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Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Elizabeth Crepeau, PhD, OTR/L,

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study is 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 through the life history stories of occupational therapists who have held leadership roles at the national level and beyond. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information. The life history is part of a larger study consisting of 30 occupational therapists. The larger study is *Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) at the National Level and Beyond*. Purposive sampling was utilized to select the participant from the list by project directors. The methodology included a semi-structured interview that guided an interview schedule prepared by the project directors. The authors created a final assertion summarizing the findings: Dr. Crepeau made significant contributions to the field of occupational therapy through her involvement in the state and national levels and her unique ways of teaching. Dr. Crepeau emphasized the importance of finding occupations that advocate and provide an opportunity for individuals to increase meaningful engagement in occupations that lead to the desired quality of life.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study is 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 through the life history stories of occupational therapists who have held leadership roles at the national level and beyond. Researchers chose participants for a larger study consisting of 30 occupational therapists. Researchers used a qualitative research design using a life history approach. The participant was interviewed over FaceTime while she was at her apartment in New Hampshire and the researchers were at their house in Wyoming.

The participant chosen for this study is Dr. Crepeau, a retired occupational therapist graduating from the University of New Hampshire in 1966. Dr. Crepeau is a mother of two and a wife to an Airforce Veteran. Throughout her career, she practiced in many settings but spent most of her career as a professor in the occupational therapy department at the University of New Hampshire. Beyond occupational therapy practice, Dr. Crepeau was involved at both the state and national levels.

### **Timeline Literature Review**

In the early 1900s, the concept of *flow* was created to describe people's intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Csikszentmihalyi (2008), explained that the concept of flow tends to occur when a person faces a clear set of goals that require appropriate responses. Flow for a person also happens when the person's skills are fully involved in overcoming a challenge that seems to be just not manageable. Flow is then implemented to learn new skills to make these challenges more manageable (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Flow is a source of mental energy that focuses on attention and motivates a person to act for constructive or destructive

purposes (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Dr. Crepeau emphasizes engaging in meaningful occupations to achieve an outcome of *flow* throughout her personal and professional life. The concept of moral treatment in occupational therapy was developed before the 20th century. It is based on the value of human individuality and the fundamental perception of the clients needs to engage in creative activities (Ernest, 1972). This concept is seen throughout Dr. Crepeau's professional career because she had an emphasis on using crafts to promote meaningful occupations.

Another concept that Dr. Crepeau emphasis is the utilization of evidence-based practice. This concept originated in 1980 for a way of describing the problem-based learning approach and providing efficacy treatment (Bennett, S. & Bennett, J., 2000). Dr. Crepeau expressed how much she values using evidenced-based to increase clinical reasoning and providing the best treatment possible for her clients. Looking into 1998, Wilcock reflects on the concept of balancing *doing, being and becoming* to promote a person's well-being and quality of life (Wilcock, 1998). Dr. Crepeau used Wilcock's concepts through advocacy to provide opportunities that enhance an individual's sense of *doing, being, and belonging* throughout the community.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To guide this study, the researchers chose the Kawa Model (Iwama, 2009). The model focuses on the use of the metaphor of a river with different contextual elements to represent human life (Iwama, 2009). The key concepts of the Kawa model include water, sidewalls, river, rocks, driftwood, and the space between obstructions (Iwama, 2009). The model derives from the Eastern Culture where the person is interrelated with the whole system rather than an independent self (Iwama, 2009). The Kawa model emphasizes the harmony between the environment and the person, and how that harmony will enhance well-being (Iwama, 2009).

In relation to occupational therapists, the Kawa model can be used to understand the contexts of the client and help them prioritize the problems in relation to the development of interventions (Iwama, 2009). The information will help therapists incorporate appropriate and individualized interventions that increase their client's life flow without completely removing the elements of the river (Iwama, 2009). This model is helpful with this type of study because it is able to provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of their participants river and how it flows and what obstacles have been faced.

### **Description of Participant**

Dr. Crepeau is a retired occupational therapist graduating from the University of New Hampshire in 1966 with a bachelor's degree. In addition, she attended graduate school to achieve a doctoral degree in sociology at the University of New Hampshire. Dr. Crepeau is a mother of two and a wife to an Airforce Veteran. Throughout her career, she practiced in many settings but spent most of her career as a professor in the occupational therapy department at the University of New Hampshire. Beyond occupational therapy practice, Dr. Crepeau was involved at both the state and national levels. In addition, she was involved in editing three editions of the textbook, *Willard and Spackman's Occupational Therapy*.

### **Methodology**

#### **Study Design**

This was a qualitative study that used a life history approach. The purpose of the study is 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 through the life history stories of occupational therapists who have held leadership roles at the national level

and beyond. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information.

