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A Comical Look at Occupational Therapy

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A Comical Look at Occupational Therapy

Text: Karen McCarthy

Comics: Kira Kuwada

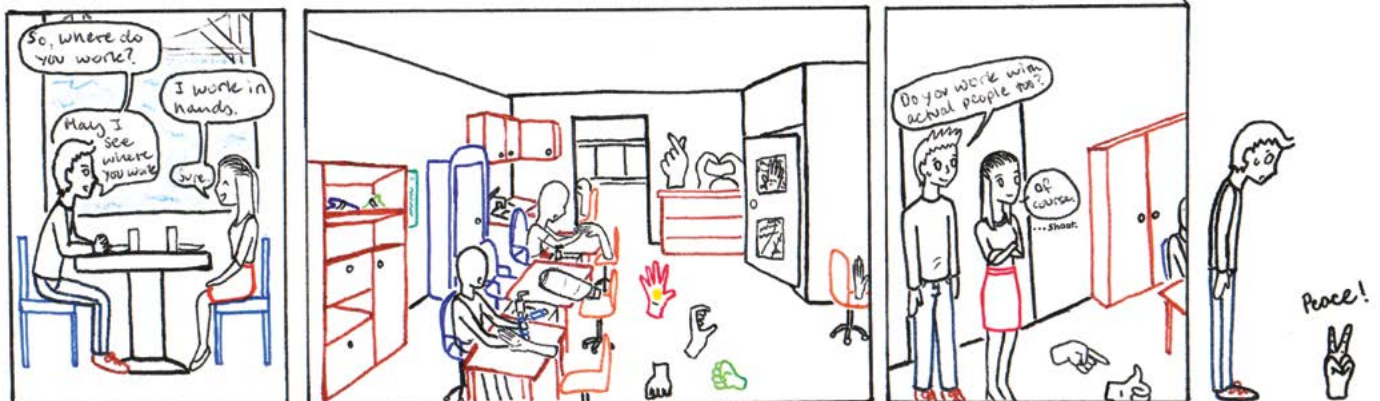
In 2015, I attended the Association of Occupational Therapists of Ireland Conference and was inspired by the keynote address given by Sue Baptiste, MHSc, OT(C). Baptiste explored how she viewed the profession of occupational therapy as moving away from its roots in occupation and becoming more reductionistic in its practice. The profession of occupational therapy has seen many paradigm shifts—from a paradigm of occupation, to a mechanistic paradigm, and then toward a contemporary paradigm, which embraces (1) emphasizing the importance of occupation to health and well-being, (2) recognizing occupational problems and/or challenges as the focus of occupational therapy, and (3) using occupation to improve health status (Kielhofner, 2009).

To keep the profession steered toward its core value of occupation, Baptiste mentioned the value of satire, which through literature or art can use sarcasm, ridicule, or irony to effect social change and show the flaws in organizations or professions, including occupational therapy.

When I was an occupational therapy student, I viewed the profession through rose-tinted glasses. I was inspired by our altruistic history and our ethos of champions using occupation to affect the health and well-being of persons, communities, and families. As I continued into my career as a clinician and an educator, I found myself confronted with examples of where the values of our profession were not reflected in actual practice. I was seeing more assessment and rote tasks than meaningful occupations.

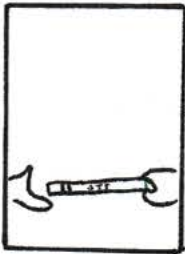
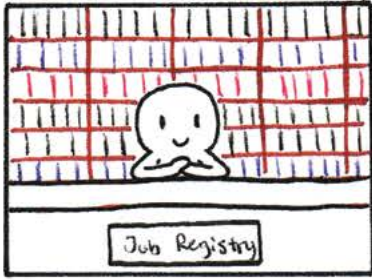
As an educator, I want to empower my students to be critical of their own profession even before they enter it. As part of one undergraduate pre-occupational therapy course, “Occupation as Therapy,” I ask the students to take or draw a picture of what they think embodies occupational therapy. One student drew a comic illustrating an occupational therapy student talking to a friend and trying to explain what occupational therapy was with much frustration, as they assumed it was similar to physical therapy. I saw real creative talent in this student and asked her if she would like to partner with me

Hand Therapy

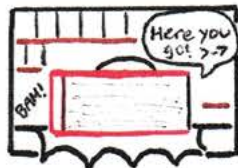


Kira

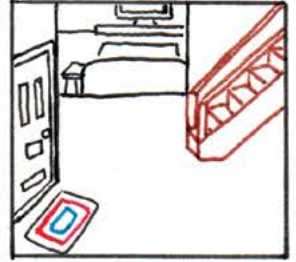
Occupation centered OTS



I'll get the other book.



Throw Rug Be Gone!



However, I have a few precautionary changes for safety reasons.

Oh? Such as what?

