

# The Life History Of Maggie Lesher, MA, OTR/L

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## Introduction

- The purpose of this study was 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 and/or at the national level
- The interview with Maggie Lesher was one of many interviews done that are included in a larger research study
- The findings of this study will be archived and made available on the UND OT website
- Informed consent was obtained by the student researchers prior to completing the interview with Maggie Lesher.

## Description of Participant

- Maggie Lesher is a highly successful pediatric occupational therapist currently practicing in Minnesota
- Maggie is an alumni of the University of North Dakota Occupational Therapy Program and has endowed the Matt and Katrin Hjalmarson Scholarship.
- Maggie is the founder of Children's Theraplay, a business that started as a home-based agency in 1993 with locations in Plymouth and Maplewood MN.
- Maggie was first interested in OT practice when she learned about the "science" aspect of OT and was hooked after discovering the "art" of occupational therapy as well.
- Maggie has 20+ years of experience on a early childhood special education team, 18 of those being on a birth to 3 year old team
- Maggie has many certifications beyond her OT degree including but not limited to:
  - Master of Arts in Early Childhood Special Education
  - Level I and II mentorship, STAR Institute & SPD Foundation with Dr. Lucy Jane Miller
  - SIPT Certification
  - Reflex Integration
  - SOS approach to feeding certification
- When not working as an occupational therapist, Maggie enjoys spending time with her children and grandchildren, being involved with a Icelandic-American Hekla Club, playing piano, and riding her bike.



## Literature Review

- Life History
  - Preserves the integrity of individuals and accepts their experiences as credible as well as being philosophically compatible with humanistic values and assumptions of OT (Wicks & Whiteford, 2006)
- Life as an occupational therapist
  - Maggie graduated from the University of North Dakota and began her career working as a therapist in Fargo, ND. From Fargo, Maggie moved to Illinois and continued to practice as an occupational therapist there. Maggie eventually made the move back to Minnesota and has practiced in MN ever since.
- Passage of IDEA (Part C)
  - The part C regulations will support the education department's commitment to the goal of preparing more children with high needs with a strong foundation for success in school and beyond (<http://idea.gov/part-c/search/new/html>).
- Moving to a Doctorate
  - OT was previously a "semiprofession" and switching to a doctorate will help OT to keep up with the many other health professions that consider a clinical doctorate to be entry level (Brown, Crabtree, Mu & Wells, 2015).

## Methods

### Study 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 Selection

•Purposive sampling was done by the course instructors and the participant was selected from the compiled participant list

### Data Collection

•A phone interview was conducted with the student researchers and participant. The interview lasted about 1 hour and 30 min, and additional information was compiled via email from the participant

### Trustworthiness

- *Credibility*: triangulation was used to gather information from the interview with Maggie Lesher, her business website, and follow-up email conversation that provided additional thoughts
- *Transferability*: analyzed into codes, categories, and themes making the data easier to reference with similar populations
- *Dependability and Conformability*: the process included thorough reflection from the student researchers and verbatim transcriptions to ensure the true meaning of the interview was captured.

## Findings

### Codes:

- 20 codes emerged from the interview data
- Codes were developed based on the verbatim transcription and grouped together to come up with 3 main categories

### Categories/Themes:

- Fundamentals of Occupational Therapy
  - The participant's experience as an OT practitioner has remained rooted in the fundamentals of occupational therapy.
  - The foundational elements of the profession such as being evidenced-based, holistic, and client-centered have remained important to Maggie throughout her career.
- Emotions
  - Many years in the field of occupational therapy can hold with it a number of emotions.
  - Reflecting back on her career, Maggie experienced a variety of emotions feelings of nostalgia, honor, and grateful for her personal supports.
- Growth
  - As her time as an OT, the participant has reflected on many areas of growth that she has undergone over the years.
  - Maggie underwent personal growth many times throughout her OT career including, the birth of her own children, getting back to her Icelandic roots, and discovering the "art" of the profession.
  - Professional growth was experienced through mentorship under Dr. Lucy Miller, getting involved at the state and national level, and becoming a leader for others in her practice.



## Discussion

- Throughout the course Maggie Lesher's occupational therapy career it was important to remain rooted in the fundamentals of the profession. Additionally, several emotions may be expected to be felt as well as growth on a personal and professional level.
- The passage of IDEA Part C was influential in Maggie's career in that it allowed her to broaden her scope of practice to include children age birth to 3.
- Maggie is passionate about increasing the credibility of the OT profession and feels optimistic about the clinical doctorate becoming the entry level degree.

### Kawa Model

- Careful consideration of the Kawa Model was kept by the researchers throughout this process to root the focus of the study on the overall life experiences of the participant
- Emphasis was placed on barriers the participant experienced, personal attributes, and physical and social environments the participant was surrounded by.

## Acknowledgements

- The student researchers would like to thank Maggie Lesher for participating in the research study and openly sharing her experience as an occupational therapist
- References
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