

Perspectives on occupation-based social inclusion

Collective occupation in the local, social world

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Abstract

The construction of our social worlds through historical, social, cultural, and economic conditions has placed some people in un-just positions; positions which exclude them from full participation in the daily lives of their families and communities. The term social inclusion is used to describe a process that works to transform our societies, to re-construct 'societies *for all*'. However, this is a complex and multi-layered process, requiring change *by all*. While policy and economic change is an essential part of this, it is also recognised that change in the locally social world, the public world of the neighbourhood and community, is significant. I suggest that collective occupation, and our research and practice of collective occupation, is an important part of these processes.

Following a general introduction to social inclusion, my first aim in this paper is to present the concept of collective occupation and its contribution to the construction and maintenance of the locally social world, including situations of both inclusion and exclusion. Following this I aim to discuss how collective occupation that supports social inclusion may be developed, including examples from Japan and Europe. Integral to this development is understanding of the importance of the public world, and the concepts of recognition and participatory citizenship. Enabling the social inclusion of all in our local neighbourhoods and communities through collective occupation can be part of the social transformation required to address the un-just conditions of many people's lives in our societies today.

Key words

Collective occupation, participatory citizenship, public world

It is a great honour to be here today, invited to join you at the 21st Occupational Science Seminar, and to be back in Japan following my first visit in 2014 to attend the World Federation of Occupational Therapists' congress, which was such a wonderful introduction for me to your country. It is exciting to be here and to be able to share with you ideas about the importance of occupation in tackling some of the problems facing our societies today.

Social inclusion is complex with different and conflicting representations. In essence, we are talking about how we can transform how we live together. This is transformation based on an understanding of socially constructed reality; that is, reality constructed by historic, social (including cultural and economic) circumstances, that place some people in un-just conditions. These un-just conditions include limitations to their possibility to participate in occupations that are available to other members of their community or society, and thereby limitations to their possibility to be healthy and to flourish.

If the focus of our work, whether in research or practice, remains on the individual person and assumptions regarding their agency, our ability to work with those social conditions influencing their daily lives is limited. Recently, occupational therapy and occupational science has begun to address this traditional focus on the individual. Some work has focused on the macro social structures that construct the conditions of people's lives, and has begun to develop important concepts and theories, for example, occupational justice and injustice (Stadnyk et al, 2011; Wilcock and Townsend, 2000) and occupational possibilities (Laliberte Rudman, 2010). Work has also begun to focus on the local social world and the importance of collective occupation (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2017; Ramagundo & Kronenberg, 2013).

The perspectives that I will discuss here are particularly related to this local social world and the way we live together in our communities and neighbourhoods. The structuring influences of laws, policies, and institutional organisations are important in facilitating or not the inclusion of all, and families' beliefs and practices may also be vital. However, I will focus on the local world, on the collective occupation that takes place and on the power inherent in such occupation to shape the nature of the

social fabric of the local community, and through that the individual's lived experience as well as potentially the macro institutional context.

Therefore, my aims are:

1. To provide an introduction to some contemporary understandings of social inclusion.
2. To discuss the importance for the processes of social inclusion of the local, public world, of recognition between people, and of participatory citizenship.
3. To introduce collective occupation and its contribution to the construction and maintenance of this local social world, and
4. To consider how we may use collective occupation to facilitate processes of social inclusion, including offering some examples.

As a complex and multi-dimensional topic, inevitably I will only be able to discuss some of the perspectives around social inclusion. My perspective is largely based on my work over the past years based in Europe. Where possible I will incorporate relevant discussion from the literature related to Japan. However, I remain aware that in bringing to the Japanese context concepts developed in Anglophone societies, inevitably there will be places of disconnect and discord. I hope that these will become useful points for discussion.

Introducing social inclusion

I would like to start with a brief story. It is told by one of the members of the ELSiTO group (Empowering Learning for Social Inclusion through Occupation), a European learning partnership of mental health service users and professionals (see www.elsito.net). For some years we worked together to understand the nature and processes of social inclusion. The story is related by a woman I shall call Lucy, aged about 35 years from Belgium.

