

TABLE 5-1

POSSIBLE MEANINGS OF PARTICIPATING IN EVERYDAY OCCUPATIONS	
FOR PARTICIPATION TO BE MEANINGFUL, IT NEEDS TO OFFER THE PERSON OPPORTUNITIES	
For becoming better at something and/or accomplishment	
For connection with others and a sense of belonging	
For expressing self, aptitudes, talents, and interests	
For exercising agency and/or authority	
For appreciating beauty and experiencing joy	
For connecting to something larger than oneself	
For rest, reflection, and quietude	
For caring for and being good to oneself	
For caring for/helping others out, and being cared for by others	
For contributing in family, community, and society	
For prospering socially and economically	

experiential dimensions of occupation are in a good position to support people in regaining experiences of meaning, satisfaction, and well-being in daily life within contexts of ill-health, disability, or altered life circumstances.

THEORETICAL ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING MEANING AS IT RELATES TO OCCUPATION

There are a number of key ideas connecting meaning and occupation; these are briefly outlined below.

Occupational engagement is a widely used term in occupational therapy, but it is not often defined. As described in *Enabling Occupation II*, occupational engagement is to “involve oneself or become occupied, to participate” (Polatajko et al., 2007, p. 26) and is considered to encompass qualities such as the nature, intensity, extent of, and degree of establishment of a person’s engagement in an occupation. Thus, the concept of occupational engagement focuses our attention on the experiential and meaning-related dimensions of occupation. In turn, this highlights that occupation cannot be fully understood without reference to the individuals engaged in it. In other words, the insider perspective of engaging in occupations is central to understanding the experience and meaning derived by the individual (Hammell, 2009; Jonsson, 2008).

People actively make meaning of what they do and experience. Indeed, the quest for and creation of meaning is viewed as central to being human, and to understanding the ways in which people think and act (Bruner, 1990;

Frankl, cited in Hasselkus, 2002). Meaning is also a relatively abstract notion, so that meanings are not always explicit. Therefore, the legitimacy and importance of meaning as a significant human phenomenon has been subject to question. Yet meaning is real in the sense that it is experienced and draws on real world knowledge from everyday experiences, even though it may not always be easily communicated (Hasselkus, 2002, p. 2).

Meanings Associated With Engagement in Everyday Occupations

The meanings ascribed to occupations are idiosyncratic and highly individual, but experiences and meanings are also strongly connected to social context and culture. This means we may identify a number of common or shared dimensions of meaning, even though the specific experience of meaning linked to engaging in particular occupations will be individual. For instance, in two qualitative studies exploring what participation means from an insider’s perspective (Borell et al., 2006; Hammell et al., 2008), adults experiencing prolonged health conditions and disability described participation as “active and meaningful engagement,” “taking initiative and making choices,” “being a part of” something whether that be an activity, social scene, or group, and “doing something for others.” They also emphasized experiential qualities of participation (e.g., fun, interacting, enriching, satisfying) and the expression of values related to choice and control, access and opportunity, connection and inclusion, and reciprocity and respect, rather than the specific activities in which they were involved (Hammell et al., 2008). Elaborating on this idea, Table 5-1 briefly lists a number of widely understood