Writing the ordinary:

AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC TALES OF AN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

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Abstract
This thesis is an auto-ethnographic study of my life as an occupational therapist. Auto-ethnographic writing animates the culture of occupational therapy by fictionalising moments of practice in one woman's life that can contribute to the collective biography of the profession in Australia. The purpose of this auto-ethnography is to re-inscribe the everyday world of practice into public accounts, at a time when occupational therapy as a profession is becoming a scholarly discipline.

Every profession has rich oral and practice traditions that are located in the everyday. Occupational therapists have a 'double dose' because the work we do explicitly concerns the everyday activities of others. Participation in all the ordinary things that people need and want to do every day is part of the 'immense remainder' (de Certeau, 1984, p. 61) of human experience that 'does not speak' (Hasselkus, 2006). This auto-ethnographic inquiry into my professional life restores something of the intimacy, viscerality and particularity of practice, which, I argue, has been left behind in the search for scholarly and professional legitimacy for occupational therapy.

The thesis consists of a portfolio of fictive tales together with layers of historical and theoretical framing. The tales are in direct dialogue with a selection of articles from my own published work concerned with the practices of a youth-specific occupational therapy project undertaken in the 1980s. A critical commentary connects the new writing with the old, related to the problematic of everyday life and to constructions of professionalism in the bigger picture of occupational therapy.

This portfolio of tales of sexuality, food and death dramatises 'paradigmatic scenes' from a remembered world of occupational therapy, recalling moments of practice with young people living and dying at Camperdown Children's Hospital. These fictional tales are twice-told, first, by an Anglo-Australian occupational therapist in her 30s and then by girls of Pacific Islands, Aboriginal and Turkish heritage. The particular approach of crafting twice-told tales in dialogue with selected publications is what makes this auto-ethnographic project distinctive. These fictive engagements with practice may 'recover' subjugated knowledges from lost and repressed places. Such 'writing the ordinary' may have ethical implications for (re)presenting interactions between all the actors involved in moments of practice.
Author's declaration

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

[Signature]
Publications during candidature


Conference presentations and submissions during candidature


Denshire, S., Poster at postgraduate day, 11th Annual Australian Association of Writing Programs, Perilous Adventures: Creative writing and research in the higher degree and beyond. Creative Industries Precinct, Queensland University of Technology, 23-26 November, 2006, Brisbane.

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Dedication

To the grandmothers of occupational therapy in Australia