

Review

Attending the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy

— A valuable and effective occupation —

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Abstract

The sixth cohort of students started in September 2004 the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy. Four cohorts graduated since the start of this program in 1999. This masters program fulfils the need for advanced education in Occupational Therapy in Europe. The program attunes to international developments in higher education, being a "joint-degree" carried out in co-operation with four institutions of higher education in four the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and the United Kingdom. A survey among graduates and their employers showed that the graduates as well as their employers judge this Master of Science program as valuable and effective. This article introduces this Occupational Therapy *Euromaster* course to a Japanese audience.

Key words: Master of Science, occupational therapy, Euromasters, Europe, occupational science

Introduction

This article will introduce the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy to a Japanese audience. The results of surveys among graduates and their employers will highlight how they value and judge the effect of this Master of Science program (Andeweg, 2003). This program is also open to non-Europeans (see Table 1) and Japanese occupational therapists may consider enrolling in this course after reading this article.

Short description of the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy

The European Master of Science in Occupa-

tional Therapy (hereafter sometimes called *Euromaster*) started in September 1999 with seventeen students, 16 of them living in one of the European countries, one living in Japan. At the moment of writing (autumn 2004) four cohorts have graduated, in total 48 students. Cohort five is finishing their thesis and cohort 6 started with 17 students September 2004.

The European Master of Science represents a co-operation between four institutes of higher education in Europe:

- Hogeschool van Amsterdam, Occupational Therapy Institute, the Netherlands
- Karolinska Institutet, Medical University, School for Occupational Therapy, Stockholm, Sweden
- University College South, School for

Occupational — and Physiotherapy,
Naestved, Denmark
• University of Brighton, Division Occupa-

tional Therapy, Eastbourne, UK
Together they carry out the program of the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy. The central focus is the scientific underpinning of occupational therapy. The examination comprises of a presentation of the research by the student, followed by a critical inquiry by a fellow student and an examiner. The scientific focus of this Master of Science program is on occupational therapy and 'occupational science'; within the program occupation is seen as an integral and complex part of life and health in which people choose themselves what has meaning for them (Zemke, 1996). In Fig.1 an overview of the program is given.

Table 1 Country of residence of students of the Euromaster 1999–2006 (N=92)

	Frequency	Percent
Netherlands	23	25
Switzerland	13	14,1
Denmark	12	13,0
Germany	10	10,9
Austria	6	6,5
United Kingdom	4	4,3
Norway	3	3,3
Slovenia	3	3,3
Belgium	3	3,3
Malta	2	2,2
Tunisia	1	1,1
Philippines	1	1,1
Italy	1	1,1
Czech Republic	1	1,1
Japan	1	1,1
South Korea	1	1,1
Total	92	100

The program is two years and three months, part-time. The study load is 2550 hours, 90 European Credit points (ECT's) which is equivalent to most European Master of Science programs.

In the first year students follow four modules. Every module consists of three parts:

- 1) A pre-course task, 2) two weeks of full-

Module 1 Sweden	Module 2 Denmark	Module 3 The Netherlands	Module 4 United Kingdom	Module 5 Own Country
Scientific theory and method in occupational therapy	Occupational therapy in the European context	Human occupation and culture in Europe	Evaluating occupational therapy in Europe	Implementing occupational therapy research in Europe
Research methods overview	Literature review	Data collection and analysis	Research proposal	Project implementation
10 ECTS	10 ECTS	10 ECTS	10 ECTS	50 ECTS

Fig. 1 Overview of structure of the Euromaster program

time study in one of the participating institutes, and 3) two assignments. The students carry out the pre-course and the assignments at home, supervised by e-mail (distance learning). The two week courses, given in one of the four participating institutes, consist of lectures, group work, self-study and seminars.

