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Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Charlie Baumer, COTA

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Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Charlie Baumer, COTA

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Abstract

Charlie Baumer is a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) who was interviewed by two year II occupational therapy students at the University of North Dakota at Casper College as part of a life history qualitative study. The interview was a semi-structured interview that lasted two hours with questions that were geared toward the history and evolution of occupational therapy in Wyoming. This single interview is a part of a larger life history qualitative study to gather information in regards to the history and evolution of occupational therapy practice in North Dakota and Wyoming through the life histories of occupational therapy practitioners who have been influential in developing occupational therapy in both states. The students designed a series of questions regarding Charlie's perspective on the profession, his experiences, and how the profession has changed in Wyoming overtime. This study is intended to contribute to current and future generations of occupational therapists in a way that highlights the history of how occupational therapy practice has evolved over time in North Dakota and Wyoming. Upon data analysis, the students identified three categories, Legality, OT Practice, and Characteristics. Charlie demonstrated his passion for occupational therapy by sharing his experiences within the profession. His contribution to the profession indicated how occupational therapy has evolved in the state of Wyoming and how it will continue to evolve.

Introduction

Occupational therapy has been a growing practice in the rural state of Wyoming. Charlie Baumer is a clinician who has been practicing in the rural cowboy state for 38 years. In order to determine how occupational therapy has changed in Wyoming, two second year students from the University of North Dakota's occupational therapy program collected information from the time Charlie began practice, to how he sees the profession today, through a life history

qualitative study approach. The purpose of this life history qualitative study was to gather information about the history and evolution of occupational therapy in Wyoming from Charlie's point of view. Charlie was one of 29 individuals interviewed for the life history study, which is part of a larger life history project entitled *Life Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) in North Dakota and Wyoming*. This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists with a view of how occupational therapy has evolved in the state of Wyoming and North Dakota. The interview took place via video conference between the students in Casper, WY and the interviewee in Greybull, WY in early October of 2017. The students used a small conference room, with the door shut, away from noise, distractions, and other students on campus during the interview.

Literature Review

A life history is an approach that can help occupational therapists to better understand the experiences of an individual. This approach provided the student researchers with a humanistic approach to building a relationship with Charlie in order to deliver and explain his story and perspective as accurately as possible (Larson & Fanchiang, 1996). It is also important for the students to utilize their listening skills when interviewing participants in order to better understand their perspective and interpretation of practice (Frank, 1996). To fully understand Charlie's perspective and interpretation it was important for the students to not only listen to Charlie, but to understand his words as well. Due to the significant passion he had, it is important to display the tone of his passion throughout. Using a life history research approach assists the therapist with information regarding, "daily occupations, routines, family member relationships, sociocultural influences" from a client's perspective (Larson & Fanchiang, 1996. para. 2). In

clinical practice, life history includes constructing and interpreting an individual's important life events (Frank, 1996).

In the middle of the 20th century, occupational therapy continued to grow especially in the psychiatric settings, and occupational therapy assistants began to develop in healthcare settings. In the 1970s, AOTA proposed that occupational therapy assistants take a certification exam as a part of advancing educational standards (Salvatori, 2001). AOTA enacted a career mobility plan for occupational therapy assistants in the 1970s. The mobility plan allows OTAs, with four years of practice experience to become a therapist upon completion of a self-study plan, six months of fieldwork experience, and by passing the certification exam. By the mid-1970s, completing the credentials included state licensure, statutory certification, registration, or trademark laws. However, in 1951 state licensure was perceived as an unnecessary component to the profession, but that perception soon changed due to the lack of protection the practitioners had when working with consumers (Reed & Peters, 2007). In 1957 the AOTA Board of Management voted to have a standard training program for OTAs and adopted the COTA title (Reed & Peters, 2007). At the end of the 1970s, OTAs were advanced to COTAs through full AOTA membership rights (Salvatori, 2001). In the 1980s, it was suggested that COTAs needed to advocate for their role to become more involved in the profession. At the end of the 1980s, there were 66 occupational therapy assistant associate programs and 5 certificate programs (Salvatori, 2001). Using a life history approach provides the researchers with experience using person-centered language to enhance future practice (Burke & Kern, 1996).

