

Ratified by OTNZ-WNA Council State Date: 2003	Review date: 2007	Version no. 2
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<p>Occupational Therapy New Zealand Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa (OTNZ-WNA)</p> <h2 style="color: #0056b3;">Occupational Therapy in Educational Contexts Position Statement</h2>	
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Background

This position statement has been developed in consultation with New Zealand occupational therapists working in education, including the early childhood and compulsory sectors. This statement reflects the current thinking of these occupational therapists. It aims to communicate with key stakeholders (consumers, purchasers and other professionals) the roles, areas of practice, research needs and key issues for the profession in this fast-growing area.

The 1989 Education Act outlined the rights of all children to receive education in state schools. The subsequent development and implementation of Special Education 2000 provided the funding and policy framework for special education, defined by the Ministry of Education (1999) as the *'provision of extra assistance or learning environments, specialised equipment or materials to support young children and school students with accessing the curriculum in a range of settings'*. The primary focus for these legislative and policy frameworks is to support inclusion for all children in their educational setting. This is supported by New Zealand Disability Strategy (2001) which calls for inclusion, participation and opportunities for people with disabilities, including fair access to the best education.

Philosophy of Occupational Therapy Practice in Educational Contexts

OTNZ-WNA supports the notion of inclusive education. Inclusive education works towards learning and participation for all learners (Booth, 2000). OTNZ-WNA supports the building of inclusive communities as this is compatible with the profession's beliefs that all children and young people have the right to equal opportunity to engage in the roles and occupations of education, and to belong and participate fully in their school communities. OTNZ-WNA adopts the stance that inclusion is not a specific place, service or approach in occupational therapy

service delivery but that occupational therapists should work to support inclusion and limit exclusion regardless of the setting. In line with the profession's belief in child and family-centered practices, OTNZ-WNA supports the right of the parent and child to select the appropriate place of learning.

Therapists promote occupational performance by working in the child's natural contexts. OTNZ-WNA believes occupational therapy services are best delivered in the educational setting, the local community and at home. Although educational outcomes are the primary focus, therapists must consider the whole child/young person across home, school and community contexts to ensure generalization of learning. The stance taken is that the child/young person is first a student/young person, then a student and always a member of their family and the wider community.

OTNZ-WNA strongly supports the provision of integrated service delivery across all sectors, with occupational therapists working collaboratively with educators and health services, the student and his/her family/whanau/fono. OTNZ-WNA recognises that within this model of service delivery therapists may work with individuals or with wider systems. The client may be the student, the family, and the school or other agencies/community groups. The approach of the occupational therapist will adjust accordingly to the needs of the identified client(s) at the time. When working with the child, the social model of disability predominates with a shift in focus from the student's dis-abilities to their abilities, emphasizing the child/young persons' strengths and participation in every-day activities.

OTNZ-WNA recognises that delivery of occupational therapy services may vary in response to changed needs as they are identified collaboratively with the team via the Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Development Plan (IDP). Models of service delivery may include working directly one-to-one with the student, working directly with others involved with the student, monitoring and review and consultation to the teaching team, the family/whanau and the educational setting. The selection of service delivery type is ideally based on individual student need and research evidence of outcomes achieved through specific service delivery models. OTNZ-WNA acknowledges that funding levels impact directly on service delivery method and outcomes.

Finally, OTNZ-WNA acknowledges the relevant legal, ethical, professional standards that inform the practice of occupational therapists in educational settings. This not only includes adherence to the articles of the Treaty of Waitangi, but also to any *Operational Protocols* put in place by the Ministry of Education, and those that exist between multiple service providers such as the Ministry of Health and Accident Compensation Corporation – all providers of services to children with special needs.

Definition

Occupational therapy for children and young people in educational contexts, aims to promote optimal well-being, function, independence and productivity within the context of learning, social and cultural environments. This is achieved through the development and application of a plan of purposeful, goal-directed activities specifically related to occupational performance and occupational performance components. Occupational performance refers to a student's occupation or participation in life tasks, and includes activities of daily living, accessing the curriculum, vocational skills, play and leisure. Occupational performance components are considered to be the foundations for learning, and include sensory-motor, cognitive and psychosocial components. Occupational therapists are an integral part of the wider team who collaboratively plan and consult through the IEP process to deliver services for students, schools and families.

Key Tasks

Key tasks include:

- Use of appropriate assessments to contribute to collaborative team planning e.g. through the IEP/IDP
- Development of clear OT objectives that support priorities established by the parents and school.
- Implementation of programmes with relevant personnel.
- Use of meaningful occupations to maximise engagement in school tasks, belonging and participation. Services aim to maximise the fit between the student, the learning environment, and the student's occupation. This may include designing the curriculum and environmental adaptations to support participation, or the provision of appropriate assistive equipment.
- Ensure that those around the student understand their specific needs relating to impairments, strengths and abilities and their personal views and priorities. In doing so, ensure that the voices of families and students are heard.
- Evaluate, record and report changes in occupational performance.
- Design interventions that focus on the student and the environment and systems in which they live and learn in.

Practice Strengths

The strengths of occupational therapy practice for students in educational contexts are as outlined:

- Occupational therapists have a wide knowledge base that is complementary to that held by others in the education sector. For example sensory motor perspectives, psychosocial perspectives, developmental perspectives, and understandings of how people learn. This provides a common ground for working with educators to determine a child/young persons' individual

strengths, abilities and meanings. This common knowledge base allows the occupational therapist to understand and work within NZ Curriculum Framework including the essential learning areas and essential skills.

- Occupational therapists are adept at intervening in the students' natural contexts. In being able to work in this area the philosophy of inclusion is supported. Occupational therapists are able to identify and therapeutically use the individual students' daily occupations at all stages of formal schooling from preschool through to the transition to work/community/tertiary learning settings at the end of secondary school.
- The philosophy of OT supports the value of "working with" others and the use of narrative and phenomenological perspectives to effect and support change. This is an essential strength when the occupational therapist is working collaboratively with children/young people, their families, the teachers and principals of schools.
- The ability to link with other service providers especially those in the health and disability sector.

Specialist Role

OTNZ-WNA recognises the role of the occupational therapist in educational contexts is considered a specialist role. Occupational therapists working in educational contexts must receive regular, ongoing supervision from experienced occupational therapists with relevant sector knowledge. Access to postgraduate educationally focused courses is paramount to ensure 'best practice'. Novice occupational therapists may work in special education if close, regular supervision by experienced occupational therapists is available. This is essential to ensure the safety of students and new staff.

Research

OTNZ-WNA believes that there is a need for occupational therapists to conduct research into their practice, with a focus on validating the effectiveness of occupational therapy's contribution to the child's ability to access the curriculum. Investigation of influential factors that contribute to the profession's ability to optimise outcomes for the child with special needs is paramount. Research should result in best practice guidelines that can be applied throughout the country.

Protection of Professional Identity

OTNZ-WNA believes that occupational therapists employed in special education should maintain the role title "occupational therapist". This is to clearly identify the profession's emphasis on occupation.

Position statements are statements on political, ethical, social, cultural and practice issues that influence client well-being, the role and practice of

occupational therapy or that affect Occupational Therapy New Zealand Whakaora Nganahau Aotearoa. They are frequently time limited and persons wishing to use them more than two years after publication should confirm their current status with the Executive Director of OTNZ-WNA.

Ratified by OTNZ-WNA Council September 2003.

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OTNZ-WNA Working Party: September