Art classes

My first year in painting-class. I'm in a group of people who have normal jobs, being married, having children... People who are mentally quite healthy. And that's another way for me; I'm not very used to it. Most of the times, I cope with fellow sufferers, but it's nice to meet people who live normal lives. Doing the painting is nice, but I also like to go for a drink after the lessons. I'm feeling accepted most of the times, and

that feels good. That's something that gives me hope, I'm not all excluded from society. There are ways to move a little bit in it, even though my art-school friends know that I'm having a mental disease. The lessons are intense, I have to concentrate for three hours and that isn't always easy to do. But the drinks afterwards are really relaxing and I'm glad to spend some time with "normal" people.
(elsito, n.d.a)

This situation is familiar to many of us from our professional work. Lucy, like many people with mental illness, is working to find opportunities in life that “give her hope that she’s not all excluded from society, that there are ways to move a little bit in it”, and that people can know about her disease and accept her. She is working on her social inclusion. But social inclusion is an important process for us **all** to work on.

Although we know that the real wealth of a nation is understood to be its people and the contributions that each of us may make (United Nations, 2010), throughout the world people find themselves excluded from many of the everyday activities that we take for granted for a wide variety of reasons. Social exclusion may be perpetuated by laws and policies, but also by the beliefs and attitudes of us all, usually directed at groups of people – women, children, the elderly, people who are sick or with different abilities, people of another nationality, religion, culture or gender, people who are poor, homeless, drug dependent, unemployed...People may experience discrimination and stigma, due to one or more of these characteristics.

The concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) reminds us that people incorporate multiple identities that create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage. Such intersectionality may make intervention aimed at only one characteristic limited in its effectiveness. Lucy has experience of mental illness, is unemployed and is a woman, however she is also educated and very creative – multiple identities influencing what she can do, where and how, but also what she wants to be and become.

Social inclusion attempts to deal with some of these issues. While it is a concept to which people can relate and in general terms most people would sign up to as

something positive, it is in reality very complex and raises numerous questions that are important to consider (Labonte, 2004).

One question is: Inclusion into what? One of the criticisms of the term social inclusion is that it may be used to support the assimilation of certain groups of people seen as excluded, into mainstream society. Historically, this was the approach in many countries towards aboriginal peoples and minority groups.

Another question is: Who decides? Policies promoting social inclusion are mainly established by governments and those in power - those whose policies may also be excluding essentially (Labonte, 2004). What about those people and groups who do not want to be part of the mainstream society?

Who decides how much inclusion is enough? Is there a danger that in supporting one group who is excluded to become more included, that other groups, almost as excluded, will find their own position worsening?

Do we all support inclusion for all? Will society always exclude some groups? There may be resistance to change by some people in positions of power; exclusion may be deliberately pursued by some for their own profit (UNDESA, 2009).

How do we manage the complexity of our increasingly diverse societies, for example with the mobility of populations, cities with multiple languages, religions, customs and traditions?

Despite these questions some key ideas around social inclusion are evident. At this time, most definitions of social inclusion recognise it to be a process and not a utopian vision. It requires change by all and does not refer to the assimilation of some into a society created by others. It requires a critical and reflexive approach to our own attitudes and beliefs (Gerlach, 2015; Kinsella & Whiteford, 2011). It is a process of working towards a 'society for all'. This process includes recognising the "dignity, value and importance of all, not only as ethical norm and moral imperative but also as legal principle, societal norm and ultimately as practice" (UNDESA, 2009, p. 5). It is a

complex and multi-dimensional process and it is useful to briefly consider some of these dimensions, that will also help position the importance of occupation.

Dimensions of inclusion

An important dimension is the structural. In Lucy's story we see how policy and laws may work to facilitate inclusion of people facing disadvantage, as she is encouraged to take part in a community art group. Social inclusion may be seen as a right and its attainment a matter of justice. Since the 1990s promoting inclusion and integration have been at the core of numerous policies of the United Nations. Most recently "Leaving no one behind" is the central aspiration that underlines the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015 (UN, 2015). In Europe we see the recent establishment of the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017). This renewed the commitment of the European Commission to not only economic but also social development in Europe, promoting inclusion in terms of ensuring that all people have a basic income, housing and access to services. While not legally binding across European countries, such guidelines provide direction for national policy. I understand that similar laws and policies are in place in Japan.

However, social inclusion is also a subjective experience. In her story, Lucy noted how in the Art class she is joining 'normal' people, how they know about her mental illness, how good it is to be able to spend some time with them in the art class and to relax afterwards. Another ELSiTO member said that you need to feel that you "*are something more than the stigma*". We can all think of a time when we 'objectively' fitted, but subjectively felt excluded, and social inclusion must consider the subjective experience of inclusion as well as the structural aspects (Ammeraal, Kantartzis and Vercruysse, n.d.).

