Life History of Stuart Kuchel M.S., OTR/L
Michael Black, MOTS; Ariel Campbell, MOTS

Introduction

- **Purpose:** This ethnographic life history was completed as part of a larger sample of 29 participants aimed to gather information about the history and evolution of occupational therapy practice in North Dakota and Wyoming through life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing occupational therapy in these two states and/or at the national level.
- **Theory:** The Kawa Model was used to tailor the semi-structured interview questions in order to better understand the interviewee’s life flow, contexts and life circumstances in which impact his performance as an occupational therapy practitioner.

Description of Stuart

- Stuart graduated from the University of Wyoming in 1993 with a Bachelor’s of Science in Anthropology.
- He later obtained a Master’s of Science in Occupational Therapy from Colorado State University in 1996.
- Stuart’s thesis consisted of a qualitative ethnography study, in which he was embedded in education research in Loveland, CO.
- The purpose of his thesis was to expand on the use of collaborative models, to more effectively serve students of a special education team within middle schools.
- Stuart has been in private practice for 15 years working with the pediatric population and has been certified in sensory integration since 2000.
- He has only practiced in the Big Horn Basin in Wyoming.

Literature Review

Stuart holds the title of OTR/L and has been licensed in the state of Wyoming since 1996. He has spent the last 15 years in private practice addressing the pediatric population. In this manner, his practice is unique. In 2015, a survey conducted by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) identified that 19.9% of occupational therapists practiced within schools, 4.6% in early intervention, and 2% within the community (AOTA, 2015). Practicing in rural Wyoming addressing the pediatric population, Stuart incorporates aspects of these identified practice areas, but does so in a manner that is unique to the geographic and population requirements of the area. Stuart identifies himself as an anthropologist first and an occupational therapist second. The American Anthropology Association (AAA) defines anthropology as the study of humans both past and present utilizing social, biological and physical sciences as well as humanities to understand the complexity of cultures across history. A central concern of anthropologists is the application of this knowledge find solutions to human problems (AAA, 2016).

Methodology

- **Research Design:** Qualitative research using a life history approach which allowed the focus to be on the participant’s involvement in the evolution of occupational therapy practice.
- **Participant:** Stuart was assigned from a list developed by the course instructors through purposed sampling. There were no gatekeeper issues because initial contact was made by the course professors.
- **Data Collection:** The interview was conducted via phone, recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim. The semi-structured, open-ended interview schedule was developed by the course instructor. The interview was one hour and thirty minutes long, and time spend setting up the interview was about five minutes long.
- **Data Analysis:** Data was analyzed and coded which was then collapsed into categories, themes and an assertion.

Findings

**Category I: Roles**

- Stuart’s roles within his family influenced the manner in which he gained an education, and the manner in which he now practices.
- In his thesis and in practice, Stuart has emphasized the importance team membership can have in effective treatment outcomes.

**Category II: Education**

- Education has been a critical aspect of Stuart’s life both preceding and following his occupational therapy education.
- Stuart’s feels that increased academic rigger results in a profession that is more valuable in the healthcare marketplace.

**Category III: Personal and Professional Development**

- Service to others and collaboration have been the guiding elements in Stuart’s development.
- Stuart’s involvement in an evolving multi-disciplinary team and participation in the state residential assembly exposed him to leadership position and resulted in personal and professional growth.

**Category IV: Defining Occupational Therapy**

- The broad, loosely defined theory base of occupational therapy has allowed Stuart to incorporate his understanding of social dynamics into his approach to practice.
- In his private practice, Stu relies on his ability to embed himself within the social dynamics of families utilizing his background in anthropology to provide individualized care to his clients and their families.

Conclusions

**Assertion:** Stuart’s roles within his family, penchant for public service and collaboration, and his interest and prior education in anthropology have allowed him to develop a personal approach to occupational therapy practice.

- During the interview, Stuart frequently mentioned the dynamic social aspect of occupational therapy practice stating, "For me, OT is not this thing that’s done in a room down the hall between a therapist and a patient; it’s something that’s imbedded in the social environment. That social environment is mom and dad and brothers and sisters, or the classroom and the teachers.” This quote illustrates the impact that context has on an individual, and how a passion for anthropology allows Stuart to emphasize these contexts.
- Education has been an important aspect in Stuart’s life and he feels that a renewed emphasis on education within occupational therapy, specifically the transition to the doctoral standard, will positively impact the service delivery provided by practitioners.

Key References