Occupations and personal projects: A comparison of the concepts

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Abstract

Introduction: The concept of personal projects has been used in occupational therapy research to understand occupation better. However, no clear distinction has been made between personal projects and occupations. An argumentative review was carried out to determine if the concepts of occupation, as outlined in the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement and the Person Environment Occupation Model and personal projects are interchangeable.

Method: Definitions of each concept and seven points of comparison were identified through reading and discussion of key material related to: framework and origins; association with health and well-being; consideration of the environment; individualized and self-directed nature; consideration of aspects of the person; categories; and balance.

Findings: Occupation and personal projects represent similar concepts when they refer to concrete and time-limited activities. More abstract and extended personal projects may be broken down into more concrete, shorter-term occupations. Differences were noted with respect to consideration of the environment, aspects of the person, categories and balance.

Conclusion: Differences in the way the environment, aspects of the person, categories and balance are considered in personal projects may provide helpful insights for occupational therapists as they attempt to practice in a client-centered, strengths-based manner with a focus on occupation.

Introduction

Enabling occupation is a core skill and concern of occupational therapists (College of Occupational Therapists, 2013). Understanding what occupation is and how occupation may be promoted is therefore of keen interest to the profession. Occupation has been defined as 'groups of activities and tasks of everyday life...everything people do to occupy themselves, including looking after themselves (self-care), enjoying life (leisure), and contributing to the social and economic fabric of their communities (productivity)' (Law et al., 1997: 34) and as 'groups of self-directed, functional tasks and activities in which a person engages over the lifespan...in order to meet his/her intrinsic needs for self-maintenance, expression and fulfilment' (Law et al., 1996: 16). More specifically, and from a hierarchical classification perspective, an occupation (for example, babysitting) is made up of activities (for example, feeding a child, reading bedtime stories), which are in turn made up of tasks (for example, cutting food, bringing food to the child's mouth) (Polatajko et al., 2004). In occupational therapy, occupations can be considered as both the outcome of therapy and the primary therapeutic medium to attain this outcome (Law et al., 1997).

The concept of personal projects from personality psychology appears to be closely related to the concept of occupation. A personal project is defined as a 'set of interrelated acts extending over time, which is intended to maintain or attain a state of affairs foreseen by the individual' (Little, 1983: 276). These acts are 'scheduled'; that is, time is set aside by the person to carry them out. Personal projects are carried out to achieve individualized goals and can be short-term or long-term endeavors. For example, one might strive to plant a tree (short term) or build a business (long term). Projects can be described in terms of both their ends and their means. For example, studying for an exam may be a personal project that is a means of attaining another project, passing a course. Also, projects can be concrete or abstract (Little, 1983). For example, one may cook a dinner (concrete) or try to be a better sister (abstract).

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Personal projects were first considered in occupational therapy by Barris (1987). A bit more than a decade later, Christiansen et al. (1998) formally presented personal projects to occupational therapists in a paper describing their potential uses for studying occupation. More recently, the occupational therapy literature has witnessed a growing use of the concept of personal projects to describe and study the occupations of people who may have participation challenges due to health issues (see, for example, Anaby et al., 2010a, 2010b; Brooke et al., 2007; Forwell, 2005; Poulsen et al., 2011; Stern, 2007; Vroman et al., 2009).

From this general description, it is clear that the concept of personal projects is quite close to the concept of occupation. However, to date, no clear distinction has been made between the terms personal project and occupation, and the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably (Anaby et al., 2010a, 2010b; Brooke et al., 2007; Christiansen, 2000; Christiansen et al., 1998, 1999; Townsend and Polatajko, 2007). The objective of this paper is to provide a more detailed comparison of these two concepts.

Method

An argumentative review was carried out to determine how the concepts of occupation and personal projects were similar and different (Hart, 1998; Newell et al., 2011). This method was selected as it allows the authors to think through a question, using selected evidence to provide support for alternative points of view. The method involves development of a thesis statement, selection of relevant material and consideration of this material in light of its support or refutation of the thesis statement. The thesis statement was that personal projects and occupations are essentially the same thing. The procedures used to select and review data sources to compare the concept of occupation and personal projects were developed specifically for this project and are detailed below.

