Life History of Carol Olson, Ph.D., OTR/L, FAOTA
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Introduction

• This life history is one of 29 life history interviews which are a part of a larger project, Life Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) in North Dakota and Wyoming. The purpose of the project is to gather information about the history and evaluation of occupational therapy (OT) practice in North Dakota and Wyoming through life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing OT in these two states. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information. This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of the history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved from its inception to current practice in North Dakota and Wyoming.

Methodology

• Participants were selected using a purposive sampling method. There were no specific gatekeeper issues identified by course instructors.
• The methods used in this qualitative study consisted of a semi-structured interview that was guided by an interview schedule prepared by course instructors; the questions were designed to be used with all the individuals as part of a larger project. The researchers were allowed to modify or add interview questions as needed for each specific interview.
• The study was guided by the Kawa model, which emphasizes an individual’s life flow within their various contexts.
• Informed consent was obtained.
• The interview was completed in 92 minutes using a video/audio conferencing program provided by the university (Blackboard Collaborate). The interview was held in a quiet study room in the UND School of Medicine and Health Sciences.
• Data was downloaded in the form of a MP3 file to be transcribed for further data analysis.

Dr. Carol Olson

• Dr. Carol Olson, a UND graduate, has been a practicing OT for the past 37 years.
• For the past 20 years, she has been a professor at the University of Mary in Bismarck, North Dakota.
• Prior to teaching, she worked in mental health before specializing in pediatrics.
• She was formerly the VP of Legislation/Practice and President of North Dakota Occupational Therapy Association, as well as a registered lobbyist for state legislative session.
• Throughout her career, Dr. Olson has accumulated a great number of rich experiences both in her professional work and altruistic work abroad.

Data Analysis

• The interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim by the interviewers and initial thoughts and feelings were recorded. The interviewers then analyzed the transcription to find patterns of meaning in the participant’s responses. The interviewers developed codes based off of the participant’s responses and sorted those codes into categories. These categories were given thematic statements to summarize the information. The thematic statements were then combined and summarized to make an assertion that would encompass all the meaningful information covered in the interview.

Findings

• Dr. Olson has seen many changes, both positive and negative, in the OT profession throughout her career.
• She has seen interventions shift from arts and crafts to more occupation-based approaches. She described the change in the role of COTAs throughout the years. She emphasized research in OT and the demand for evidence-based practice.
• She identified aspects of practice she felt were crucial to the OT profession.
• Dr. Olson stressed the importance of client-centered practice, understanding the client, and flexibility to meet client needs.
• Dr. Olson has been influenced by values present in her practice setting, personal life, and geographic location.
• She has worked in different regions including rural, international, and urban, and has been influenced by these regions. Her experience in working in pediatrics and mental health have influenced her values as well.
• These influences have guided her practice throughout her career in OT.
• Benedictine values have been a source of influence and moral guidance through her career helping her stay true to her beliefs while providing the best service possible.
• As an OT practitioner, Dr. Olson reflected on past and current experiences that have been meaningful to her.
• She is proud of her international service, her work and accomplishments in mental health, pediatrics, and higher education, pride and accomplishment within her career.

Discussion/Conclusion

• Assertion: In the course of one’s occupational therapy career, one can expect to see many changes in the profession. One will likely be influenced by a number of factors and will accumulate meaningful experiences throughout their time in the profession of occupational therapy.
• Throughout the course of her career, Dr. Carol Olson has accomplished a great deal within the mental health and pediatric settings.
• Dr. Olson has greatly contributed to the development of the occupational therapy program at the University of Mary.
• Dr. Olson entered the field during a time of shift within occupational therapy’s identity. This shift is reflected in her recollection of her early practice experiences.
• Dr. Olson’s involvement in NDOTA and AOTA has made an impact on the profession as a whole through her work in legislation and advocacy.

References