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**TOWARDS FACILITATING CHANGE IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY  
MANAGERS' PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY INTERVENTION SERVICE  
DELIVERY IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

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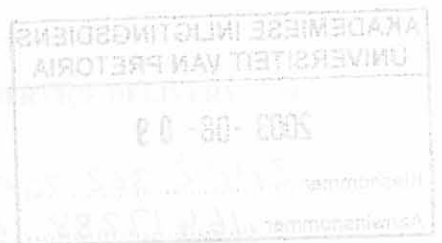
In Partial Fulfilment of a Ph.D. in Augmentative and Alternative Communication

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## ABSTRACT

Occupational therapy service delivery within the field of early intervention in South Australia is going through change and development. Services find themselves within a continually evolving environment that requires flexibility in being able to meet the changing needs of society. International trends in the field of early intervention service delivery are towards the use of early detection and prevention strategies; the involvement of both the client and the family in service delivery; client centeredness and client education, as well as the recognition of the value of direct, client-focused intervention. Team-based approaches are used in order to provide a holistic service, as are working with key people in the child's life, and networking with other organisations. The trend is towards integrating the child and family into the community and recognising contextual factors in child development.

In South Australia, several developments indicate that health care and other government policies support early intervention services, but it seems that problematic factors have impacted on the implementation in occupational therapy. These developments, together with geographically-specific sociological, demographical and professional factors underlie the changes that are currently occurring in services within this field.

The foundation for facilitating change within services is the facilitation of internal processes of change within individuals. It is within this context that this project was implemented to facilitate change in the perceptions of occupational therapy managers regarding service delivery within the field of early intervention. Fourteen occupational therapy managers of early intervention services participated in the study. A multi-phased, naturalistic design with aspects of a participatory action research approach, as well as the structure of a pre-post test design, was utilised. Complementary data derived from the use of a number of research tools was obtained over a period of six months. Online focus groups provided a forum for exposure to a variety of service delivery models by means of a change-orientated program. Pre- and post intervention questionnaires measured the perceptions of

managers both before and after the change-orientated program, and the follow-up interviews provided longer-term indicators of changes in perceptions.

The project provided valuable information on managers' perceptions of the processes of change that are occurring in service delivery. It provided a description of current service delivery models and the difficulties experienced in facilitating change from managers' perspectives. The change-orientated program utilised in this research project proved to be appropriate in facilitating critical reflection on current practice. Results and findings indicate that managers' perceptions regarding changes in practice are generally in line with international trends. Findings suggest that the characteristics of occupational therapy managers and services are such that they are well equipped to facilitate change. Some managerial and organisation-specific characteristics that may inhibit processes of change were identified and have resulted in recommendations being made for early intervention practice. The study provided an early attempt at identifying a framework of standards for practice for the development of new models of service delivery. In addition, the study provided information on the utilisation of online focus groups as a research medium. Overall, this study has contributed to an improved understanding of managers' perceptions of the processes of change that occur in practice, with subsequent recommendations being made for future practice and research.

Keywords: Occupational Therapy, Paediatric Services, Early Intervention, Models of Service Delivery, Change, Questionnaire, Online Focus Groups, Interviews.

## ABSTRAK

Arbeidsterapie dienste in die veld van vroeë intervensie in Suid-Australië is in die proses van verandering and ontwikkeling. Dienste bevind hulself in 'n gedurig veranderende klimaat wat buigbaarheid vereis om aan te pas by die veranderende behoeftes van die samelewing. Internasionale tendense in die veld van vroeë intervensie sluit in strategieë verwant aan vroeë identifisering en voorkoming; die betrokkenheid van die kliënt en familie; kliënt-gesentreerde dienslewering en kliënt-opvoeding, sowel as erkenning vir die waarde van direkte, kliënt-gefokusde intervensie. Span benaderings word gebruik om 'n holistiese diens te lewer, tesame met samewerking met ander sleutelpersone in die kind se lewe asook met ander dienste. Die tendens is om die kind en familie te integreer in die samelewing en erkenning te gee aan die kontekstuele faktore wat 'n rol speel in kinderontwikkeling.

Ontwikkelings in Suid-Australië dui aan dat ofskoon die gesondheidstelsel en die regering se beleid vroeë intervensie ondersteun, dit tog blyk dat problematiese aspekte die implementering daarvan in arbeidsterapie beïnvloed. Hierdie ontwikkelings, tesame met geografies-spesifieke sosiale, demografiese en professionele faktore, onderlê die veranderings wat tans plaasvind in die dienste in hierdie veld.

'n Fondasie vir die fasilitering van verandering in dienste is die fasilitering van interne prosesse van veranderings in individue. Dit is in hierdie konteks dat hierdie projek geïmplementeer is om verandering te fasiliteer in die sienings van arbeidsterapiebestuurders in verband met dienslewering in die veld van vroeë intervensie. Veertien bestuurders van arbeidsterapie dienste in vroeë intervensie het aan die studie deelgeneem. 'n Multi-fase naturalistiese ontwerp is gebruik met aspekte van 'n deelnemende aksie navorsing benadering, sowel as die struktuur van 'n pre-post toets ontwerp. Aanvullende data in verband met die gebruik van 'n aantal navorsingsinstrumente is oor 'n tydperk van 6 maande versamel. Fokusgroepe wat aanlyn aangebied is, het 'n forum gebied vir die blootstelling van

bestuurders aan 'n aantal diensleweringmodelle. 'n Pre-en post intervensie vraelys is gebruik om die sienings van bestuurders te bepaal voor en na interaksie in die fokusgroepe. Die opvolgonderhoude het gefokus op langer termyn veranderings in persepsies.

Die projek het waardevolle inligting gebied rakende bestuurders se persepsies oor die proses van verandering wat in die lewering van dienste plaasvind. Dit bied 'n beskrywing van die diensleweringmodelle wat tans gebruik word en die problematiese aspekte wat ondervind word. Die intervensie program was toepaslik in die fasilitering van kritiese refleksie op bestaande praktyk. Die resultate en bevindings dui daarop dat die persepsies van bestuurders rakende veranderings in praktyk, in die algemeen in lyn is met internasionale tendense. Bevindings dui aan dat bestuurders en dienste se eienskappe sodanig is dat hulle goed toegerus is om veranderings teweeg te bring. Bestuurs- en organisasie-spesifieke eienskappe is geïdentifiseer wat die veranderingsprosesse inhibeer en hierdie bevindings het aanleiding gegee tot aanbevelings vir die praktyk. Die studie het 'n vroeë poging gebied in die identifisering van standarde vir praktyk vir die ontwikkeling van nuwe modelle van dienslewering. Hierdie studie het ook inligting rakende die aanwending van aanlyn fokusgroepe as navorsingsmedium gebied. Hierdie studie het, in opsomming, bygedra tot 'n verbeterde insig in bestuurders se persepsies van die prosesse van verandering wat in die praktyk plaasvind en daarvolgens is aanbevelings vir die praktyk en toekomstige navorsing gemaak.

Sleutelwoorde: Arbeidsterapie, Pediatrie, Vroeë Intervensie, Diensleweringmodelle, Verandering, Vraelys, Aanlyn Fokusgroepe, Onderhoude

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any university; and that to the best of my knowledge, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Kobie Boshoff

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