### **Participant Selection**

The participant was selected from a participant list compiled through purposive sampling by the project directors. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview and the project was reviewed by the UND Institutional Review Board and because of the study design the formal IRB process was waived.

### **Data Collection**

The semi-structured interview was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the project directors; the questions on the interview schedule were designed to be used with all the individuals interviewed as part of the larger project. The student researchers were allowed to modify or add interview questions as needed for each specific interview. The participant completed a one 120 minute interview with the researchers to build rapport and gather a deeper understanding of the participants personal and professional life experiences. The researchers were able to gather the needed information from the participant within the 120 minutes by having all the questions answered at the end.

### **Trustworthiness**

To establish trustworthiness, the researchers interviewed a participant that was unfamiliar to them to decrease bias. The researchers also documented possible biases through reflexive journals throughout the process. The reflexive journals allowed the researchers to reflect on the process and their judgments regarding the topic. Interviews were transcribed verbatim to increase the validity of the study and ensure the researchers did not skew the data collection. Additionally, since the data was obtained directly from the participant this increased the

credibility of the study. Researcher triangulation was increased throughout this study because there were two researchers involved in data analysis which decreased bias. The researchers also utilized a research advisor throughout the process which increased credibility. Triangulation was utilized throughout this study by reviewing existing literature and interviews. The strategies mentioned above describe the efforts made by the researchers to establish the overall trustworthiness of the study.

### **Data Analysis**

The researchers started the data analysis process by transcribing the interview verbatim. After collecting the data, researchers further analyzed the data by coding the interview transcription. Thirty-two codes were developed based on the interview with the participant. From the 32 codes, the researchers created three categories based on the recurring ideas and statements from the participant. To conclude the data analysis process the researchers generated two themes from each category and created the final assertion, see appendix.

The Kawa model is reflected throughout the data process by being incorporated through main categories that were identified as professional career, advocacy, and leadership. The category of professional career can be used as the sidewall for our participant's river to help her life flow. The advocacy category helps our participant's life flow within her sidewalls. Through the process of advocating, this can also be seen as driftwood for the participant within the sidewalls of the river. The final category, leadership, can be reflected as the main component of the river and the way it flows within the sidewalls for the participant.

Based on the results from the participant the researchers created a final assertion summarizing the findings: Dr. Crepeau made significant contributions to the field of occupational therapy through her involvement in the state and national levels and her unique



ways of teaching. She emphasized the importance of finding occupations that advocate and provide an opportunity for individuals to increase meaningful engagement in occupations that lead to the desired quality of life.

### **Findings/Results**

To guide this study, the researchers chose the Kawa Model (Iwama, 2009). The model focuses on the use of the metaphor of a river with different contextual elements to represent human life (Iwama, 2009). The Kawa model was used to understand how Dr. Crepeau finds harmony between her environment and herself to achieve a sense of well-being in her life. Considering Dr. Crepeau's life history, the researchers used the Kawa model to understand the contexts of her life in relation to her experiences with the occupational therapy profession. The information obtained was useful in understanding how current and future generations of occupational therapists view the history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved over time in Dr. Crepeau's point of view to guide the data analysis.

### **Professional Career**

Theme 1: Dr. Crepeau encouraged others through creativity to promote new opportunities.

“I also did a lot of work with the activity programs to try to make them more responsive to the needs and interests of the people in the nursing homes.”

Theme 2: Dr. Crepeau used teaching as a way to increase student exploration and self-awareness.

“I loved creating courses and trying to find assignments that students would learn something from, but would also be interesting and fun for them to do.”

### **Advocacy**

Theme 1: Dr. Crepeau believes in providing meaningful occupations to increase engagement.

“The idea of people engaging in things that they love to do and how that contributes to their health and well-being and to the community is I mean, that’s just the central tenet of OT.”

Theme 2: Occupational therapists serve as advocates to provide resources.

“Being a part of a larger organization and being able to advocate for the profession has an impact on the future generations of OT”

Theme 3: Being aware of diversity will enhance a holistic approach to providing change.

### **Leadership**

Theme 1: Dr. Crepeau is passionate about being involved in roles that inspired and were goal-directed to having an impact on the OT profession.

“It’s emphasizing to the legislature the importance of funding for colleges so students can afford to go to school, you know, so it doesn’t have to relate just to OT”

Theme 2: Dr. Crepeau was involved on the national and state levels during her time as a practitioner and educator, to give and gain knowledge about the profession.

“Taking on a challenge there's always going to be opportunities to contribute either at a national or state level or even at a town level. OT is such a wonderful field and it's so important and it's really I think underappreciated.”

