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A new way of seeing; how can occupational therapists harness arts-based occupations for social transformation? The case of participatory photography.

Cunningham, M

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A new way of seeing; how can occupational therapists harness arts-based occupations for social transformation? The case of participatory photography.

Introduction: Occupational therapy has voiced a commitment to ameliorating social and health inequalities using occupation as a means of social transformation. However, there is a lack of theorising to support this area of practice.

Objectives: To build a theory of change, based on an exploration of how arts-based occupations, specifically participatory photography, have been used with marginalised communities to support personal and social transformations.

Method: A realist review methodology was used to synthesise the literature describing the use of participatory photography with community projects. The synthesis resulted in a theory of change, known as programme theory, which described the way mechanisms operated in certain contexts to bring about both intended and unintended change outcomes.

Results and or practice implications: Community projects that use occupational forms like photography, do support personal and social transformations. The programme theory suggested change occurred because the process of taking photographs allowed people to cast a critical gaze and 'see' their life situation differently. Taking photographs tapped into creative processes that supported expression and gave voice to concerns in a way that took advantage of non-verbal methods. Groups that used visual images and dialogue to question the status quo supported development of critical consciousness. Occupational therapists can use this theory of change to support the development of meaningful personal and social transformations when working with communities.

Conclusion: Using realist review has helped to explain how, why, for whom and in what contexts using an arts-based occupational form, specifically participatory photography, can lead social transformation.

Themes (I need to choose a maximum of 3),

1. Community development
2. Occupational justice/human rights/equity/social inclusion
3. Leadership/advocacy/agents of change