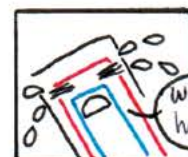
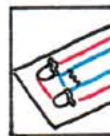


Also, I suggest having your father live on the first floor.

That way, he won't need to climb the stairs. Or you could install one of those stair lifts.

so much money...

Let's talk about all the options elsewhere



Why do OTs hate me??

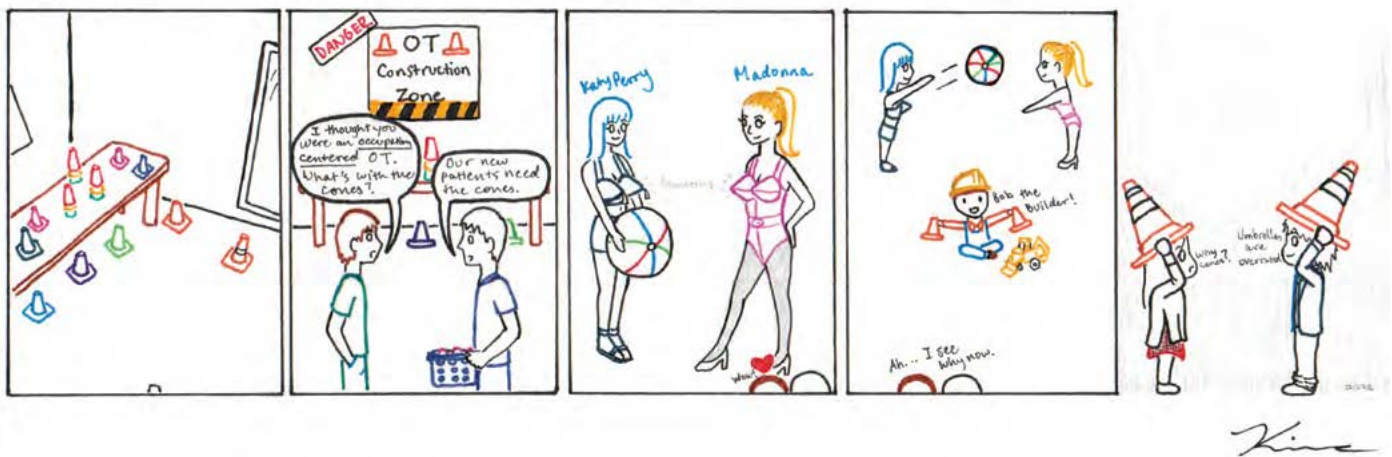


Ha! You think they hate you?!

Up Down. Up Up Down



Fun Cones



to create some satirical comics about occupational therapy. The student and I met over coffee to go over concepts and designs. Not only would her artistic skills be a good match for the project, but this activity was also embodying occupational therapy values by engaging the student in one of her valued occupations, which was drawing comics. The comics touched on themes such as occupation-based practice, holistic versus reductionistic methods, and client-centered approaches.

Student Kira Kuwada, who says she taught herself to draw for fun as well as to be an outlet for creative ideas, says she drew her first occupational therapy-related comic based off how much emphasis there is on the difference between occupational therapy and physical therapy. She says that in discussing my ideas for comics, she realized how occupational therapy, just like any other form of work, has its perceived issues.

“A couple of the comics addressed the idea of occupation-centered occupational therapy. For example, the use of cones was addressed in one of the comics,” Kuwada says. “While using cones may help range of motion and grip, when will a client use a cone in real life? Unless the client was a construction worker (Bob the Builder) or an extravagant fashion designer (who works for Madonna), it would not be often. Creativity in the profession allows for more engagement with the client because as a therapist, you get to know the client more outside of the session. You see the client as a whole, rather than another person to treat.”

Conclusion

My hope as an educator and self-proclaimed occupation activist is to inspire current and future occupational therapy practitioners to safeguard the values of our profession. This type of action can be

done in many ways, including through education, politics, advocacy, and creativity. My hope is that these comics not only get a laugh but also inspire change in how we practice. 🎯

References

Kielhofner, G. (2009). *Conceptual foundations of occupational therapy practice* (4th ed.). Philadelphia: F.A. Davis.

Karen McCarthy, OTD, OTR/L, began her career as an occupational therapist participating in the occupational therapy research study, “The USC Well Elderly Study II: Health Mediating Effects of the Well Elderly Program.” She taught Mental Health Occupational Therapy at the University College Cork in Ireland from 2012 to 2016 and now teaches Psychosocial Aspects of Occupation at the Dominican University of California, in San Rafael. She also works as a dating coach for her private practice.

Kira Kuwada was born and raised in San Francisco. She attends Dominican University of California as a Global Public Health major. When she’s not studying, she enjoys drawing, reading, and listening to good music. Feel free to contact her at kira.kuwada@students.dominican.edu for comic ideas.