Life History of Dr. Charles Christiansen EdD, OTR/(C), FAOTA  
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Introduction

- The life history of Dr. Charles Christiansen is one of 29 life history interviews, which are 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 evolution 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.

- This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists with a view of the history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved from its inception to current practice from the views of influential graduates from the University of North Dakota in both the Grand Forks, ND and Casper, WY locations. It is anticipated that the information and the process of gathering this information of this project will be powerful to past and present students, faculty, and practitioners in the field of occupational therapy and other professionals.

- For the particular life history of Dr. Christiansen, a semi-structured phone interview was conducted between the student researchers and Dr. Christiansen. It was audio recorded, transcribed, and coded. In addition to the phone interview, a curriculum vitae as well as a Biore sketch was obtained from Dr. Christiansen to appropriately depict the professional life and contributions Dr. Christiansen has made to the field of occupational therapy.

Literature Review

- When Charles Christiansen began his schooling at UND, AOTA went under reorganization and expansion and placed emphasis on scientific research in OT (Christiansen & Haefet, 2014). Because of this, the American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF) was established to advance science in the field to improve recognition of the profession.

- The influence of WWII led to the mechanistic paradigm in OT. During this time, practice shifted from a holistic-mind-body-occu pation-based philosophies to bottom-up approaches which focused on underlying dysfunction.

- During this time period, laws governing health care, such as Medicare, Medicaid, and educational services increased public access to OT services which allowed for an expansion of practice areas throughout the profession.

- Following WWII, many psychiatrists entered into private practice, which caused occupational therapy to take a primary role in hospital treatment of psychiatric patients. Deinstitutionalization revealed the critical importance of coping mechanisms and performance skills of discharged patients. This change emphasized the need for conjoint efforts between psychiatry and occupational therapy.

Description of Participant

- Dr. Charles Christiansen began his career in Occupational therapy after graduation from the University of North Dakota in 1970 with a special interest in the mental health practice of OT. He then went on to earn his master’s degree in Counseling Psychology form Ball State University and a doctorate degree in Educational Administration from the University of Houston. In addition, he has completed a post doctoral residency with Baylor College of Medicine.

- He is currently the Principal of a consulting group called StoryCrafting, Inc., which specializes in individual and organization transitioning.

- Dr. Christiansen is past CEO of the American Occupational Therapy Foundation (2008-2015).

- He currently serves on the board of directors for Tasks Unlimited Inc., a supported employment program for persons with mental illness and disability as well as the National Advisory Committee for long-term services and supports for Anthem, Inc., one of America’s largest health care insurers.

- He was designated as one of the 100 most influential persons in the history of the occupational therapy profession, was the Founding Editor of the scientific journal *OTJR*, senior editor and contributor of 12 academic books, and has published over 100 articles and chapters, which have been cited in publications over 2,000 times.

- He resides with his wife, Beth, in rural Rochester, MN where they are partners operating a boarding facility for high performance horses.

Methodology

- A qualitative research study using a life history approach was used to allow the focus to be on Dr. Christiansen’s involvement in the evolution of occupational therapy practice.

- This participant was assigned from a larger list developed by the course instructors through purposive sampling.

- Initial contact with Dr. Christiansen was made from the course instructors of OT 458, and then a follow-up email was constructed from the student researchers introducing themselves and further describing the study.

- IRB approval was obtained from the University of North Dakota and informed consent was obtained.

- A semi-structured interview was conducted lasting 1 hour and 36 minutes and was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the course instructors.

- The Kawa theoretical model was used to guide the research process. This model uses the metaphor of a river and its elements to describe one’s life journey.

Discussion / Conclusion

- By researching the contributions Dr. Charles Christiansen has made to the field of occupational therapy via direct interview and information provided through his curriculum vitae and Bio sketch, the student researchers have formulated the following assertion: Dr. Christiansen’s passion and influence in occupational therapy flow out of a lifetime of being shaped through experiences and interests in the field.

Data Analysis / Findings

- After the student researchers transcribed the data verbatim from the interview; they immersed themselves into their findings to create codes, categories, themes, and an assertion statement based on the life history of Charles Christiansen. Through the analysis of the interview transcription, the three categories that emerged were lifelong development, following interests, and his perspectives and values.

- Lifelong Development
  - Personal and professional experiences allowed Dr. Christiansen to continually develop and grow throughout his career.

- Following Interests
  - Taking calculated risks has allowed Dr. Christiansen to advance his career.

- Perspectives and Values
  - Occupational therapy as a lifelong endeavor provides the professional development of Dr. Christiansen.

- Understanding occupational therapy as a lifelong endeavor provides the professional development of Dr. Christiansen.

- Occupational therapy has provided Dr. Christiansen with opportunities to follow his interests.

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- Occupational therapy is a professional setting where therapists experience life and meaning.

Reference