This brings us to the third dimension, that is, our 'doing together in everyday life', our relationships with others as we 'do' with them. Reflecting the definition of social inclusion as societal norm and as practice, this requires us to turn a critical lens towards a more local level of how we live together in our neighbourhoods and communities. I understand this to refer to the Japanese concept of *Seken*, defined by Yoshida (2003, n.p.) as "the community of people with whom we share daily life", coming between our family and close friends and those unknown or strangers.

But how do we manage our doing together, how well are we doing?

Experiencing exclusion in our everyday lives

People with experience of disability commonly report the impact of stigmatizing attitudes of colleagues and neighbours on their work and social lives (WHO, 2011). Angell (2014) identified hegemonic practices between school children in the United States, re-enacting in the classroom attitudes related to gender, race, ability, and age.

In Japan as well, inclusion would seem to be an important topic to discuss at this time. While traditionally identified as a collectivistic culture with an importance on human interaction and togetherness in people's everyday lives (Wado, 2011), this is increasingly challenged. The Cabinet Office (2007, cited Hommerich, 2015, pg. 49) reports that in 1975 53% of the population stated they had close relations with neighbours, a figure dropping to 11% in 2007. It is reported that since 2000 there has been growing social inequality and a weakening of social networks, leading to the creation of the term "society without bonds" (muen shakai) (Hommerich, 2015, pg.48). Feelings of dis-connectedness, a reduced sense of belonging to and value for society (subjective social exclusion), particularly when combined with socioeconomic precarity, is leading to lower civic engagement (Hommerich, 2015). Alongside this, in 2015 there were 18.45 million people living alone in Japan, including 5.93 million people over the age of 65 (Statistics Bureau, 2017).

While living alone may be a choice for some, it may lead to loneliness, especially if combined with decreased engagement with one's community. Loneliness has been linked to early mortality and the development of Alzheimer's disease in UK research (AgeUK, 2017). Neighbourhood dissatisfaction, including trust in neighbours and neighbourhood safety have been associated with poor self-rated health in Japan (Oshio & Urakawa, 2012). Having social networks, access to employment and other conditions, are understood to be important social determinants of health (CSDH, 2008).

From this brief review it seems evident that consideration of processes of inclusion for all in the daily lives of our neighbourhoods and communities is an important focus

at this time. Before exploring the contribution of collective occupation to these processes, a number of key, underpinning, concepts will be considered.

Three ideas for social inclusion: The construction of the public world; the importance of recognition; and participatory citizenship

Underpinning these concepts is the understanding that humans are social animals. This is almost intuitively accepted by most people, while research also demonstrates that the human species has always operated as communal groups with skills in social cooperation (Fukuyama, 2012).

The Public World

The first idea is the importance of the public world. The ‘polis’ – the city state of Ancient Greece - was not so much a physical place as a construction of *polites*, of ‘citizens’, coming together to enable collaboration and order (Aristotle, n.d.). Building on this idea, the social theorist, Hannah Arendt writing on the human condition (Arendt, 1958) discusses various types of human activity. Two of these, labour and work, are individual in nature. The third is *action*, which she describes as our actions and words that combine to create a network of actions and relationships, a common world of public life. This public world is vital to the expression of identity and of action, beyond that of the home and the work place. For those excluded from such *action*, for example due to the ongoing demands of labour for survival, they are in effect excluded from the public world and from the possibility to fulfil their identity and their potential.

Arendt describes how people acting together, what she calls “sheer human togetherness”, creates power. This power, the plurality of the collective when united, is the condition that enables the space for action, to act upon traditional or hegemonic boundaries (Allen, 2002), to create change. Therefore, the idea of a public world is important not only for the expression of our identity, our skills, and the fulfilment of our potential, but also for the power created by people coming together creating a space for action.

Recognition

In this discussion of the public world, we see that the public self is a relational self and the fundamental importance of our relationships with others. This brings us to the second idea, the concept of recognition. Nancy Frazer and Axel Honneth are two philosophers whose work around concepts of social justice, including on recognition (Frazer & Honneth, 2003) is useful in demonstrating that social inclusion is not only a matter of economic exclusion and of distribution as influenced by class, but is a matter of the relationships of different social groups.