The program starts in September in Stockholm with two weeks full time courses, in November the students go to Denmark, in February to Amsterdam and in May to the UK. Thus, in the first year the students follow 4×2 weeks of courses, the other study hours the students do at home (distance learning). If the four modules of the first year have been passed then a student may start with the second year and does his/her research project. The research project, which results in the graduation-thesis, is carried in the home country of the student, again with supervision by e-mail. The team of supervisors for the thesis consists of teachers in occupational therapy with a PhD of the participating countries. In November of the next year (that is after the second academic year has finished) the students do their examination. The graduation thesis consists of a scientific article ready for publication in a scientific occupational therapy journal with an additional extended introduction and discussion.

The overall design of this course reflects the belief that acquisition of research skills must underpin all aspects of the course. Although the course is modular in structure, research infiltrates every module. Research forms the warp of the course design while concepts of human occupation in Europe form the weft. In other words in every module research methods are the vehicle through which understanding of occupational therapy is deepened. Another aspect of the design is that each module integrates theory, practice, skills and values. In addition several subjects are integrated in the modules, such as occupational therapy theory and models, quality assurance, intercultural aspects, aspects of social legislation and occupational science.

The European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy fits very well with the current developments about harmonizing higher education in Europe. The so-called Bachelor-Master structure is being introduced in the whole of European higher education. As a result European higher education will have more or less the same outcome levels, that is a

bachelor degree and a master degree after which one is qualified to pursue PhD studies.

Until the start of the Euromaster it was possible to obtain a Master of Science degree in occupational therapy in just a few European countries (Sweden, United Kingdom, Finland and Iceland). This European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy offers now all occupational therapists with a bachelor degree the possibility to obtain a master degree.

The whole program is in the English language.

Facts and figures about the European Master of Science in Occupational (Andeweg, 2003)

Students from many countries in Europe and outside of Europe have been admitted to the program. In Table 1 an overview is given of the countries of residence of the students. About 25% of the students come from the Netherlands, followed by Switzerland (14%) and Denmark (13%).

In Fig. 2 an overview of the age of the students is given. The mean age of the students is 37 year. In the last years the mean age has dropped from 41.8 (cohort 2000–2002) to 33.1 (cohort 2004–2006). The number of men was stable over the years. Never more than 20% were male, which means one or two men per cohort.

In Table 2 and 3 overviews of the work setting of the students is given according to

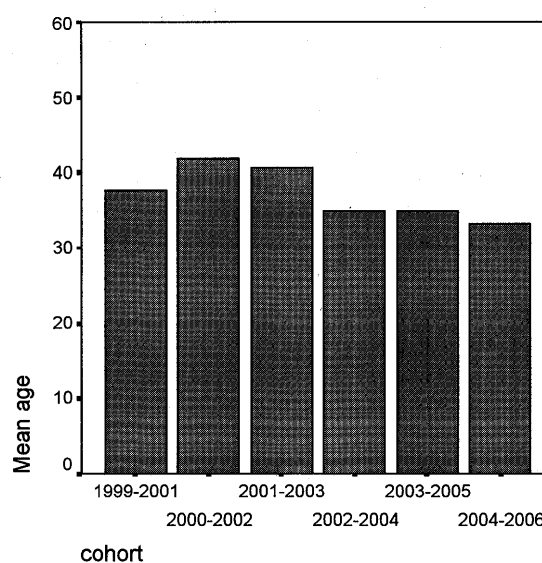


Fig. 2 Mean age of six cohorts of students in the period 1999–2006 (N=92)

Table 2 Work setting of six cohorts of students in the period 1999–2006 split up for region of residence (N=92)

		Region of residence		
		Countries of course organizers	other European countries	non-European countries
		Col%	Col%	Col%
worksetting	clinical setting	54,3%	72,5%	50,0%
	educational setting	45,7%	20,0%	
	combination or other worksetting		7,5%	50,0%

Table 3 Work setting of six cohorts of students in the period 1999–2006 (N=92)