Theory

The KAWA model guided the interview for the research through the development of questions in order to provide a natural flow of conversation. Additionally, it guided the life flow

of Charlie's life and how becoming an occupational therapist has provided various implications both positive and negative. Understanding the contributions and drawbacks of his experience was how the KAWA model guided the research and interview for this qualitative study (Iwama, Thomson, & MacDonald, 2009).

Description of Participant

Charlie grew up wanting to be a locomotive engineer and started down that path at the age of 18 but was laid off two years later. He was first introduced to occupational therapy when he became a paraplegic from a toboggan accident in 1975. Through the hospitalization and rehabilitation, Charlie was treated by OT's and COTA's. Through that experience, he gained an appreciation for the profession of occupational therapy in addition to the therapists who helped him. Charlie attended COTA School in Duluth, MN. Charlie is a member of the Wyoming Occupational Therapy Association (WYOTA), and has served as the Vice President for WYOTA more than once. Charlie served on the conference committee for the state wide occupational therapy conference. Charlie is 62 years old and has been a practicing COTA for 38 years. Charlie is currently practicing as a COTA in Greybull, WY. His work settings include a hospital with a nursing home, an assisted living facility, and he is contracted into the school system. All data regarding the description of Charlie was gathered through the interview process. He did not provide a résumé, as he did not have a current one available.

Methodology

This study used a qualitative life history approach which allowed the focus to be on the participant's involvement in the evolution of occupational therapy practice. This approach allowed the focus to be on Charlie Baumer's professional work as a COTA. Even the lives of ordinary people are worth writing about, as long as they are written truthfully and impartially

(Dillon, 2001). This included information pertaining to his professional life for the past 38 years. There is significant evidence supporting the importance of narrative stories; they seem to be less forgotten and more genuine because it is coming straight from the specific person. However, when writing a more narrative piece of work, it is important to only report the subject's accomplishments as they were. Therefore, the reader is able to identify the subject as either a hero or a villain within their life (Dillon, 2001).

Interviews were conducted with occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants who have been influential in the states of North Dakota and Wyoming. Participants for this study were selected through purposive sampling by the project directors. Charlie Baumer was on the list as one of the COTA who has been practicing in Wyoming for a long time. Participants were paired with the second year occupational therapy students through random assignment from the course instructors.

Data was collected through a semi-structured interview process. The interview took place via video conference between the students in Casper, WY and the interviewee in Greybull, WY in early October of 2017. The students used a small conference room, with the door shut, away from noise, distractions, and other students on campus during the interview. The participant and researchers conferenced via blackboard collaborate. No video was available, and therefore only audio conferencing was completed. The interview was also recorded on both student's iPads to ensure that recordings would not get lost. The interview lasted two hours and seven minutes. The semi-structured interview was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the course instructors; the questions on the interview schedule were designed to be used with all the individuals interviewed as part of the larger project. The students were allowed to modify or add interview questions as needed for each specific interview. Prior to the interview the students

were in contact with the participant. They inquired about any kind of artifacts which Charlie would want to provide, including resumes, photographs, or a curriculum vitae (CV). The participant did not provide any artifacts prior to, during, or after the interview process. However, after the interview, a google search was conducted in order to obtain an image of Charlie Baumer for the poster presentation. Consent was given and the picture became available for use.