Recognition as a concept, arises from the philosophy of Hegel, and the idea that one's sense of self as a subject, as a person, only comes from being recognised by another, "that social relations are prior to individuals and intersubjectivity is prior to subjectivity" (Frazer & Honneth, 2003, pg. 10). If one is denied recognition, or 'mis-recognised', one develops a distortion of one's relationship to one's self and injury to one's identity (Fraser, 2000). Mis-recognition can be part of laws, formally institutionalised through policy or professional practice, but also informally institutionalised through the long-standing social practices and customs of civic society (Fraser, 2000), the local social world that is our focus today.

Addressing recognition, Fraser argues for the notion of "parity of participation" (Frazer & Honneth, 2003, pg. 36) by which justice requires social arrangements that permit all adult members to interact with one another as peers. Honneth describes the importance of recognition in three areas: affection and care from loved ones, legal recognition of one's rights, and recognition of one's achievements as a "productive citizen" (Frazer & Honneth, 2003, pg. 141).

We can see that incorporating recognition into processes of social inclusion emphasises the importance not only of the re-distribution of resources (for example, policy addressing poverty), but also is about addressing unjust practices around identity. Addressing such unjust practices requires a destabilisation of all existing status differentiations in society, of cultural values that impede parity of participation, and a change in everyone's self-identity (Honneth & Fraser, 2003).

These ideas, that people are inherently social, that the power of people coming together shapes the nature of the public world, and the importance of recognition between us, are important to the third idea, that of participatory citizenship.

Participatory citizenship

Citizenship is understood in many ways in countries throughout the world, depending on their unique socio-historical trajectory, and the concept of *participatory* citizenship has been proposed quite recently in the European Union. Participatory citizenship has been defined as “participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterized by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy” (Hoskins et al, 2012, pg.4). Citizenship here is much more than a legal status identifying the relationship of state and subject, rather it incorporates active participation, living together and the shaping of our common world, reflecting ideas of collective occupation. It would seem to be relevant to ideas of citizenship in Japan, being related to civic engagement, moral and social responsibilities, evident, for example, in the engagement of school children in school life and committees (Davies et al, 2010).

This is citizenship where all can participate, where we all contribute to the construction of our common shared world, incorporating Arendt’s notions of Action. Incorporating this concept of participatory citizenship into our discussions of collective occupation, points not only to the importance of certain occupations, such as voluntary work, engagement in political activities and local committees, but also to the relationships between us and our roles as citizens. This means that primarily we recognise ourselves as citizens and the responsibility that each of us have in determining the position of our fellow citizens in, and the nature of, our shared world. In terms of our work as occupational therapists it offers an alternative to the potentially problematic relationship of therapist and client, based in unequal positions of power, and recognises us to be first fellow citizens, before any other relationship (Fransen et al, 2015).

We can see the importance of the concepts of the public world, of our recognition of each other and of participatory citizenship, to our understandings of processes of

social inclusion. We also have begun to see how these link with the importance of our doing together in the construction of our social worlds, and we will now explore this doing together, our collective occupation, in more detail.

Collective occupation

Collective occupation has been defined in a number of ways, but I propose that it is defined “by its unique construction through the numerous people engaged in it and the power that is thereby produced, as well as by its intention or purpose towards the social fabric” (Kantartzis & Molineux, 2017, pg.173). This is occupation that can only occur in the plurality of people coming together. It recognises that by coming together power is created that shapes our shared social world. The shape that our common world takes may exclude and discriminate against some of our fellow citizens, but also through our collective occupation people can be and become together.

An example is the Japanese festival of viewing the Cherry blossom (On-Hanami). The atmosphere and the doings of this occupation occur when people come together each year. In coming together, they powerfully recreate this as an annual tradition with associated experiences, symbols and memories.

That some occupation is only possible through numerous people coming together, has been recognised since Fogelberg and Frauworth’s (2010) discussion of distributed occupation. They suggested that some occupation such as national holidays and sporting events, are collectively produced across four nested levels: population, community, group and individual. More recently Zango Martin et al, (2015) propose that in many parts of the world everyday occupations are primarily social practices, while Peralta-Catipon, (2012) noted how for immigrants, collective occupation reconstructs familiar social structures, ways of relating and doing, from their countries of origin.