		Cohort					
		1999-2001	2000-2002	2001-2003	2002-2004	2003-2005	2004-2006
worksetting	clinical setting	37,5%	53,3%	61,5%	73,3%	66,7%	80,0%
	educational setting	50,0%	40,0%	38,5%	13,3%	33,3%	20,0%
	combination or other worksetting	12,5%	6,7%		13,3%		

Table 4 Success rate analysis of six cohorts of students in the period 1999–2006 (N=92)

Cohort	Number of students	Dropout	Delayed	Graduates	Success rate ¹
1999-2001	17	2	—	15	88%
2000-2002	15	2	1	12	80%
2001-2003	13	2	1	10	77%
2002-2004	15	—	4	11	73%
2003-2005	15	1	—	—	—
2004-2006	17	—	—	—	—
Total	92	7	6	48	80%

¹ The success rate is the number of students of a cohort who graduate in two years and three month since the start of the Euromasters.

country of residence and cohort respectively. Students who come from the countries that organize the master program have their work setting relatively often in education.

In the last years the ratio of students that work in clinical settings has steadily increased.

In Table 4 the success rate is described. It is difficult to make a statement about the development of the success rate, because of the small numbers. However it can be stated that a success rate of 80% is a good result. This means that 4 out of 5 students manage to graduate in the two years and three month that this master program takes. Over the years the number of drop-outs is stable.

The survey among graduates and their employers

In 2003 a survey was held among graduates and their employers of the first two cohorts.

The aim of the survey was to get an insight

in the expectations and experiences of the graduates and their employers with the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy. In total 27 survey's were send to graduates and 27 to their employers (the whole population) More than 80% (22) returned the survey. Some of the results are discussed here.

The survey among graduates

The graduates were asked about their expectations when they started the European Master of Occupational Therapy.

The most important reason for following this master program is the expectation that one can improve his professional performance (See Table 5). Those who work as teachers at an occupational therapy school expected to better their teaching.

Further questions were asked about their experiences with the master program. See Table 6. All graduates stated that positive changes in their work situation took place after graduation, such as raise in salary, more

Table 5 Graduates' reasons for attending the Euromaster, divided in work setting (N=22)
(1 = not relevant-5 = extremely relevant)

	worksetting		Group Total
	clinical	educational	Mean
	Mean	Mean	
improve professional functioning	(4,8)	(4,5)	(4,7)
better professional	(3,9)	(3,6)	(3,8)
employer stimulated to attend this master	(2,3)	(2,8)	(2,6)
emplyer wanted to improve the quality of the research within the organisation	(2,5)	(2,4)	(2,5)
employer wanted to improve the quality of the teaching/instruction within the organisation	(2,1)	(3,0)	(2,5)
employer wanted to improve the quality of the OT within the organisation	(2,4)	(2,2)	(2,3)

Table 6 Judgment of graduates about realization of aims of the Euromaster, divided in year of graduation (N=22)
(1 = notrealized-5 = completely realized)

	year of graduation		Group Total
	2001	2002	Mean
	Mean	Mean	
Developing professional networks	(3,2)	(4,0)	(3,6)
Maintaining professional networka	(2,9)	(3,8)	(3,4)
Contribution to theory building in OT	(3,5)	(3,9)	(3,7)
Professionalisation of OT in my country	(3,4)	(3,8)	(3,6)

Table 7 Relevance of some skills of graduates of the Euromaster as judged by the graduates (N=22) in descending order
(1 = not relevant-5 = extremely relevant)

	Mean
Reflective skills	(4,4)
Working theory based	(4,4)
Working evidence based	(4,3)
Innovation skills	(4,3)
Finding data by means of computer/internet	(4,2)
Academic writing skills	(4,0)
Presentation (conferences, seminars)	(4,0)
Using information and communication technology	(3,9)
Setting up a research design	(3,9)
Conducting research	(3,8)

responsibility, and rise in work hours or a change in tasks. 90% stated that these changes were directly related to being graduated from the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy.