First, to ensure that the comparison of occupation and personal projects was both manageable and relevant to practice, the authors decided to base their perspective of occupation on one found in two related and highly utilized practice models, the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement (CMOP-E) (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007) and the Person Environment Occupation (PEO) model (Law et al., 1996).

Second, in order to explore the relationship between personal projects and occupation, the two authors independently reviewed key material related to personal projects and occupation. This process began with the two authors reading the book, *Personal Project Pursuit: Goals, Action, and Human Flourishing* (Little et al., 2007); in this book multiple authors, including personal projects' originator, Brian R. Little, describe the development of the concept of personal projects and their use in a wide range of research. Then, both authors reviewed *Enabling Occupation II: Advancing an Occupational Therapy Vision for Health, Well-being, and Justice through Occupation* (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007), the key document describing the CMOP-E, and two articles outlining the PEO (Law et al., 1996; Strong et al., 1999).

Third, after reading and reflection, the first author suggested key points of comparison between personal projects and occupation. In discussion with the second author, through a consensus process, a number of suggested key points of comparison were combined and others were added.

Fourth, the first author reviewed each of the primary sources listed above and proposed how each of the key points was considered under the two concepts of occupation and personal projects. These propositions were discussed during meetings with the second author. Important references cited in the primary documents and supplementary readings identified through bibliographic searches were retrieved to clarify issues related to the key points when the two authors felt that clarification was required.

Findings

Seven key points of comparison between personal projects and occupation were identified: framework and origins; relationship with health and well-being; role of the environment; individualization and self-direction; consideration of aspects of the person; categories; and balance. A summary of the definitions and key points of comparison can be found in Table 1.

Framework and origins

In the CMOP-E (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007), occupational performance and engagement are understood as being the result of the dynamic relations between the person, occupation and environment. Occupational performance and engagement are understood as encompassing these relations. Occupation is a bridge between the person and the environment, 'indicating that individuals act on the environment through occupation' (p. 23). In the PEO (Law et al., 1996), occupational performance is the outcome of the dynamic interaction of the person, environment and occupation. A greater compatibility between the person, environment and occupation creates better occupational performance.

The precursor of the CMOP-E, the Canadian Model of Occupational Performance (CMOP) was developed to describe the process of Canadian occupational therapy in the intervention guidelines for the client-centered practice of occupational therapy (Department of National Health and Welfare and Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 1983). The model originates in the work of Reed and Sanderson (1983) (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007) who, consistent with a social ecological understanding of behavior, postulated that the person and the environment influence each other through purposeful activities. The original CMOP was refined in a follow-up document, *Enabling Occupation: An Occupational Therapy Perspective* (Law et al., 1997) and then developed into the

Table 1. Comparison of personal projects and occupations.

	Occupations[a]	Personal projects
Definition	Everything people do to occupy themselves, for the purposes of self-care, product-ivity, or leisure Enacted in order to meet intrinsic needs	Set of interrelated, personally meaningful actions extending over time in order to maintain or attain a state of affairs and to achieve a personal goal
Framework or model	Volitional meaningful actions The end one is aiming for, as well as the means to other ends Negotiation of resources and barriers through occupation/PP	
	Outcome: Occupational performance	Outcome: Well-being and human flourishing
Origins	Ecological theory of adaptive behavior and aging, model of flow, occupational performance models	Personality psychology, social ecological framework
Influence on health and well-being	Emotional and physical emphasis	Psychological emphasis
Environment	Physical, social, cultural, institutional and temporal Resources and barriers	
		'Personally constructed'
Individualized and self-directed nature	Meaning is determined by the individual	
	Choice: Reflects preferences, needs, and values	Choice: Integrates personal and social demands
Personal components	Physical, cognitive, affective, health, per-sonality, and spirituality	Cognitive, affective, conative, and behavioral
Categories	CMOP-E: Self-care, leisure, and productivity PEO: No categories	Created by client himself or rater Categories not always used
Balance	Managed by the person	
	Balance of self-care, play, work and rest; how time is spent on occupations; how occupations are perceived to be har-monious and under control	Projects may have a positive, negative, or neutral influence on each other

[a]As defined by the CMOP-E and PEO.
CMOP-E: Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement; PEO: Person Environment Occupation model; PP: personal project.

present CMOP-E (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007). In addition to being influenced by the original CMOP, the PEO was based on the ecological theory of adaptive behavior and aging (a social ecological model), and Csikszentmihalyi's concept of flow (Law et al., 1996).