We begin to see an increasing focus on the importance of our doing together. However, in identifying an intention towards the social world, I particularly draw on the work of Ramugondo and Kronenberg (2013), who discussed how human

relationships were the intent of collective occupation. They noted how individuals and communities influence each other and therefore have responsibilities to each other. In identifying the focus of collective occupation on relationships, we are enabled to explore how the relationships maintained through collective occupation may come anywhere on a continuum between the positive and the oppressive.

Therefore, a critical approach is required to recognise the nature of the social world produced through collective occupation. We can see the importance of recognising social inclusion as 'practice' (UNDESA, 2009) and our own contribution to inclusive or exclusionary practices as we recognise or not, in our action and words of collective occupation, the position and possibilities of our fellow citizens.

Collective occupation takes a number of forms and a quote from another ELSiTO member will introduce the first of these: *'What is really nice is to be able to walk down your street and for someone to say hello'*. What a simple request, but for an activity that may be increasingly uncommon in some of our urban areas, and as more and more people live alone, one that is increasingly important.

Informal encounters in public places

Walking down the street is one aspect of 'informal encounters in public places', one of the forms of collective occupation identified in research (Kantartzis, 2017). Through our daily encounters with our neighbours and others in our neighbourhood, village or town, we build networks, not only social networks but also networks of occupation – regular places where we do our shopping, fix our car, get our hair cut, find a baby sitter, or a doctor. We recommend such places to others, we learn that someone needs help or advice, we ask for help or advice ourselves. Here, what we do, where, when and with whom is shaped by related occupation; knowledge, skills, products and support are exchanged, and we are recognized and given identity as an inextricable part of the local, social world (Arendt, 1958; Hammell, 2014).

Exploring the conditions of possibility for daily life, for such informal encounters, is therefore particularly important in relation to the social space of the neighbourhood.

We see the combination of physical spaces, ideology as well as traditions, that construct our neighbourhoods and the daily occupation within them (de Certeau, Giard and Mayol, 1998).

To join this network of occupation we must be recognised, be seen and acknowledged as a person, a person with value and something to contribute. We must be able to physically access public space – to go down the street or into the shop – and it must be safe for us to do so. Legally we must also be able to access public space, for example, in some countries women are excluded from some public spaces. At the same time socio-economic exclusion prevents the access of poorer people to up-market restaurants and bars either due to pricing or ‘style’.

The network of occupation may exclude and include by whom it approves (‘he’s a good and honest decorator – I recommend him for the work you want to do on your house), and by the norms and social values upheld in the practices of public space (for example, how we talk to and about people with disability living in our neighbourhoods). We can remember Lucy who was encouraged that her class mates accepted her company for a drink after the classes, ‘despite her mental disease’.

We begin to see in this discussion of the collective occupation of informal daily encounters, the public world of action and voice as discussed by Arendt. We also see the importance of ‘recognition’. However, some of our collective occupations in public places take a more structured form, as in the development of formal and informal associations that organise public action.

The collective occupation of organisation and association.

Local associations are a common feature of many neighbourhoods and communities, aiming to address local needs and interests, and often originating in daily encounters and conversations. A large variety may exist, including those organising local business (for example, a Farmer’s cooperative), supporting particular population groups (for example, a Women’s Association), or particular recreational activities (for example, Athletics Association, Folklore Association)

(Kantartzis, 2017). There are 3000 neighbourhood associations in Japan (Pekkanen, Tsujinaka & Yamamoto, 2014). These local associations are important in providing opportunities to be visible and acknowledged, and to take on roles and use skills, while contributing to the common good and influencing local affairs. These are opportunities that may not be available in the work place or home.

We see here the power of the collective in how these associations 'arrange' the social fabric, or organise the public world. However, a critical approach enables us to see how they may not address all the issues of the local population, or even exclude some people. For example, how do transgender people 'fit' with associations with male or female only membership. Other associations may exclude through expectations of the skills and abilities of members.

More informal organisation of action may occur to address new challenges or unexpected events. Frank and Muriithi (2015) discuss the civil rights movement in the USA as an example of collective action that led to far reaching changes in the everyday lives of many Black people in the United States. Organisations may also respond to local events or crises by adapting their activities. An example is described by Shiino and Hasegawa (2017) in the description of the response of occupational therapists with 'Disaster support activities after the great East Japan Earthquake in Fukushima'. Important to these occupations is the idea of collective emotion, which is central to the third form of collective occupation.

