



Commentary

# A psychospiritual integration frame of reference for occupational therapy. Part 2: Transformative occupations and the change process



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**Abstract** This paper builds upon the first in the series on psychospiritual integration (PSI) and examines the concept of transformative occupations and the process of change underpinning occupational therapy from a PSI perspective. A repertoire of new terms highlighting finer distinctions in the concept of occupation will be introduced and explained, as will the dynamic for transformation inherent in the psychospiritual integration change process. Suggestions for PSI-informed occupational therapy practice will be explored.

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## Introduction

In my first paper on the psychospiritual integration (PSI) frame of reference (Kang, 2003) for occupational therapy, I proposed a new conceptual and practice framework for enabling occupational therapists to reflect and engage the area of spirituality in human occupational functioning. Here, I would like to delve into the practical aspects of

PSI – the *doing* of PSI for occupational therapy practitioners as they work with their clients. The process of transformative change intrinsic to spirituality that is linked to health and wellbeing will be discussed in greater detail. The transformative edge of occupation itself will be examined, outlining various ways in which dimensions of spirituality are enabled and energized in persons in the course of PSI-informed occupational therapy, but the community spirituality aspect of PSI will not be the focus of this paper.

Since my first paper on PSI has been published in 2003, after a hiatus of 13 years, this second part of the planned series on PSI is finally out. During that time, there has been a marked proliferation of occupational therapy publications

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centred on the concept of occupation (see e.g. Iwama, 2006; Kielhofner, 2008, pp. 110–125; Pollard, Sakellariou, & Kronenberg, 2009; Townsend & Polatajko, 2013; Turpin & Iwama, 2011). The issue of spirituality has also become more salient as evolving models of occupational therapy practice continue to include discussion of spirituality in their frameworks (see e.g. Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement). Spirituality – the many-splendoured thing – refuses to be silenced. But rather than a thing, it may be more useful and accurate to describe spirituality as a wave-like process.

In this paper, I will be discussing in greater detail the process of transformative change intrinsic to spirituality that is linked to health and wellbeing. The transformative edge of occupation itself will be examined, outlining various ways in which dimensions of spirituality are enabled and energized in persons in the course of PSI-informed occupational therapy. The community spirituality aspect of PSI will not be the focus of this paper.

### Occupations that transform

The concept of occupation has been core and central to much theorizing and clinical practice in occupational therapy, with models of occupational therapy practice moving away from emphasis on discrete skills, tasks, and activities to more holistic understandings of human occupation. Occupation pertains to the ‘doing’ dimension of human existence and involves more than mere productivity and work. Occupation is anything meaningful that people do to occupy time in the context of their environment. Seen in this light, there has been a call for occupation-focused, occupation-based, and occupation-centred assessment and intervention that places occupation at the front and centre of occupational therapy (Fisher, 2014). The potential for occupation to positively impact health and wellbeing of people with disability or illness is not a matter of dispute. Studies have shown that a strong link between meaningful engagement in occupation and health.

What is not so evident is the transformative potential of occupation, conceived more narrowly as individual or personal transformation and more broadly as social or collective transformation. To investigate this issue, we first define what is meant by transformation. What follows is a discussion on PSI-informed occupational therapy that points to new concepts of occupation – meta-occupation, non-occupation and trans-occupation – implicated in transformation at the most profound levels of human existence.

### Transformative change

Change means alteration – shift from one state or condition into another. Conceptualizing change in human subjects is challenging. There can be different kinds and levels of change to be elaborated upon. First, there is what can be termed ‘level zero’ change – no change or no learning at all. Then, there is ‘level one’ or incremental change – “corrections, adaptations, modifications via flexibility and stretching within the box” (Hall & Duval, 2003, p. 122). Next, there is ‘level two’ or discontinuous change – “shift to different behaviours and responses in a different box of

behaviours” (Hall & Duval, 2003, p. 122). Beyond that, there is ‘level three’ or evolutionary change – “shift beyond old box to new box, paradigm shift to new choices entirely” (Hall & Duval, 2003, p. 122). Finally, there is ‘level four’ or revolutionary change – “awakening to a new world, transformative change” (Hall & Duval, 2003, p. 122). At level four, change is transformative in the sense that there is a new order of things not previously present that has now become manifest.

### PSI-informed occupational therapy

In my first paper, I articulated the PSI frame of reference using the template of model construction proposed by Kielhofner (1997, 2009, pp. 60–66). Since then various models in occupational therapy have emerged that utilized alternate structures – see e.g. Canadian Model of Client-Centred Enablement by Townsend, Polatajko, Craik, & Davis (2013) – and metaphors – see e.g. Kawa model by Iwama (2006). Subsequent reflection has prompted a shift in thinking away from mechanistic modelling to organic representations for my articulation of PSI. Hence in this paper, I will be analyzing the ‘enablement’ of spirituality and occupation and ‘technology for application’ in fluid and organic ways more akin to the spirit and style of the Kawa model (Iwama, 2006).

The Canadian Model of Occupational Performance and Engagement (CMOP-E) defines the profession of occupational therapy as “the art and science of enabling engagement in everyday living, through occupation; of enabling people to perform the occupations that foster health and well-being; and of enabling a just and inclusive society so that all people may participate to their potential in the daily occupations of life” (Polatajko, Backman, et al., 2013, p. 27). In *Enabling Occupation* (CAOT, 1997, 2002), spirituality is understood as a source of meaning “that resides in persons, is shaped by the environment, and gives meaning to occupations.” (p. 33). Spirituality, understood in terms of meaning making, can be seen as both the driving force and outcome of occupational engagement (Kielhofner, 2002; Persson, Erlandsson, Eklund & Iwarsson, 2001; Polatajko, Backman, et al., 2013).

### The three zones

The psychospiritual integration (PSI) frame of reference articulates six interpenetrating dimensions of spirituality as becoming, meaning, being, centredness, connectedness, and transcendence (Kang, 2003) (Table 1). As such, meaning, while definitely important and central, is only one of six facets of spirituality and needs to be seen in context. The meaning of occupation that both drives and results from occupational engagement is strongly linked to the concept of becoming. The construction of meaning for an individual in occupation constitutes the narrative that situates and locates the person’s life. Such narrative is in turn central to identity formation, of becoming.

In both meaning and becoming, language and conception play constitutive roles. In other words, the making of meaning and dynamic formation of identity are inextricably tied to language articulation and conceptualization. The

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