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Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Ivelisse Lazzarini, OTD, OTR/L

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Abstract:

Objective: The purpose of the life history of Dr. Ivelisse Lazzarini is to provide current and future occupational therapists a view of history and how practice has evolved from start to current.

Method: A semi-structured, 60-minute interview was conducted via an online video conference at the University of North Dakota- Casper site with participants. The interview was transcribed verbatim which developed 22 codes. The codes were then collapsed, and three categories emerged. Common themes emerged from the categories. From themes, a final assertion was created to summarize the findings.

Results: The themes were placed into three categories: professional journey, aspects of occupational therapy, and advocacy for occupational therapy. The findings indicate that Dr. Lazzarini is passionate about occupational therapy education and she uses her experiences to advocate, educate, and provide leadership for the profession.

Conclusion: Occupational therapy is continuously changing, and Dr. Lazzarini is staying true to the occupational therapy values by using her experiences to advocate, educate, and provide leadership in the profession.

Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Ivelisse Lazzarini, OTD

Introduction:

The life history of Dr. Ivelisse Lazzarini 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 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.

Description of the Participant:

Dr. Ivelisse Lazzarini received her Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy from Temple University and her Occupational Therapy Doctorate from Creighton University. She is an academic leader, administrator, and an accomplished educator. She is currently the founding chair and professor of the occupational therapy program at the University of Monmouth in Long Beach, New Jersey. Dr. Ivelisse Lazzarini has held past positions in academia as well as fellowships for her doctoral work. She was the Associate Dean of Applied Health Sciences and Occupational Therapy Program Director at Pfeiffer University. Also, she was the founding Chair and Professor at the Purcell School of Professional Studies at Le Moyne College. At her alma mater, Temple University, she became the Program Director and Assistant Professor of the occupational therapy program. Dr. Ivelisse Lazzarini currently holds five state association memberships: Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, North Carolina, and New Jersey. She collaborated with Claudia Allen and traveled all over the United States doing training on Allen's

Cognitive Levels. Along with that, she has traveled the globe, teaching occupational therapy and presenting her work in complexity science.

Timeline Literature Review:

The profession of occupational therapy has changed remarkably throughout history. In 1985, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) reported a shortage of occupational therapy personnel (Powell, Griffith, & Kanny, 2005). Due to this shortage, people with different degrees were being pulled and put through occupational therapy school to become educators (Powell, Griffith, & Kanny, 2005). This shortage was still happening when Dr. Lazzarini graduated with her bachelor's degree in occupational therapy in 1995. Dr. Lazzarini was a part of task force that did retention and recruitment for occupational therapists to enter academics. Currently, Dr. Lazzarini encourages students to get through their education and enter the world of academics. At this time, the medical model was prominent that Dr. Lazzarini followed in her academic time at Temple University.

Starting in 1996, she worked at Salisbury VA hospital in Salisbury, North Carolina. In 1997 and 1998, she remembers Medicare fraud being a huge issue due to The Balanced Budget Act (Important Events in Occupational Therapy by Decades, n.d.). This created caps on private practitioners in practice, which impacted hospitals, graduate medical education, and access to health care (Important Events in Occupational Therapy by Decades, n.d.). Due to the caps, facilities would change the billable units to get more money.

In 2002, Dr. Lazzarini started her first assistant professor job at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. This same year, AOTA replaced Uniform Terminology with the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process (Important Events in Occupational Therapy

by Decades, n.d.). The framework is a summary of constructs that describe occupational therapy practice.

Dr. Lazzarini was the founding Chair and Professor at Le Moyne College in Syracuse, New York in 2014. In 2016, when Dr. Lazzarini was still at Le Moyne College, AOTA adopted Vision 2025, (Important Events in Occupational Therapy by Decades, n.d.). Vision 2025 states “Occupational therapy maximizes health, well-being, and quality of life for all people, populations, and communities through effective solutions that facilitate participation in everyday living” (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2018). Dr. Lazzarini stated, “OTs are facilitators of change. We influence change every step of the way and we continue to talk about a right of things, but we continue to be undefined.” This related to Vision 2025 as occupational therapy is a facilitator of change and practitioners want to help their clients participate in everyday living and activities.

In August 2017, the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education issued a mandate stating that the entry-level education for occupational therapists is transitioning to the doctoral level by July 1, 2027 (AOTA, n.d.). Dr. Lazzarini was transitioning from Purcell School of Professional Studies to Pfeiffer University in Charlotte and Misenheimer, North Carolina. At Pfeiffer, she processed the candidacy for the new entry-level occupational therapy doctoral degree and developed a post-professional occupational therapy doctoral program. Dr. Lazzarini stated that she has been writing occupational therapy curricula for many years. In August of 2018, Dr. Lazzarini became the founding Chair for Monmouth University in Long Branch, New Jersey. With this position, Dr. Lazzarini developed an occupational therapy doctorate that offered a dual degree: OTD and M. Ed to be completed in under 3 years. With Dr. Lazzarini’s experience in educating and creating curricula, she is a valuable leader within the profession.