Based on the results from the participant the researchers created a final assertion summarizing the findings: Dr. Crepeau made significant contributions to the field of occupational therapy through her involvement in the state and national levels and her unique ways of teaching. She emphasized the importance of finding occupations that advocate and provide an opportunity for individuals to increase meaningful engagement in occupations that lead to a desired quality of life.

### Discussion/Conclusion

The purpose of the study was 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 through the life history stories of occupational therapists who have held leadership roles at the national level and beyond. The researchers were able to gather a sense of the evolution of occupational therapists by reviewing the literature of what was happening in the profession during our participants' career.

In the early 1900s, the concept of *flow* was created to describe people's intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008) which Dr. Crepeau emphasized throughout her professional career. The concept of moral treatment was emphasized throughout Dr. Crepeau's careers because how the therapy included the value of human individuality and the fundamental perception of the clients needs to engage in creative activities (Ernerst, 1972). Another concept that Dr. Crepeau emphasized throughout her occupational therapy career is the utilization of evidence-based practice.

The evidence-based concept originated in 1980 for a way of describing the problem-based learning approach and providing efficacy treatment (Bennett, S. & Bennett, J., 2000). Dr. Crepeau expressed how much she values using evidenced-based to increase clinical reasoning and providing the best treatment possible for her clients. Looking into 1998, Wilcock reflects on the concept of balancing *doing, being and becoming* to promote a person's well-being and quality of life (Wilcock, 1998). Dr. Crepeau used Wilcock's concepts through advocacy to provide opportunities that enhance an individual's sense of *doing, being, and belonging* throughout the community.

To guide this study, the researchers chose the Kawa Model (Iwama, 2009). The Kawa model was used to understand how Dr. Crepeau finds harmony between her environment and herself to achieve a sense of well-being in her life. With consideration of Dr. Crepeau's life history, the researchers used this model to understand the contexts of her life in relation to her experiences with the occupational therapy profession. The Kawa model was used to identify Dr. Crepeau's sidewalls and river bottom that help shape the river of her life flow. Dr. Crepeau's sidewalls and river bottom consist of her social context such as her family, friends, students and her co-workers. These can be impacted based on where Dr. Crepeau works and who is involved in her life.

Within the sidewalls of the river Dr. Crepeau's river flows but is faced with driftwood and rocks. Rocks that Dr. Crepeau mentioned that she has faced dealt with getting pregnant during her last fieldwork and had to rearrange when she was going to complete it so she could graduate. Another rock that she faced dealt with having to travel and move a lot since her husband was involved in the AirForce. There were many more and will continue to be more rocks that interfere with the flow of Dr. Crepeau's river. Dr. Crepeau also faces driftwood which is based around her weaknesses and strengths. This driftwood can hinder or push the rocks in the river out of the way for Dr. Crepeau's river to continue to flow smoothly.

The findings are relevant to the occupational therapy body of knowledge because of the thorough examination of life history stories of occupational therapists that have held leadership roles at the national level and beyond. The findings are also relevant because breaking down a person's life through the use of the Kawa model helps gain a deeper understanding of how a person's life continues to flow. This study contributes to occupational therapy knowledge

because it gives a further examination and understanding of how occupational therapy practice has evolved from the year 1917 to the current practice.

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## Appendix



**Life History of Elizabeth Crepeau, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA  
Nathina Crabtree, OTS and Sara Gregoire, OTS**

<b>Codes:</b>	Social participation Leisure Community Resources Individualized Adaptation Effectiveness Realistic Diversity Advocacy Holistic Meaningful/fulfillment Engagement	Flexible Choice/ preference Qualifications Evidence-based Education Crafts Creativity Exploration Self-awareness Influencer	Motivation Inspiration Representation Passion Commitment Goal-directed Dedication Optimistic Involvement
<b>Categories:</b>	Advocacy	Professional Career	Leadership
<b>Themes:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Crepeau believes in providing meaningful occupations to increase engagement.</li> <li>• Occupational therapists serve as advocates to provide resources.</li> <li>• Being aware of diversity will enhance a holistic approach to providing change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Crepeau used teaching as a way to increase student exploration and self-awareness.</li> <li>• Dr. Crepeau encouraged others through creativity to promote new opportunities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Crepeau is passionate in being involved in roles that inspired and were goal-directed to having an impact on the OT profession.</li> <li>• Dr. Crepeau was involved on the national and state levels during her time as a practitioner and educator, to give and gain knowledge about the profession.</li> </ul>
<b>Assertion:</b>	Dr. Crepeau made significant contributions to the field of occupational therapy through her involvement in the state and national levels and her unique ways of teaching. She emphasized the importance of finding occupations that advocate and provide an opportunity to individuals to increase meaningful engagement in occupations that lead to desired quality of life.		