In addition, it is apparent that the concept of occupation, particularly within the CMOP-E, builds on occupational therapy traditions arising from multiple sources. For example, the active nature of occupation is put forward based on the belief of Meyer (1922) that people need occupations that require both physical and mental exertion. However, there is also recognition of a reflective nature of occupation through the inclusion of Wilcock's assertion of the importance of occupations that allow not only doing, but also being and becoming (Wilcock, 1998).

Little et al. (2007) proposed the concept of personal projects in response to the lack of ways to examine what personality psychologist Henry Murray called 'serials, temporally extended enterprises that typically involve acting on a concern...until it [is] completed or abandoned' (as cited in Little et al., 2007: 7). Murray believed that these serials, which make up our behavior, were not simply enacted as a response to a stimulus, but rather generated in a volitional, proactive fashion. In developing the idea of personal projects, Little was also influenced by psychologist George Kelly, who similarly reacted against

existing beliefs that humans were mostly passive, influenced primarily by external reinforcement or unconscious forces (Little et al., 2007). Rather, Kelly believed that the purpose and meaning of any behavior was best understood consciously by the person engaged in the behavior (as cited in Christiansen et al., 1998: 440).

Little (1983) introduced the concept of the personal project as a unit of analysis to study personality in its social, physical and temporal contexts. Little et al. (2007) postulated that personal projects arise as a result of the demands of both internal and environmental pressures. Similarly to occupation within the CMOP-E and PEO, the concept of personal projects was developed within a social ecological framework. Current understanding of this framework is depicted in Figure 1. In this framework, there is mutual influence between personal projects and well-being, and between personal projects and dynamic contextual and personal features. The dynamic person and context features influence each other through the mediating effect of the personal projects.

Associations with health and well-being

There are two major assumptions regarding the association between occupation and well-being according to the CMOP-E. The first is that occupation, in and of
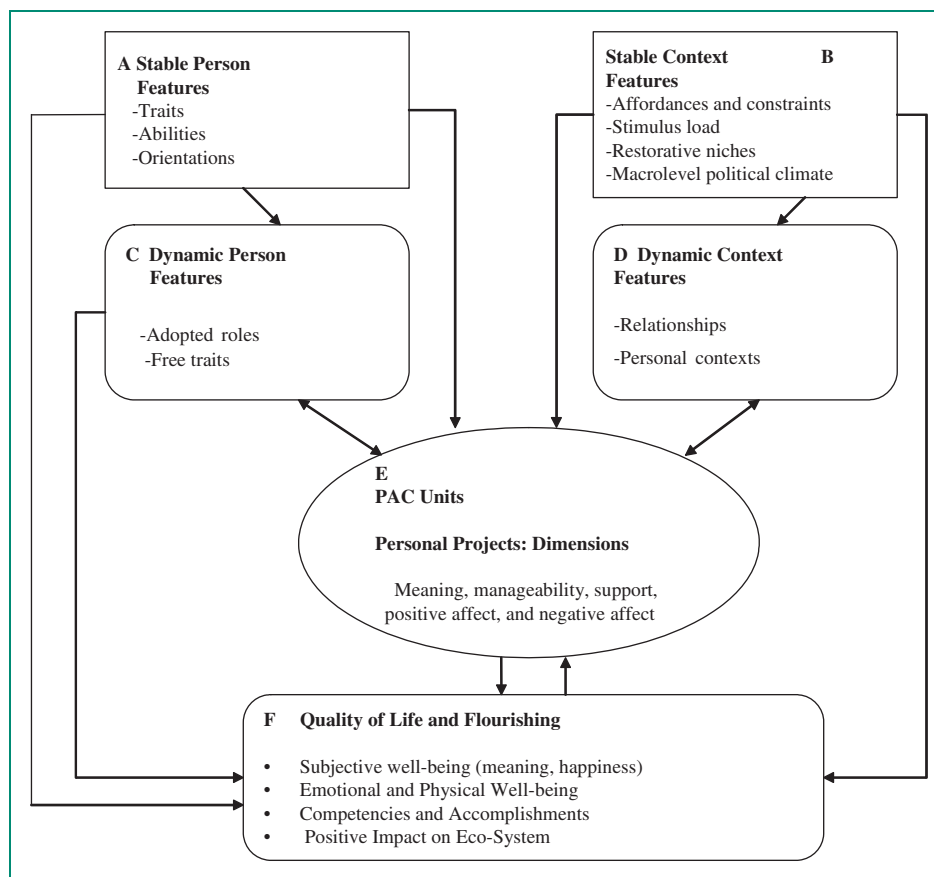
Figure 1. Social ecological framework. Personal projects and motivational counseling: the quality of lives reconsidered. Used with permission from Little (2011) © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.
Note: PAC units: personal action constructs.