The graduates were asked about their experiences with the value of the newly acquired scientific skills. All the skills are seen as relevant for their professional work. Reflective skills and working theory based scored highest. In Table 7 the results are shown.

When asked to comment their most outspoken experiences after graduation, the graduates mentioned the following aspects of their functioning :

Scientific view

“Learning to work/think scientifically: use facts; be aware of my perspective, my private opinion, etc.”

“A whole new view (scientific view) was added to my outlook on OT and the wider world.”

“The experience that my knowledge and vision can grow so much [was] beyond my

expectations.”

Research in OT

“Gaining new knowledge about research.”

“It has been very important to get a new perspective on the profession, take a look from different angles.”

“Getting your article published : great.”

Reflection

“To experience to be reflective and critical and evidence based.”

“Being able to reflect on my work better, more critical approach to my work.”

“The pleasure of reading, reflection and writing, to experience the engagement in occupation.”

An important result of the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy is that about 50% of the graduates of the first two cohorts have published about their research in a scientific occupational therapy journal such as the American Journal of Occupational Therapy, The Occupational Therapy Journal of Research or the Scan-

Table 8 Employers judgment of the relevance for their employees to attend the Euromaster divided in work setting (N=14) (1=not relevant-5=extremely relevant)

	worksetting		Group Total
	clinical	educational	Mean
	Mean	Mean	
improve professional functioning	(5,0)	(4,0)	(4,2)
better professional career	(4,5)	(3,9)	(4,0)
emploter stimulated to attend master	(3,5)	(4,4)	(4,2)
employer wanted improvement of the quality of the research within the organisation	(4,0)	(4,1)	(4,1)
employer wanted improvement of the quality of the teaching/instruction within the organisation	(5,0)	(3,6)	(3,9)
employer wanted improvement of the quality of the OT within the organisation	(5,0)	(3,8)	(4,0)

dinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy (see appendix).

The survey among employers

All employers have great expectations of their employees' participation in this Master of Science program. On a few items the employers in clinical work settings unanimously gave the maximum score (5.0). Those working in an educational setting stress their (stimulating) role in the employers' participation. See Table 8.

The judgment of the employers concerning the achievement of this master program's goals is very positive. They consider the aims as grossly reached. Especially the non-Dutch employers have this opinion. Some employers state that they especially value the international networking of their graduated employee.

Also the employers were asked about their 'most outspoken experience' with the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy. In general they valued the new acquired research skills as very relevant for the daily work of their employer.

Some of their statements were:

"The development of my employee is extremely ... much better understanding, more skills in theory and research methods"

"Able to set up a research and raise funds from external parties. Able to look at developments at higher level"

The experience of one graduate (2nd author: Peter Bontje).

There were several reasons for me to apply for this course. First and foremost I wanted to

learn about research, preferably in English. Another consideration was that I wanted it to be an affordable course that I could do while living and working in Japan. Amongst the part-time distance-learning courses the Euromasters was most interesting to me, because it offered both a strong focus on 'occupation' as well as an international perspective. The emphasis was on Europe, of course, but I could also explore issues relevant to my work in Japan. On all accounts I look back at this course very favorable.

- The research component formed the 'red-threat' throughout the course. Each module focused on different aspects of research, such as literature review in module 2 and data-gathering and analysis in module 3 (see Figure 1). However, it did not stop at that. There was a lot of group-work and we were set to work on certain problems. This was very useful, because the process of this problem-based learning process in many respects resembles the research process, that is naming and framing the problem, designing a plan of action (designing a research), executing this plan (collecting and analyzing data), and solving the problem (interpreting the research results). Furthermore, through working in groups of 4 to 6 persons we had the added benefit of learning from each other. I found out that each of us had strengths and weaknesses. We improved our weak points by learning from each other's strengths.
- The international component was another highlight for me. Before coming to Japan I had actually never really given much thought about how occupational therapy and other services for disabled

persons in Scandinavia functioned. In my group of 17 students there were 9 students from Denmark and Sweden. Therefore, in each group there was always one Dane and one Swede : A tremendous opportunity to hear the stories of how it really is. (It is great indeed, but not that much different from the situation in my own country, the Netherlands, so that perhaps explains my limited interest in Scandinavia.)