Trustworthiness

Throughout the process of this life history there were many attempts to establish trustworthiness within the study. The course instructors assigned two students to each participant. Because the students are novice researchers, being in a pair allowed them to reflect on the life history process with each other. This was to ensure that if one student were to misinterpret something Charlie said, the other could better explain. To avoid bias, both students used reflective journals throughout the course of the study. Here they were able to make notes of their personal thoughts or beliefs on topics that came up during the study. The two students also made jotted notes during the interview to ensure that the main points expressed by the participant during the interview were not lost during translation. Over the course of the project, the two students debriefed on topics to ensure that they both had the same understanding of the interview and the study process. Project directors were also utilized during the process of compiling the study in order to ensure that the students were accurately depicting the life history process.

Data Analysis

The interview was audiotaped, transcribed, and initially coded into 20 unique codes that reflected potential themes to discover in one or more of the answers to the questions asked. Initial analysis of the interview generated reflective notes that allowed the students to develop codes to characterize Charlie's thoughtful answers. The codes were then classified as part of a

larger whole, and were placed into one of three categories. From the categories, the students were able to identify specific themes, which elaborated on the codes chosen for each category. When coding, the students did not use inclusion or exclusion criteria, but rather, coded what the main point of Charlie's responses were. See Appendix A for a complete outline of the codes, categories, themes, and final assertion. Triangulation was used during the study, involving the use of two students sitting in on the interview. Students were able to clarify and confirm initial understandings of the information with each other after the interview took place.

The Kawa model influenced the coding system. The students wanted to incorporate Charlie's entire life history. Therefore, as not to denote any specific event during his career, the students coded each answer Charlie provided. The interview schedule was set up in accordance with the Kawa model. The questions were scheduled in an order that flowed naturally. This made the interview flow as if he were telling the students his entire professional life story, with few prompts or questions (Iwama, Thomson, & MacDonald, 2009).

Results/Findings

The Kawa model and the interview schedule was used collectively to guide the data analysis in order to produce solid findings. The interview schedule was set up in an order which flowed most parallel to events within Charlie's professional life. This guided the interview by allowing Charlie to discuss the topics in order, creating a natural flow and allowing him to recall periods of his life based on what events were happening in the world around him. The students were able to identify events happening within the OT world and were able to help Charlie identify personally meaningful events that were occurring within his personal life, in order to help him recall what he was feeling, thinking, and doing throughout his career as a COTA.

The interview was focused on understanding where Charlie came from, where he is now, and where he is going in relation to occupational therapy. The 20 main codes from the interview were placed into three categories, Legalities, OT Practice, and Characteristics. The following categories outlined an abbreviated glimpse of the 3 major categories and the 20 codes identified in the complete data analysis.

Category One: Legalities

From Charlie's perspective, there were many legal aspects to occupational therapy practice. Charlie discussed the importance of his education, licensure continuing education, and specialty certifications throughout the course of the interview. His educational experience was tailored specifically to him. Charlie went through an open ended COTA program. This meant that he could enter at any time and progressed through it at his own pace. He enjoyed his educational experience, however, does not think that a person could get all of the knowledge needed for practice, within two or three years. Charlie has a sincere gratitude for continuing education courses. He attributes much of his current OT knowledge to continuing education courses which were taught on subjects that were not taught in his formal education classes.

“When you graduate you think, ‘Hey, I can make a difference, I am going to go out and do this. I am going to set the world on fire.’ Then, you get out into practice and you find out that you don’t know too much. The last continuing education course I went to, I left feeling amazed. I thought, ‘Why didn’t they teach me this stuff when I was in school?’ I’ve come away from many courses feeling that way. I think that is why the profession is moving towards a doctorates degree because there is just so much to know and so much to offer within the profession. There is more information than you can ever cover and you wonder why there’s limits.”

Charlie also discussed the importance of legislation and protocols within the work place. He admitted to not being a political person and sometimes wished that politics did not have a place within occupational therapy. However, agreed that some politics were needed to keep reimbursement in check.

“I ranked number seven of the card sort question as legislation. Now, that gets political and I am not a political person, nor do I have an interest in being a highly politicized person, but it is important. We discussed reimbursement a little earlier [in the interview] or lack thereof, both ways affects our practice.”

