

Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Donna Costa, DHS, OTR/L, FAOTA Macie Romsdal, OTS; Taylor Anderson, OTS

Introduction

The life history of Dr. Costa was one of 30 life history interviews conducted a part of a larger project of *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 like Donna Costa 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. The Kawa model was used to guide this study by focusing on aspects that facilitated and inhibited the participant's experience of the evolution of the field.

Description of Participant

Dr. Costa was born and raised in Buffalo, NY. She graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy and a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1973. In 1991, she obtained a Master of Science degree in Health Care Administration from the New School for Social Research in New York, NY. She attended Stony Brook University from 1999-2000 working towards a Ph.D. in Social Policy and Research. She then decided to get a DHS in Occupational Therapy and went to the University of Indianapolis from 2003-2007. She currently lives in Las Vegas and has 46 years of experience in diverse educational, clinical, and administrative positions. The strengths of her career include her strong clinical background in mental health practice, along with program development/administrative skills, and extensive teaching experience. Dr. Costa was involved in American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT), Nevada Occupational Therapy Association (NOTA), Alpha Eta Health Professions National Honor Society, Association for Driving Rehabilitation Specialists (DRS), and Society for the Study of Occupation. Donna Costa has been awarded and recognized multiple times including: awarded the AOTA Jeanette Bair Writer's Award in 2018, elected to Director position on the AOTA Board of Directions in 2017, received the AOTA Service Award for serving as the Chair of Special Interest Section Council from 2014 to 2017, and names a Paul Harris Fellow of the Rotary Foundation in 2012. Characteristics of her work style include being highly goal-directed, results-oriented, and successful in guiding interdisciplinary teams by fostering group decision-making and creative problem solving.

Literature Review

- In the 1960's, JFK was assassinated, the Vietnam war was still going on, and communism was rising (Aboukhadijeh, 2012).
- In the 1970's, occupational therapy was pushing towards science and theory of the profession (Christiansen & Haertl, 2014).
- The first PhD program was founded at New York University for the OT profession (AOTA, 2019).
- The *Occupational Therapy Code of Ethics* was founded by AOTA (AOTA, 2019).
- The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was established in 1975 (Garcia, 2018).
- In the 1980's, the Model of Human Occupation was founded by Gary Kielhofner (Garcia, 2018)
- In the 1990's, the shift back to occupation-based practice was happening as well as an increase in new technology (Garcia, 2018).

Methodology

Study Design: A qualitative research design using a life history approach.

Participant Selection: Initial contact was made by course instructors. The participant was selected from a list compiled through purposive sampling by the course instructors. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview. No specific gatekeeper issues were identified.

Data Collection: Data was collected through artifacts and a video chat. The researchers obtained a copy of Dr. Costa's CV before the interview. The video chat was recorded and lasted approximately one hour and fifteen 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 researchers were allowed to modify or add interview questions as needed for each specific interview. The data was transcribed and coded and the researchers developed categories and themes from the formulated codes.

Data Analysis/Findings

Data Analysis: Data analysis was guided by the Kawa model by focusing on the turning points in Dr. Costa's life. The researchers transcribed the information from the one-hour semi-structured interview with Donna Costa verbatim. Once the data was transcribed, it was coded with 23 codes. Three categories were generated, professional journey, personal/professional achievement, and OT education. From there, the following themes emerged:

Professional Journey:

1. Dr. Costa came into the OT program with an interest in mental health due to family history.
2. Evidence-based practice was not as common when she started practicing.
3. Dr. Costa feels the presence of interprofessional healthcare leads to better patient care.

Personal/Professional Achievement:

1. Dr. Costa was involved in leadership positions at the local, state, and national levels, and she feels it is important for every OT to be involved.
2. Dr. Costa has advocated for her clients by developing groups and being innovative.

OT Education:

1. The experiences Dr. Costa had in college and OT school were very different as compared to current OT students and their college experiences.
2. Dr. Costa believes that switching from a master's program to a doctoral program is a necessary change.



Conclusion

Assertion: Dr. Costa believes that everything about her is related to occupational therapy, which has been impacted by her OT education, personal and professional achievement, and her professional journey. She believes in advocating for clients as well as working in interprofessional teams and feels that all OTs should be involved at the local, state, and national levels.

Throughout Dr. Costa's career, she experienced various political, social, and economical events that had a lasting impact on her practice. Educational requirements have shifted and the presence of OTs in different settings has varied. Dr. Costa's involvement in leadership roles and advocacy has made an impact on OT practice. By being innovative and prioritizing client's needs, she has made an impact on many lives. She is a true leader and her career and experiences are influenced by the flow of her life.

"Just take it all in and keep an open mind. A lot of times students come in, as I said before, I want to work with kids and if they're open-minded, then they go do a field work with older adults and they come back and say, people are so cute. So just being open to that and yet then often a lot of times students are like, I don't know what I want to do yet. I love it all. That's okay. You'll eventually find your passion, but you don't know where the jobs are going to be when you get out and whether you're going to be able to move or stay put. So just keep it open, try to experience as much as you can. I do tell students if you have the opportunity to go somewhere for your level two, not in your backyard, do it now while you're single and you don't have kids and all these responsibilities." - Donna Costa, DHA, OTR/L, FAOTA

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References

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