The collective occupation of celebration and commemoration

These are those collective occupations which have at their core the sharing of emotions. Multiple groups of people may be involved in their production, reflecting ideas of distributed occupations (Fogelberg and Frauworth, 2010). However, rather than focusing on how they are constructed, it is important to notice the experience of heightened, intense emotion (Von Scheve & Ismer, 2013).

Throughout the world communities have annual or seasonal events, some of which are celebrations of religious or historical events, while others are opportunities for shared mourning or remembrance of national or local tragedies. Where traditional

rituals may be becoming less common, other forms of heightened collective emotion may be enabled, for example, in sports crowds and pop concerts (Getz, 2007). With such collective occupation, shared actions, rituals, and the re-creation of symbols support the group's coherence and solidarity (Collins, 2004), and enable a sense of belonging.

Three forms of collective occupation have been discussed: informal encounters in public places, organisations and associations, and celebrations and commemorations. While discussed separately in practice they frequently overlap. For example, neighbours coming together in daily encounters may identify a local need, leading to the establishment of a new association. The power of collective emotion may support action for change (for example, in the American Civil Rights movement, or contemporary Peace marches).

Collective occupation has also been discussed primarily in terms of people physically coming together. However, the virtual world means that collective occupation may take place in locations across the globe. An example is the football World cup, where although the matches usually are held in one country, related occupation, carrying experiences and meanings, is transferred via the media, to many people throughout the world.

And as we recognise the importance of collective occupation we need to consider the form of the social world that they are shaping. We need to consider whether that social world is strong, vibrant and inclusive.

Developing collective occupation

The final part of this discussion will consider how we can support the development of such vibrant and inclusive neighbourhoods and communities through collective occupation, including providing some examples of projects in Europe that have been developed.

Before doing so I would like to take a moment and ask you to consider your own collective occupations, your daily encounters, your involvement in associations, your

opportunities for shared emotional expression, and perhaps other forms not mentioned here. Consider: what are the important elements for you? But also consider: Who is not there, who is not taking part, how and why are they excluded? Keep them in mind as we discuss how we might support their engagement and inclusion.

Developing inclusive public places

How can we work towards inclusive public places? Physically accessible, safe, public places are an important first step. However, Seamon (2006) uses the phrase 'place ballet' to emphasise how a temporal and environmental regularity is required that enables people to become known and engage with each other. We should consider where and when can people meet regularly, examples may be the local shops, weekly markets, religious services, places with regular occupations. Lucy, went to weekly art classes. However, does everyone in our local community have regular access to an inclusive public place? We may need to work to create such places.

We also need to ensure that they have an atmosphere that facilitates people to feel a sense of belonging, to feel included. Features that promote such an atmosphere include: that they have 'everyday' furnishings, that chairs and tables can be moved to fit those entering the space and how they want to use it, that there are flexible opening hours, and that there are some people who regularly attend and become familiar faces (Kantartzis, 2013; Oldenberg, 1999).

Raising awareness

And not only may we need to establish such places, but we may also need to raise awareness of the importance of our doing together and our inter-relatedness. Consciousness of the inter-relatedness of people exists strongly in some cultures, for example, in the African ethic of Ubuntu (Ramagundo and Kronenberg, 2013). In other communities, traditional features, for example, a shared belief that people with mental illness may be dangerous, leads to discrimination against them and their exclusion (Hamer et al. 2017). We heard Lucy's awareness of potential stigma around her mental illness.

However, the public world of Arendt is constructed by voice and action and as people come together we can see the possibility for raising awareness of issues of

oppression and injustice. The pragmatist John Dewey described the importance of developing specific opportunities for debate, discussion and persuasion to lead to change in communities (Cutchin et al, 2017). Paulo Freire (1996), noted that action for change requires processes of conscientization, reflective processes that enable the co-creation of knowledge around the nature of the constructed social reality. It is important that there is awareness and acknowledgement of the importance of the quality of our relationships, of respect for the dignity of all, and of getting to 'know' the other as citizens together.

Awareness of the language we use is also important, as language "creates, contests and recreates power, authority and legitimation" (Taket et al. 2014, pg 4), and positions can be created, but also challenged through language.