itself, contributes to general well-being, particularly emotional well-being (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007). A more implicit assumption is that there is a potential reciprocal effect between occupational performance and engagement and physical, cognitive and emotional health and spiritual well-being. This idea draws from the occupational therapy tenet proposed by Mary Reilly: 'Man, through the use of his hands, can influence the state of his own health' (Reilly, 1962: 301).

From the perspective of personal projects, it is believed that both stable and dynamic aspects of the person and stable aspects of the environment influence well-being both directly and through the mediating role of personal projects. Furthermore, it is believed that well-being depends on the 'sustainable pursuit of core projects' (Little, 2011: 73). Core projects are those that are the most valued and least likely to be abandoned by the individual. Pursuit of a project is believed to be more sustainable if the project is meaningful, manageable, supported by contextual features, and not interfering with other important projects. The pursuit of such projects can be considered an indicator of the adaptation and subjective well-being of an individual. Also, such pursuit within a well-balanced system of projects ideally leads to human flourishing. In other words, compared to occupations, the relationship between personal projects and well-being is more of a psychological nature and with a focus on core projects.

Consideration of the environment

In terms of the environment, as previously stated, both occupation and personal projects are considered from within a social ecological framework. This means that the environment is seen to have an important influence on both occupation and personal projects. Within both the CMOP-E and PEO, aspects of the environment are categorized as physical, social, cultural and institutional (Law et al., 1996; Townsend and Polatajko, 2007). The occupational choices available to an individual vary across cultural, social and institutional environments. Aspects of these environments can act as facilitators or barriers to occupational choice. Furthermore, in the PEO, the environment is viewed from the perspective of the individual and consideration of the temporal context is essential (Law et al., 1996). The CMOP-E, on the other hand, does not include subjective aspects of the environment.

Personal projects are considered within social, physical and temporal contexts. Also, personal projects are considered to be embedded in cultural, 'personally constructed', and institutional contexts (Little, 2006: 421; 2011; Little et al., 2007). Similarly to the PEO, the environment is viewed from the perspective of the individual. In addition, the person's perception of the environment is seen as critical – that is, the subjective experience of the

environment is considered as important as the objective aspects of the environment.

Individualized and self-directed nature

Occupations and personal projects are similar in terms of their individualized and self-directed nature. According to the CMOP-E, an individual selects occupations that reflect personal preferences, needs and values (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007). Occupations are therefore self-directed activities that have an individualized nature and meaning (Law et al., 1996; Townsend and Polatajko, 2007). Only the individual who is engaged in an occupation can determine its purpose. For example, preparing food can be considered leisure, work, or self-maintenance depending on the individual meaning and purpose of the occupation (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007).

Personal projects usually encompass several goal-directed actions. These actions are 'intentional, volitional, and conative' (Little et al., 2007: 26). Through choices and actions, personal projects allow an individual to integrate personal and social demands (Little, 1972; Little et al., 2007). They have unique meanings (Little et al., 2007) and it is only by asking a person to evaluate his or her personal project that the meaning of a project can be understood (Christiansen et al., 1998).