Charlie discussed the difficulties of reimbursement and how politics plays a large role in what is reimbursable and what is not.

Category Two: OT Practice

During the interview, there was a lot of discussion related to the different aspects of occupational therapy practice. Many times, dynamics, past/present context of practice, and the male perspective came up. Charlie claimed that the field of OT was dynamic, in that it is changing just like the rest of the world. He believes that the profession will continue to learn and grow in order to be more client-centered and evidence-based. Charlie fears, however, that the profession is losing sight of its roots. He believes that the profession as a whole, is chasing a new direction which may or may not have good value for the profession. He feels as though occupational therapists in general, are losing sight of the foundation of OT. When he began as a COTA, occupational therapists and their assistants were mainly practicing in nursing homes or long term care facilities. At that point, they were using crafts and different occupations to provide a new meaning for the residents. While the profession is still small, and the main purpose is to use therapeutic occupations, it is becoming more evidence-based and research-

driven than occupation-based. When discussing the male perspective, Charlie found that it benefits the entire setting, if there are both male and female therapists.

“Sometimes there are clients who come in and need to work on lower extremity dressing. If that client is a male, and they would rather not work on that specific task with a female therapist, we can trade clients for that hour. Or if I have a female client and she would be more comfortable working with a female OT, we just trade off. There are many times that a new therapist will see something differently as well. That doesn’t mean that the other one missed it, but different people put different emphasis on things.”

Charlie also found that working in a rural setting as part of the healthcare team was a very rewarding environment to work in. He would rather be in a town with a small population than in a bigger city where you are “another brick in the wall.” During the infancy of Charlie’s education and OT practice, he learned that being able to work in a team was a very valuable asset.

“I have always been encouraged to and trained to work as a team. It was always taught to me that I have to get my skills in order before I was ever any value to a team because if your skills are in order you can offer a lot. A team does have a lot of value. When they get behind you and you get the entire team pushing for one of your goals, that’s a good feeling.”

Category Three: Characteristics

During the interview with Charlie, he identified many different characteristics of occupational therapy, both positive and negative. Specifically, he identified personality traits, role models, and advice for future occupational therapists as positive characteristics. He found that communication and the therapeutic use of self was the most important when it came to personal traits. He felt that these were the best traits an OT could have because, as a patient, the

OT who was helping him recover from an injury carried these traits, and made therapy worthwhile. His advice for future occupational therapist was to receive nothing less than a doctorates degree.

“Nothing less than an OTR, specifically a doctorate. Now for the why, as a COTA, I need an OTR to supervise me, do evaluations for me, and follow the guidelines to tell me what I can and cannot do. I work under you.”

Charlie also brought up the challenges, balancing personal and professional life, and the impacts OT has had on his life. He found that the biggest challenge in OT was the lack of reimbursement. It was hard for him to see a client who needed a piece of equipment get declined the equipment because of the insurance provider. He found that the balance between work and home life was not difficult due to his love for the profession. He genuinely wants to give back to the profession what it gave him in his time of need. Charlie did mention, however, that on the occasion that he wants to go out for a long weekend, he has to give a little more during the work week. “It is all about sacrifices,” in the words of Charlie Baumer. OT has treated Charlie very well, and he only hopes that his therapeutic use of self will inspire someone else to develop a passion for OT.

Charlie is passionate about occupational therapy; he was instrumental in establishing practice in rural settings, bringing his personal experiences with therapy, and his focus on client-centered care. He values the collaboration he has had in inter- and intra-professional team work in order to give back to the profession, as evidenced by his dedication to continuing education.

