

Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Paula Kramer, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

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Introduction

- This life history is one of 30 life history interviews which are part of a larger project, *Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) at the National Level and Beyond*. The purpose of this 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. We had the opportunity to interview Paula Kramer, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA who worked as an occupational therapy practitioner and educator for 46-years across several locations on the east coast.

Literature Review

- In 1975, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (now Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; IDEA) provided an entrance for occupational therapy into the school-based setting as a related-service.
- In 1979, efforts to improve engagement in research began with the American Occupational Therapy Foundation providing grants.
- In 1980, occupational therapy was defined as a qualifying service for home health.
- In 1986, certification and membership were officially separated following the creation of the American Occupational Therapy Certification Board.
- In 1992, the Accreditation Council of Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE) was created for membership credentialing and accreditation.
- In 2013, it was first recommended by ACOTE that a single-point of entry be transition to a Doctoral degree.



Description of Participant

- Paula Kramer has earned a Bachelor's (1973), an Advanced Master's (1977) and a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD; 1993) in Occupational Therapy. She also attended Harvard for the Macy Scholar for Leadership program in 2011.
- She started her career working for the N.Y.C. Bureau for Handicapped Children where she worked as a school-based therapist from 1973-1975. Then, she worked at St. Vincent's Hospital & Medical Center from 1975-1981. She worked in a private practice from 1976-1996 working primarily with children and adolescents.
- She began her career as an educator in 1977 where she held various position at several universities. She was named Professor Emerita in 2017 following her retirement from the University of Science in Philadelphia.
- She has been involved in several published works including research articles and textbooks. She also participated in many grant funded projects, with grants totaling over \$600,000.
- She received the American Occupational Therapy Association Award of Merit in 2012 which is the highest Association award given for global contribution to the profession. She was also named one of the 100 Influential People in the Profession of Occupational Therapy in 2017.

Methodology

- A qualitative study was conducted using a life history approach.
- Participant was assigned from a list developed by the project coordinators through purposive sampling.
- There were no gatekeeper issues as initial contact was made by the project directors.
- Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview and the project was approved by the UND Institutional Review Board and because of the study design the formal IRB process was waived.
- 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.
- Two, one-hour interviews were conducted via video conferencing at the University of North Dakota's School of Medicine and Health Science.
- Data was collected through verbatim transcription of the interviews. The researchers then analyzed content from the transcription to generate codes, categories, themes and an assertion statement.

Data Analysis and Findings

- Data analysis was guided by the KAWA model, which takes into consideration the influence the individual's internal and external contexts have on his/her life journey (Teoh & Iwama, 2015).
- Personal Journey**
 - Paula's positive personal experience with an occupational therapist following scoliosis treatment influenced her to learn about and later become a part of the profession of occupational therapy.
 - Paula has maintained a well-rounded balance within her life by spending time with family and engaging in several hobbies, which has allowed her to maintain a positive attitude within her professional career.
- Professional Journey**
 - Paula credits her mentors for pushing her to embrace new opportunities, which in turn led to higher perceived self-confidence of abilities.
 - Following a successful career as a clinician in a variety of settings, Paula began her career as an educator to inspire occupational therapy students to provide high quality care to their future clients that reflects the core values of occupational therapy.
- Education/Advocacy**
 - Paula believes that occupational therapy services need to be grounded in evidence and theory in order to demonstrate the benefits and importance of our skilled services.
 - Paula is a strong advocate for the OTD Mandate, as she believes that it will allow occupational therapy to become a prominent profession within healthcare.



Conclusion

- Assertion:** Paula Kramer credits her support systems and occupational balance for allowing her to remain passionate about occupational therapy, which has led her to fulfill a variety of roles throughout her time as a practitioner and educator, and has inspired her to continue advocating for theory and evidence-based services.
- Paula Kramer has a passion for occupational therapy which was evident throughout the interview process. She has continued to be excited about scholarship in occupational therapy and looks forward to seeing where the profession of occupational therapy progresses in the future.

Acknowledgments

- Special thanks to Paula Kramer for her willingness to participate in this project. Her participation is valuable as she has made several contributions that has influenced practice across the nation.

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