Consideration of aspects of the person

In the CMOP-E, the person is depicted as having physical, cognitive, and affective components, as well as a spiritual core. Here, the cognitive aspect includes 'all mental functions, both cognitive and intellectual, and includes, among other things, perception, concentration, memory, comprehension, judgement and reasoning' (Law et al., 1997: 44). The affective aspect comprises 'all social and emotional functions and . . . interpersonal and intrapersonal factors'.

In the PEO, the person has both static and dynamic features (Law et al., 1996). The person has acquired innate skills, attributes and life experiences including 'abilities related to motor performance, sensory capabilities, cognitive aptitude and general health' (Lawton and Nahemow, as cited in Law et al., 1996: 16).

From the point of view of personal projects, aspects of the person are not a central feature. Rather the focus is on the project. However, examination of a personal project may provide insight into the cognitive, affective, conative, and behavioral components of action connected with that project (Little et al., 2007). Here, the cognitive aspect refers to what people think about their personal projects. For example, a project can be described in terms of several cognitive dimensions including importance, difficulty, visibility, control, responsibility, time adequacy, outcome/ likelihood of success, self-identity, perceived view of others, value congruency, progress, challenge, absorption, support, competence, autonomy and stage. The affective aspect refers to how a person feels while engaged or thinking about their project. The conative aspect reflects the person's self-direction, initiative, striving, and choice

when undertaking a project (Little, 1972). In other words, it is related to the individual's intrinsic motivation. The behavioral aspect refers to the actions accomplished to carry out the project (Little et al., 2007).

Categories

In the CMOP-E, occupation is separated into three categories related to the typical purpose of the activities: self-care; leisure; and productivity (Law et al., 1997). The PEO does not categorize occupations.

Similarly to the PEO, categorization of personal projects is not mentioned in the definition of personal projects and it is not a compulsory aspect of analyzing projects. However, if categorization is undertaken, it is a flexible endeavor. The earliest classification, for example, included the following categories: interpersonal, academic, work, intrapersonal, recreational/leisure, health, maintenance, and other (Little et al., 2007). More recently, researchers have asked participants to propose their own categories (Little et al., 2007).

Balance

Balance is not explicitly portrayed in the CMOP-E. However, an underlying assumption of occupational therapy in Canadian and many other descriptions of occupational therapy concepts is that balance among occupations will enhance health (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007). Occupational balance can be seen as the 'balance of self-care, play, work and rest' (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007), the way individuals 'choose to spend time on valued, obligatory, and discretionary activities' (Backman, 2001, as cited in Townsend and Polatajko, 2007: 47), and the way people perceive their occupations as being 'harmonious, cohesive, and under control' (Christiansen, 1996, as cited in Townsend and Polatajko, 2007: 47).

From the perspective of personal projects, people are involved in a constellation of projects that make up a personal project system. Within this system, projects may have a positive, negative, or neutral influence on each other (Little et al., 2007). A group of projects may be considered well balanced if those projects considered most essential by the person (core projects) are not adversely affected by the other projects in their system.

Discussion and implications

This examination of occupation and personal projects reveals that, while there are many similarities between personal projects and occupations, the two concepts cannot be used interchangeably. From the broad definitions of both concepts, it is apparent that in many cases the two concepts are compatible. Cooking dinner, for example, can be both a personal project and an occupation. It can be a personal project since it consists of acts that extend over time in order to achieve a goal. It can also be an occupation as it is something one does to occupy one's time, and something that fulfills a purpose or meets a need.

Some personal projects, however, may seem at first glance to be too abstract to be considered occupations. For example, the project of trying to be a better sibling seems quite large and abstract; it is difficult to view this project as a single thing that occupies one's time or fulfills a purpose or meets a need. However, this and similar projects generally encompass more concrete acts that could be considered occupations. For example, in trying to be a better sibling one might send a birthday card, plan a mutually enjoyable activity or babysit nieces and nephews. Any of these acts may be considered occupations.

