

Building globally relevant occupational therapy from the strength of our diversity

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The theme of the first World Federation of Occupational Therapists' Congress held on African soil - *Connected in Diversity; Positioned for Impact* - informs this lecture, which challenges the dominance within the international occupational therapy profession of theories and models formulated by a privileged English-speaking minority. It contends that occupational therapists perpetuate colonialism when theories, assessments, interventions, outcome measures and models of practice that are informed by culturally-specific, Western neoliberal assumptions about what is valuable and desirable are promoted and applied in contexts that are politically, culturally, economically and socially dissimilar; and argues that occupational therapy practices informed by these assumptions may be inadequate, inappropriate, irrelevant and oppressive. It asserts that because theorists formulate their ideas within specific socio-cultural, political, economic and geographic contexts, cross-cultural perspectives are necessary to reveal gaps in existing knowledge and identify what has been overlooked, obscured, omitted and assumed. It proposes that knowledge derived from our profession's diverse perspectives might be triangulated to generate inclusive theoretical models, inform culturally-safe practices and be more responsive to the structural factors that inequitably constrain people's opportunities to use their abilities. Surely, the occupational therapy profession can be positioned to have a relevant and significant global impact if we build from the strength of our diversity, and work together towards ensuring that all people, regardless of difference, have the capabilities (i.e. both the abilities and the opportunities) to engage in occupations that contribute to their own well-being and the well-being of their communities, as is their right (WFOT, 2006)!