Discussion/Conclusion

Life history and narrative approaches have emerged as important research areas over the past decade. Life histories and narratives offer exciting alternatives for connecting the lives and

stories of individuals to the understanding of larger human and social phenomenon (Hatch & Wisniewski, 2002). Specifically, this life history allowed the students to build a relationship with Charlie in order to convey and describe his story and perspective on occupational therapy as accurately as possible. During life history research, it is highly important for the researcher to utilize their listening ability in order to fully grasp every detail of a person's story (Frank, 1996). Charlie expressed thoughtful and genuine answers to all interview questions that were asked. It was obvious that he was very passionate about his work and helping others who needed it most. Charlie described his passion for occupational therapy as a result of the care he received during his toboggan accident in his early 20's. Without, the occupational therapists and assistants who aided in his recovery process he never would have found this profession. Charlie took a lot away from his accident, which has benefitted his work in the field for the last 38 years. Throughout the interview, Charlie continued to identify the importance of specific characteristics which therapists and assistants should obtain in order to be most beneficial for their clients. Those traits were ones which he found in the team who treated him. He felt it was important to mimic those traits in both his professional and personal lives.

In mid-20th century, occupational therapy was mainly in the psychiatric settings and within the geriatric population. Charlie began his career in a nursing home and found that since his first position as a COTA, the field as evolved and grown. He believes that the field will continue to grow and evolve as time continues on. However, Charlie worries that the field is losing sight of its foundation. He is concerned with the direction that occupational therapy is going. As he sees it, the field is veering away from its background in occupation. Moreover, no matter the changes to come, Charlie knows that the most important aspect of an occupational therapist is his license, education, and continuing education. In the 1970's, occupational therapy

assistants had to take a certification exam prior to practicing (Salvatori, 2001). This is one of the most important pieces to the occupational therapy puzzle, through Charlie's eyes. It is important to maintain a level of professionalism and knowledge within the profession and Charlie feels that occupational therapy requirements are exceeding health care expectations in that realm.

Throughout the entire life history of Charlie, the students learned one thing. Charlie is passionate about occupational therapy; he was instrumental in establishing practice in rural settings, bring his personal experiences with therapy, and his focus on client-centered care. He values the collaboration he has had in inter- and intra-professional team work in order to give back to the profession, as evidence by his dedication to continuing education. Charlie Baumer has been an asset to the field of occupational therapy and has made countless contributions to the positive identity of the profession.

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Appendix A

<p align="center">The Life History of Charlie Baumer, COTA Hannah Williams, OTS & Bailey Fruit, OTS</p>			
<p>Codes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialty Certifications • Licensure • Continuing Education • Protocol • Education • Legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OT Dynamics • Male Perspective • Present Practice • Past Context of Practice • Healthcare Team • OT/COTA Dynamic • Rural Practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality Traits/ Growth • Challenges • Role Models • Transition/Balance • Impacts • Participants Roles • Advice for Future OTs
<p>Categories</p>	<p align="center">Legality</p>	<p align="center">OT Practice</p>	<p align="center">Characteristics</p>
<p>Themes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charlie questions the necessity of specialty certifications; in rural practice it is necessary to be able to meet multiple needs of clients. The in your paper you can use a quote that discusses. • Legislation is an important aspect of practice; it influences reimbursement and helps establish treatment protocol. • Charlie values continuing education; it is key to continuing competency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charlie views OT as a growing profession with a need for more practitioners in rural settings. • Charlie is able to provide client centered care and able to connect readily with male clients. • OT is a dynamic profession that has evolved across time, he values advanced training and team work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charlie has the perspective of being both a patient and a practitioner, he recognized that his OT demonstrated communication and therapeutic use of self, influencing his perspective in practice. • Charlie believes the lack of reimbursement/funding and limitation of his scope of practice as an OTA, is challenging in meeting client needs. • Working in a setting where Charlie felt he was part of a family, positively impacted his ability to balance his personal and professional roles.
<p>Assertions</p>	<p>1. Charlie is passionate about occupational therapy; he was instrumental in establishing practice in rural settings, bringing his personal experiences with therapy, and his focus on client-centered care.</p>		