

## **Shifting occupational identity: Envisioning ourselves as scholars**

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*Occupational identity serves both as a means of self-definition and a blueprint for upcoming action (Kielhofner, 2008. P. 107).*

Many occupational therapy academics transition into higher education with a robust practitioner identity and a desire to teach. Strong expectations of publication and grant winning productivity not generally expected as part of our initial careers can be met with an identity reversal – once expert, now novice! Motivated by a desire to re-define self-imposed and institutional judgments of our status as 'unproductive' researchers, thirteen occupational therapy academics chose to collaborate in a group based action research process. This process provided space to reflect on the occupation of being scholarly and doing scholarship, and to reclaim some power and authority in developing scholarly identities.

Writers on academic identity have observed that our identities are 'co-constructed' (Archer, 2008) related to our disciplinary "tribe" (Becher & Trowler, 2001), tied up in our 'personal project' (Clegg, 2008), fluid (Billiot, 2011) and so on. These observations prompted us to consider what the nature of the academic 'project' was for occupational therapy academics. Are we simply client instructors turned teachers? Or are we, as Clegg's (2008) work revealed, a hybrid breed of "prac-ademics"? (p.335). We applied an 'occupational' lens to our questions about identity, competence and adaptation (see Kielhofner, 2008). This lens conceptualises that any activity harnessing our interest, time and capabilities is an occupation, and that occupational identities are constructed through perceptions of competence in doing what we are interested in or need to do. An overall notion of who we are or wish to become (Kielhofner), occupation identity is intimately tied to our participation (or not) in a constellation of tasks and roles (Phelan & Kinsella, 2009).

A critical first step in our identity and scholarship development journey was to reflect on our occupational narratives. Where had we come from, what prompted us to set off on the journey, where are we currently, and what hopes do we have for our scholarly futures? Analysis of 13 individual written narratives and a focus group discussion revealed micro and macro factors influencing our occupational identities that were dominated variably by blend of educator, practitioner and scholar identities. Despite a desire to be scholarly, not knowing how to get a foot in the door of the mysterious world of research resulted in retreat to the educator identity where one could feel competent and have influence. This new and shared understanding of our history and current positioning provides strong guidance for group action that aims to move us towards our desired scholarly identities as individuals and a group.

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