Engagement in collective occupation

These processes may go alongside or be integral to engagement in collective occupation. We should recognise the importance of small everyday doings, of greetings, of small kindnesses, of sharing (Ammeraal et al. n.d.), of daily encounters. As well as these small, everyday doings, we may want to be aware of, or create opportunities for, more extensive engagement in collective occupation. Research in Japan has demonstrated the positive association between voluntary participation in neighbourhood associations and subjective well-being (Tiefenbach and Holdgrün, 2015). Volunteering, taking part, whether through associations or traditional celebrations, offers opportunities for people to share experiences of engaging in occupation, to utilise and develop their skills, to experience social connections and a sense of belonging as well as to contribute to the local community and the development of local policy (Ripat et al. 2010).

This is not only about enabling marginalised individuals to join the ongoing activities of the majority. We may need to consider how we might reconstruct such occupations (Frank, 2015, 2017, in press) to enable us to develop new ways of doing together or develop new collective occupation to address contemporary needs.

In completing this presentation, I will offer some examples of collective occupation specifically developed to support inclusive communities and they demonstrate the

interweaving of the three forms of collective occupation. I am aware that there are also such projects being developed in Japan, and I hope these examples will support your reflections on your own local activities.

The Praatcafé “PolParol”, Leuven, Belgium

This café was developed to address “*the challenge of seeing and meeting people in a relaxed, non-structured environment*”. Every Thursday night a meeting is organised at the café “Pol Parol” for unemployed persons with mental health problems who live independently in one neighbourhood of the city and other local inhabitants including immigrants. We see the importance of the ‘place ballet’ with a regular meeting place and times, but also informal encounters - people drop in. Those who attend are encouraged by the staff, together with students of the local occupational therapy programme (HuB Brussels) to become engaged with the running and management of the café. They develop the skills required to be involved in an informal collective organisation. Social activities, such as barbeques, are also organised, again promoting skills, confidence and a sense of belonging, as well as incorporating shared emotion (see www.elsito.net).

Urban gardening in Hildesheim, Germany

This project was developed in a collaboration between a university and a community in a deprived area of Hildesheim, Germany. Following discussions, students and members of the community worked together to create raised flowerbeds that became a focus point for the local community. We can see again the significance of ‘doing’ together, the power of collective occupation bringing people together to meet and collaborate, while developing a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy. This collective organisation around an identified local need, utilises urban gardening as a grass-roots movement towards ecological sustainability (see Schiller et al, in press).

Art in the Scaffolding, Belgium

Finally, this community-based project, demonstrates the power of collective engagement in a range of creative occupations, bringing the local community together, not only physically but also emotionally. Once a year a celebration is held over a weekend in the local, disused church. The annual event is organised through

a collaboration between a local community mental health centre, the local children's school, members of the church, and the local council. It is attended by all members of the community, while many people spend time over the year to prepare and present paintings, drawings, poetry-recitals, video-art and many other forms of creative expression.

(see Kunst in de Steigers, www.elsito.net)

Conclusion

This presentation has explored the contribution of collective occupation to social inclusion. Social inclusion is complex and dynamic. It is influenced by multiple levels from the macro, structural level of laws and policies to the subjective level of each individual's experience. As a dynamic process the construction of inclusion varies from situation to situation and moment to moment. Multiple factors, including race, disability, language, gender, age, and poverty may all contribute. All elements are contingent, each aspect influences the others, and change in one will bring change in others.

I have proposed that the public world of our local neighbourhoods and communities is important for developing processes of inclusion. This is not to ignore that many people are excluded by economic policies and "the use, abuse and distribution of power" (Labonte, 2006 p. 118), or to underestimate the importance of employment. However, the approach taken here supports the need for change at the local level (Carpenter, 2009). It is proposed that collective occupation is an important constituent in such processes. Doing together, as citizens, engaging in everyday life together, recognising each person and their potential contribution, creates the conditions of our social world. Active, engaged communities, critically addressing their own exclusionary values and practices, can support all their members to flourish.

It is evident that social inclusion is not (only) a desired outcome but much more a process, an ongoing work that we need to be continually engaged with throughout our everyday lives. It is not primarily the responsibility of Lucy and others facing exclusion, but is dependent on us all, professionals, academics, researchers, as

people, as citizens. It requires work at multiple levels, from the individual to the structural, but the power of occupation to drive change is of critical importance. Harnessing the power of collective occupation may enable the social transformation required to ensure inclusion for all.

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