components of function

Golledge (1998)

# Is occupation possible in a forensic setting?

- lack of meaning and context
- security, risk, lack of resources
- ‘traditional’ activity provision
- past criminogenic occupations
- occupationally depriving patients further?
- the secure unit is the patient’s context
  - a **get-out clause**?
  - **occupation as means and/or ends**
- a sliding scale of meaning
- a hierarchical approach to meaning

# Your thoughts?



# Does it really matter?

## - semantics or rigour?

- oh no, here we go again!
  - our thoughts are expressed as language, and language shapes actions and politics (Royeen 2002)
- to forensic occupational therapy?
  - our unique paradigm
  - unity
  - survival
  - rigorous appraisal of practice/services
- to our patients?
  - meaning, purpose, dignity
  - addressing rather than regressing occupational deprivation and alienation
  - centrality of occupation to rehabilitation – but only if it is occupation

# Further thoughts or questions?