As noted above, the role of a personal project is to maintain or attain a certain state. Personal projects that are formulated in terms of the attainment of a desired state, such as 'stay out of the hospital', are not something one does to occupy oneself and are therefore not occupations. However, the set of interrelated acts that make up such projects might be considered occupations. For example, these acts might include taking all daily medications as prescribed, monitoring skin for the development of pressure sores and planning meals to ensure adequate nutrition, all of which could be considered occupations. Apparently then, personal projects may in themselves be occupations, or may be able to be broken down into discrete acts that could be considered occupations. Thus, by inquiring about one's personal projects, the therapist may obtain information not only about specific occupations, but also the wider objectives of the client. This may allow the client to express goals that may otherwise be missed through asking about occupations using three categories (self-care, productivity, and leisure).

Consideration of the seven points of comparison between occupation and personal projects reveals many similarities and a few notable differences. The basis of both concepts in a social ecological model ensures that aspects of both the person and the environment must be considered in the examination of either concept.

Attention to aspects of the person is viewed as essential to understand the doing of occupation within both the CMOP-E and PEO. Within these frameworks these characteristics are viewed in separation from the activities considered. In personal projects, aspects of the person are considered only with regards to how they relate to the project. On first glance, this could appear to be related to the fact that the concept of personal projects was developed outside of concerns with pathology, was first tested largely with samples of non-clinical populations, and was motivated primarily by the wish to study health-promoting pursuit of activities. In contrast, the study of occupation within the CMOP-E and PEO arose primarily from within the context of physical rehabilitation and psychiatric care at a time when engaging in occupation was seen as much as a means of healing physical, cognitive and emotional problems as it was an objective in itself.

Rather than being something negative, the focus of personal projects on personal characteristics as they relate to the project at hand may be an extremely useful idea for occupational therapy. Christiansen et al. (1998) noted that

the analysis of a personal project enabled a more thorough understanding of the perception of the person regarding their occupational lives than could be obtained by focusing on biomechanical or psychosocial issues. Considering the person through the lens of their projects may help occupational therapists focus on occupation, their key concern (College of Occupational Therapists, 2013), while avoiding being sidetracked by biomedical issues. Furthermore, attention to project characteristics, that is, how projects are experienced by the client, may help occupational therapists avoid prejudgment regarding which occupations may be, for example, stressful, important or pleasurable, based on the therapist's evaluation of the person's performance components.

Occupational therapy proponents of 'top down' approaches to evaluation and intervention recognize the importance of reserving judgment regarding whether an occupation is possible based on assessments of performance components. With a top down approach, clients are supported in problem-solving their way through valued occupations, the idea being that, with the proper support, they will discover ways to continue to carry out such occupations (Polatajko et al., 2000). Furthermore, it is often evident that certain things sometimes assessed as relatively stable performance components (such as attention, memory) vary depending on the occupation at hand. Personal projects' focus on personal characteristics only as they relate to the project at hand may facilitate top down approaches as well as strength-based approaches that recognize that assets can be brought to light in the carrying out of personally valued occupations.

Regarding considerations of the environment, examination of subjective aspects of the environment are absent from the conceptualization of occupations within the CMOP-E, but critical to the concept of personal projects. The concept of occupation within the PEO seems to hold a middle ground, with consideration of both objective and subjective aspects of the environment. Here again, considering a valued occupation as a personal project encourages the occupational therapist to consider subjective aspects of the patient's environment that are increasingly seen as critical to consider in enabling occupation (Iwarsson, 2003).

It should be noted, though, that within the CMOP-E concept of occupation there is recognition of objective aspects of an environment that may limit one's choices of occupation. The concept of occupational justice recognizes people's access to certain occupations may be restricted through physical barriers, societal and cultural norms, legal restrictions and poverty. In this way, by recognizing aspects of the environment that are clearly barriers to engagement, occupation provides a broader understanding of the potential impact of the environment than personal projects.