According to Dillon (2001), leaders must lead through serving others and their needs. Dr. Lazzarini has been a leader throughout her career. It started when she was at Temple University with being the Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) President. Next, she was the chair of the diversity and minority groups within occupational therapy at the national level. Dr. Lazzarini has also been a part of many task forces for retention and recruitment and has served on the commission of education to help build occupational therapy programs. As she currently educates students and serves as a founding Chair for a professional program, Dr. Lazzarini is a valuable leader.

Theory:

The life history of Dr. Lazzarini was guided by the Kawa Model. This model comes from the Japanese culture, as Kawa means “river” in Japanese (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). Each person has their life journey, such as experiences, and the river can help depict this journey. There are five constructs, river flow, riverbanks, rocks, driftwood, and spaces for the river (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). River flow represents the flow of life and health of a person, the riverbank represents the different contexts such as social and physical environments that a person is in (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). Rocks represent obstacles and challenges that impede the river flow and driftwood is the influencing factors in a person’s life (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). Lastly, the spaces mean the opportunities for enhancing the flow of the water through the river (Turpin & Iwama, 2011).

Each person is viewed holistically as a part of a broader picture with the Kawa Model. This study looked at the culture of occupational therapy as a whole through the synthesis of each participant. Each story looked at how the culture and progression of the profession across

different states and at the national level. This is why the Kawa model was chosen to guide this study.

Methodology:

A qualitative research using a life history approach was used. This allowed the focus to be on the participant's involvement in the evolution of occupational therapy practice. Dr. Lazzarini 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.

The semi-structured interview was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the project directors using the Kawa Model; the questions on the interview schedule were designed to be used with all the individuals interviewed as part of the larger project. The researchers modified or added interview questions as needed for each specific interview.

The researchers contacted Dr. Lazzarini by e-mail to set up a time for the interview. The interview took place through a Zoom conference at the University of North Dakota- Casper. The researchers reserved a private conference room to ensure a quiet environment. The interview was audio-recorded and took 1 hour and 20 minutes. After, it was transcribed verbatim to allow for coding and completion of the data analysis.

Trustworthiness:

To establish trustworthiness within the study, the researchers kept reflective journals. These journals were used to log thoughts, beliefs, and possible bias throughout the research process. Member checking was also used to increase trustworthiness. The verbatim interview transcription was sent to Dr. Lazzarini following the interview, for her to review the information.

Member checking was also used following the creation of a visual display of the data. Dr. Lazzarini was sent the completed visual data display for her to review the content including the themes, codes, categories and assertion statement. The trustworthiness of the research study was also increased by the setup of the research team. The study was conducted by two researchers with an overseeing research advisor throughout the whole process.

Data Analysis:

The interview with Dr. Lazzarini was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researchers. There were 22 codes developed from the transcription. The codes were collapsed, and three categories emerged. The researchers then identified key themes from each of the categories, and then patterns. A final assertion was created to summarize the findings and to capture the life of Dr. Lazzarini. The researchers reviewed the transcript and materials provided several times; initial thoughts, memos, and feelings were noted. The Kawa Model was used as a guide for data analysis. This method was used to gain an understanding of Dr. Lazzarini's life and work experience within the occupational therapy profession.

Results:

Dr. Lazzarini is passionate about occupational therapy education and she uses her experiences to advocate, educate, and provide leadership for the profession. Through data analysis and coding, three categories emerged. These categories are professional journey, aspects of occupational therapy, and advocacy of occupational therapy. The themes that emerged, outlined these categories and represent Dr. Lazzarini's perspective on the profession. A final assertion was compiled to bring together the themes.

Professional Journey

The codes of education, life, leadership, mentorship, accomplishments, experiences with occupational therapy, qualifications, and challenges make up this category. There were four themes developed within the category of professional journey.

Theme 1: Dr. Lazzarini's background in mechanical engineering provided a foundation to enhance her understanding and knowledge of occupational therapy, resulting in a passion for ongoing growth and development. In Dr. Lazzarini's past, she was a mechanical engineer. She was always singing and playing guitar. After an accident and being told she would not walk again, she started attending physical therapy. After still feeling depressed and physical therapy not moving her, she was sent to occupational therapy. Here is when she enhanced her understanding and knowledge of occupational therapy. Dr. Lazzarini stated,

So long story short, I met the first OT and she had the capacity and this skill to go to a deeper me to say what is keeping you so sad and I said I have two children, I'm a single parent, I want my children to stay with me, I cannot go up the steps.

After building a relationship with her occupational therapist, she said: "oh, I'll do what you doing in a heartbeat." From here her understanding of occupational therapy grew and resulted in growth for continuing education.

Theme 2: She is adamant about being involved in the profession and serving as a leader in everyday practice and taking advantage of opportunities at the national level. As quoted by Dr. Lazzarini "I became the Class President and the SOTA President, and from then, I ran for the National Association and became the chair for what was the name, of, um, diversity and minority groups within occupational therapy and I served from Bethesda, from the AOTA office."

