

Optimizing Resilience with the Bio-Occupational Approach, illustrated by Client Stories

Pat McKee (University of Toronto, Canada)

Our profession has swung back and forth like a pendulum between occupational and biological paradigms. The occupational, or top-down, paradigm is the one that aligns with the title of our profession – Occupational Therapy. This is the paradigm where our profession started.

The biological paradigm, which emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, is the oft maligned bottom-up approach especially now when the occupational paradigm is again dominant.

It could be argued that Occupational Therapy at its best, uses two lenses – an occupational lens and a biological lens. However, the current paradigm is dominated by an occupational focus and biological content is diminishing in the educational curricula. We are teaching our students how to think, but less how to do.

Client stories will show the resilience of the head-injured physical therapist who has become a Paralympic champion cyclist; the concert pianist who is able to continue her profession and passion despite arthritis; a woman able to maintain independence despite extreme joint hypermobility. These stories illustrate how a bifocal, Bio-Occupational approach addresses both the biological and occupational goals of the client to achieve successful outcomes.