Both occupation and personal projects are felt to influence health. With respect to occupation, this influence is described more implicitly and globally, encompassing emotional and physical health. It is also not completely clear whether certain types of occupations are more effective for promoting health. However, efforts are currently

underway to try to map the characteristics of such occupations (Moll et al., 2013).

From the perspective of personal projects, the potential health effects are described more psychologically. This is not surprising, given personal projects' origin in psychology. The overall objective of healthy personal project systems, human flourishing, appears to resonate with the occupational goal of doing, being and becoming.

An additional potential difference with regards to impact on health is personal projects' emphasis on the importance of core projects to health. With regards to occupation, the importance of personal interests and values in the selection of occupations is recognized, and the importance of opportunities to pursue personally valued occupations is of central importance to the concept of occupational justice (Townsend and Polatajko, 2007). However, an explicit link between the pursuit of personally valued occupations and health and wellbeing has not been explicitly described in the CMOP-E or PEO. The concept of core projects and their relation to health and wellbeing may support occupational therapists in considering clients' views on the importance of specific occupations during goal setting and treatment planning.

In terms of categorization, while early attempts were made to categorize personal projects objectively, categorization of projects is now seen as optional and, if undertaken, subject to the individual's own classification system. This seems consistent with occupation within the PEO. While it is stated that the categorization of occupations within the CMOP-E depends on the purpose of the occupation as defined by the individual, there is still a tendency to group particular occupations according to the categories of self-care, productivity and leisure and to view these categories as impermeable and all-inclusive. Both of these criticisms have been made in the occupational therapy literature (Hammell, 2009). Adoption of a personal project approach to classification, that is classification by the person, would solve this.

Regarding the idea of balance, from a personal projects perspective, better balance occurs when a person's overall system of projects allows pursuit of core projects. Balance among occupations is not considered within the PEO. Within the CMOP-E, ideas concerning the balance of occupation are still somewhat scattered. Descriptions of good occupational balance vary. They include the idea of relatively equal amounts of time devoted to the three major categories of occupation, and of engaging primarily in occupations that are consistent with personal values. Personal projects' focus on how well core projects are supported by other projects appears to match the focus on the latter perspective.

Limitations

The aim of this paper was to outline the similarities and differences between occupations and personal projects. The use of an argumentative approach introduces potential bias into the findings. Attempts were made to limit this bias.

Specifically, the authors read the selected literature independently and discussed their findings to arrive at consensus. However, it should be noted that others repeating a similar process may not arrive at the same findings. Also, while the literature represented important texts with regards to the concept of occupation and personal projects, the literature review was neither systematic nor exhaustive.

Another limitation of the paper is its focus on occupation as defined in only two related occupational therapy models, the CMOP-E and the PEO. Again, as a result, this review does not provide an exhaustive comparison of personal projects and occupation as it is defined in other occupational therapy models. Although the definitions of occupation used were from Canadian models, the authors believe that the comparison may be relevant to similar ecologically informed models in other countries. Also, it should be noted that the sources used to extract information regarding personal projects, the CMOP-E and the PEO, were not exhaustive. This limitation, in addition to the fact that the key points of comparison were not validated by an expert outside the authors' research group, means that the scope of the comparison may be subject to differing opinions. However, the authors believe that this work provides a valuable updated discussion of the potential of personal projects in looking at occupations as an occupational therapist, furthering Christiansen's introduction 17 years ago.

Conclusion

This article provided a description and comparison of occupations and personal projects with the goal of determining whether the concepts are interchangeable. Personal projects are closely related to occupations. However, the terms personal project and occupation cannot always be used interchangeably, at least with the current definitions of occupation in the CMOP-E and PEO. Considering occupations as concrete personal projects, or parts of more abstract personal projects, may promote a greater occupation and client focus in practice. Also, personal projects' focus on personal meaning and the importance of core projects may be useful in occupational therapy evaluation and planning.

Key findings

- Occupations and personal projects differ with respect to environmental and personal components, categories and balance.
- Insights on these issues may help occupational therapists practice in a strengths-based, occupation-focused manner.

What the study has added

This study provides an updated introduction to the potential ways the concept of personal projects may be considered in examining occupation.

Research ethics

Declaration of conflicting interests

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