Theme 3: Dr. Lazzarini is proud to have partnered with Claudia Allen in working with Allen's Cognitive Levels. She stated that “one of the things I think has been the hallmark of my career was when I met Claudia K. Allen and, Claudia and I were partners in crime for almost 20 years with the Allen Cognitive Levels.”

Theme 4: She is proud to have traveled to different countries to promote complexity science and teach occupational therapy. Dr. Lazzarini shared that she was invited to teach in Japan, Panama, Germany, Spain, South America, Puerto Rico, and South Korea to teach cognition and complexity sciences.

Aspects of Occupational Therapy

The codes of billing, fraud, legislation, boards, different practice, crafts, and occupational therapy practice were developed into this category. There were three themes developed within the category of aspects of occupational therapy.

Theme 1: Initially when learning crafts, she did not appreciate the impact this would have on her future practice, she emphasized the importance of activity analysis in modifying crafts to be client centered. When Dr. Lazzarini began her education in occupational therapy she was required to take craft classes such as woodworking, knitting, and ceramics. At this point in her education, she did not value the crafts, until she began to use them in practice through the use of activity analysis.

Theme 2: The practice of occupational therapy is influenced by geography and cultural values; she stressed the importance of using media that is representative of the background of the client. She emphasized the impact of a culture of occupational therapy by stating that “the practice in Nebraska, the practice from the Midwest, and the practice on the east coast is dramatically different.”

Theme 3: Dr. Lazzarini expressed the importance of accountability and following the code of ethics when providing and billing for services. She emphasized the importance of accountability and following the code of ethics through sharing a story about fraud. Her story discussed a personal experience she encountered while working in the OT profession. Dr. Lazzarini was working at a therapy facility and noticed that changes were being made to her documentation after she had submitted it. She stated that she had kept records of her documentation and was able to prove that the fraud had taken place. Dr. Lazzarini related the story to how occupational therapists need to be accountable for the services that they provide to clients.

Advocacy for Occupational Therapy

The codes of millennials, occupational therapy doctorate, benefits of occupational therapy, change, role model, complexity science, and the definition of occupational therapy were developed into this category. There were three themes developed within the category of advocacy for occupational therapy.

Theme 1: Dr. Lazzarini advocates that the profession should go to one-degree, occupational therapy doctorate, and she is passionate about creating occupational therapy doctorate programs to promote this change. As quoted by Dr. Lazzarini,

I think that we are to go to a single degree, and that should be the OTD. I believe that when we are dancing between masters and the OTD and the PTs already have a nice history and president on how moving their knowledge to one-point entry has done wonderful for their careers.

Theme 2: Dr. Lazzarini values the holistic view of occupational therapy and continues to advocate for the profession to fully understand individuals. She believes that if a practitioner

fully understands themselves, then they can fully understand another individual. Dr. Lazzarini said, “OT is in the business of understanding human life from the point of meaning and to understand meaning for another client you need to know yourself.”

Theme 3: She inspires others to continue her work in cognition and complexity science and to strive to be a role model for others in the profession. Dr. Lazzarini stated that “I’ve been able to in a number of individuals who are doing fantastic work. So, I think my work has inspired others to continue the work in complexity scientists and used it for applicable in daily clinical practice.”

The final assertion was that Dr. Lazzarini is passionate about occupational therapy education and she uses her experiences to advocate, educate, and provide leadership for the profession.

Discussion/ Conclusion:

Occupational therapy is continuously changing, and Dr. Lazzarini is staying true to the occupational therapy values by using her experiences to advocate, educate, and provide leadership in the profession.

When Dr. Lazzarini received her bachelor’s degree in occupational therapy, there was a shortage of educators. She stated, “right now there is a dire need to have the youngster’s kind of finish their careers and then try to enter academia.” Dr. Lazzarini advocates for education and values its importance. This is illustrated with the timeline literature review and her dedication to creating occupational therapy doctorate programs. She is a firm believer that the profession should go to an occupational therapy doctorate. The reason she values this is that occupational therapy doctorate degrees allow for more personal reflection. The reflection process is needed so a practitioner can better serve their clients and fully understand different individuals. From the

timeline literature review, she is passionate about the mandatory change to the doctorate degree by 2027.

After reviewing Dr. Lazzarini's perspective about work and life contexts, the Kawa model was used to look deeper into her experiences. A barrier, which represents a rock, in her life, was her accident prior to becoming an occupational therapist. She encountered other obstacles throughout her journey such as, insurance fraud and being ahead of the time when creating complexity science. Her passion for education has guided her towards many positions in education and administration to share her passion with others. Dr. Lazzarini stated that "when I define OT, I tell them I am in a career where I understand the flow of being human. And we look for what is meaningful for that individual to empower them to live with their most quality."

The story of Dr. Lazzarini's journey through the profession of occupational therapy provides an example of how individual life experiences guide someone's professional journey. One example of an experience in Dr. Lazzarini's life that guided her journey was when she met Claudia Allen. This experience guided her towards her work with complexity sciences and cognition. Dr. Lazzarini has made a lasting impact on the profession of occupational therapy and the realms of cognition and complexity sciences.

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Appendix

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