On the other hand, having lived for eight years now in Japan, I have come to view the European countries as very much the same. Perhaps not as much as how Hokkaido may resemble Okinawa's society, but I was astounded to see how little differences between European countries had such a huge impact. I learned how socio-cultural values (regarding solidarity versus individual responsibility, and taxation) underpinned the fairly comprehensive coverage of the welfare systems in the Netherlands, while the United Kingdom welfare coverage contrasts sharply by providing the minimum (poverty relief). Yet in both countries, comprehensive more or less free health care coverage exists, because both Dutch and British believe that all men are born equal and thus have equal rights to health.

- I liked the content of the course, and the Euromasters distinguish itself from other Master courses that I considered. The Euromasters presumes that students know their area of work, so there are no classes on clinical issues, such as stroke, dementia, schizophrenia, or adaptive equipment. The Euromaster challenged us, students, to think deeper and widen our perspectives to include the influence of social welfare and health care systems and social-cultural values. Interestingly, through the strong focus on occupation and occupational science I became aware the relativity of differences between occupational therapy in different fields. Studying together with students who were experienced in other fields, such as psychiatry or pediatrics. I learned that under the surface of what we actually do in practice we very much reason alike, whether it is about the treatment goals we set or the approaches we select.
- There is a burden, of course. Studying 16 hours was not a problem for me, because

I worked part-time. (Please note that the course now requires up to 25 hours of study per week.) Furthermore, in the first year one is required to travel to one of the four institutes. This was more a bonus than a burden, because I made sure that I always flew via the Netherlands to see family and friends. The costs were not bad. I reckon that had I done a Masters degree in Japan (while living in Takamatsu, Kagawa-ken) I would have spent the same amount in total. Weekly travels within Japan add up too, but airfares to Europe can be as cheap as 90.000 Yen. With fees of Euro 9500, the Euro-masters is not expensive.

- Finally, the theory of 'flow' teaches us that when a person gets absorbed in an occupation he or she forgets time and place, because of the joy of being occupied with that occupation. That is what I experienced with the assignments. For each module we were required to produce 2 papers of 3000 to 4000 words in about two months. Most were based on literature, but for one assignment I did interviews. I can only say that I was having great times whenever I sat down at my desk with computer on and books and journals at hand.

Conclusion

In the four years of its existence, the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy has proven its viability. The outcomes of the survey give strong support for the statement that both the graduates and their employers recognize this Master as a valuable contribution to the professionalisation of Occupational Therapy. Especially, the attention paid to research methods and skills are valued. Moreover, they value the central aims of the program as (mainly) realized :

1. Furthering the study of human occupations within different cultures
2. Bringing unity in practice into Europe
3. Developing evidence-based practice through research
4. Upgrading Occupational Therapy education in Europe

The title of this article suggests a positive result and, indeed, the results give strong indications that graduates and their employ-

ers are very satisfied with this masters' program. The European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy has an effect for the profession as a whole (*valuable*) and it has a direct benefit for the graduates themselves in terms of changes in the work situation and work conditions (*effective*). The two-fold meaning of *occupation* is used to refer to the activity of developing the profession.

The scientific orientation of the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy strengthens the bases of occupational therapy both from a professional as from an educational view. From this perspective the title of this article could well have been: *ATTENDING THE EUROMASTER: A PROFESSIONAL STEP*.

Official information about the European Master of Science in Occupational Therapy can be obtained from Astrid Kinebanian, A. Kinébanian@hva.nl. Information can also be found on www.ergo.hva.nl/masters Informal information can be obtained from Peter Bontje at Aino University, p-bontje@ot-u.aino.ac.jp.

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