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Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Kuzhilethu “Shep” Kshepakaran,

M. Ed., OTR/S, CAPS, FAOTA

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Abstract

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. An in-depth interview with the selected participant, Kuzhilethu “Shep” Kshepakaran, as well as his resume and the internet were used to gather information. The categories created symbolized Shep’s life history which included personal experiences, perspectives and practice influence. The themes represented Shep’s personal values and beliefs, perspectives regarding practice and cultural awareness as well as commitment to the overall value of occupational therapy profession. The themes highlight the important aspects that led to Shep’s contributions to the OT profession regarding legislation as well as educational enhancement. By staying true to his personal motivations, Shep was able to use education and life experiences to accomplish various achievements which allowed him to increase his involvement in the field of occupational therapy as it grew and developed overtime.

Introduction

This life history is one of 30 life history interviews which are a part of a larger project, *Life 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. In order to gather information about his experiences as an occupational therapist, the researchers conduct a semi structured interview with Shep as well as reviewed his personal resume. The interview was conducted via ZOOM and it was audio recorded. The researchers were in a public room at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences. By using a life history approach, this study focused on the participant, Kuzhilethu “Shep” Kshepakaran’s, involvement in the evolution of OT practice. This study intends to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists with a view of the history and how OT as a whole has evolved to current national practice. The life history assignment provides insight on Shep’s knowledge, perspectives and personal experiences regarding his personal life and how he relates to occupational therapy. Shep is a well known practitioner in multiple states including Wisconsin, Maryland, Kentucky, Illinois and Washington as well as internationally with representation in India. He has achieved several accomplishments and accolades through his years in working as an occupational therapist.

Description of the Participant

The following information was obtained from an interview and the participant's provided resume. Kuzhilethu "Shep" Kshepakaran is an accomplished occupational therapist who has received extensive achievement in the field of OT. Towards the end of his first year of college, Shep became aware of occupational therapy job openings which sparked his interest in this profession. In 1960, Shep attended the University of Nagpur, Maharashtra India and earned a diploma in occupational therapy. He then went on and graduated from the University of Puget Sound in 1975 where he received his master's degree. Initially after graduating, Shep started his professional career working as a registered OT (OTR) at the Jewish Chronic Disease Hospital in New York City. In 1964 ambitious to advocate for the OT profession, Shep moved back to India to expand the occupational therapy profession. Shep became chief occupational therapist for Bon-Hooghly Hospitals in India. Desiring to fulfill an administrative role, Shep also became superintendent for the Home for Handicaped Children in India. After several years, Shep moved to Washington D.C. and served as chief of therapeutic activities for D.C. Village. When Shep decided to pursue an educational role for OT, he transitioned to working at Chicago State University. This was the most rewarding experience by far during Shep's years of practice; he stated, "that it was always a challenge to encourage and motivate students to continue through their education, defining the importance of activity analysis, and occupational therapy as life itself." Recently, Shep moved to Owing Mills Maryland to be closer to his son and practices OT part time.

Aside from his impressive work history, Shep has always wished to pursue both national and international roles within the OT field. Throughout Shep's 60 years of practice, he became and continues to be an active member in AOTA and the Maryland Occupational Therapy

Association. He believes strongly in the importance of cultural competence and is motivated to advocate for minorities and societies. Complementing his values and beliefs, Shep is a part of the AOTA Multicultural and Diversity Inclusion organization. Shep has also been involved in a variety of continuing education opportunities and has served as a member of the Roster of Accreditation as an evaluator of the Accreditation Council of Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE). In addition, he has on the served National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT) as an item writer. The importance he places on the occupational therapy field and promotion of OT services is evident and reflected by an extensive list of accomplishments and recipient awards. Some of Shep's biggest accomplishments include: an inductee in the Albert Nelson Marquis Lifetime Achievement Association, a featured listee in Who's Who, a featured listee in the Midwest Marquis Who's Who, a recipient of the Recognition of Achievement award through the Association of Occupational Therapists in America, recipient and induction as a fellow of the American Occupational Therapy Association and recipient and recognition of excellence through the Maryland Occupational Therapy Association.

Literature Review

Historically, the profession of occupational therapy underwent major changes from the 1950's to the 1960's that helped to broaden and shape the field professional identity. Because there were turning points that happened within these time periods, it is important to acknowledge the changes that have influenced the profession today. In 1955, AOTA published the "Policy on Advanced Study" which reinforced the idea that occupational therapy should maintain their competence by completing continuing education (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], nd). Maintaining competency through expanding education ensures that occupational therapists are providing the more accurate and up to date therapeutic interventions. At this time,

to be an occupational therapist practicing in the field the facilities required a bachelor's degree education. The first Eleanor Clark Slagel lecture was presented in the year 1955, which today is used to expand on the occupational therapy profession as a whole as well as to honor leaders that are making strides for the AOTA organization.

During the 1950's the field of OT shifted from using arts and crafts as a means for intervention to a method focusing on implementing rehabilitation techniques with medicine as a guide (Christiansen & Haertl, 2014). This movement into the rehabilitation period helped occupational therapists focus on helping wounded soldiers recover from World War II. The rehabilitation movement increased the demands for health professionals. This shift moved towards a medical based focus specifically working with mental and physical capacities (Christiansen & Haertl, 2014). This shift led to more professional responsibilities of the occupational therapists. In 1956 AOTA published the *Guide for Professional Responsibilities for Occupational Therapist* which is a tool for therapists to use for a basis of what their responsibilities are regarding their role within the profession.

In the year 1958, AOTA published the *Guide for the Development of Graduate Education Leading to Higher Degrees in Occupational Therapy*. This document outlined the requirements for a master's level curriculum for the profession (AOTA, nd). As educational requirements increased for occupational therapist there became a shortage of therapist due to the increased commitment of schooling for an OT degree (Christiansen & Haertl, 2014). This resulted in AOTA to taking on the responsibility for the educational standards for Occupational Therapy Assistants and approval of the first OTA educational program for COTAs (Christiansen & Haertl, 2014). The two year program was accredited in the United States in 1958 (Christiansen &

Haertl, 2014). This shift in educational programs lead to more job opportunities for available practitioners and an expansion for the OT profession.

In 1964 the AOTA underwent reorganization and expansion which emphasized the expansion of scientific endeavor for the field of occupational therapy (Christiansen & Haretl, 2014). This resulted in the American Occupational Therapy Foundation (AOTF) to advance the science of occupational therapy and to increase the public knowledge and understanding of occupational therapy (AOTA, nd). The emphasis on science and theory development helped lead to the emergence of models, theories and frames of reference that help guide the profession today which helps to advance the education to a graduate level (Christiansen & Haretl, 2014).

The purpose of this project is to gather information about the history and evolution of occupational therapy practice through the life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing occupational therapy in the United States. In order to do so, it was important to develop an understanding of what was happening both in the world and in the occupational therapy practice. Establishing the events of the past helped the researchers understand what was happening as own participant Kuzhilethu “Shep” Kshepakaran pursued his career.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical model that guided this research was the Kawa model. The word Kawa is a Japanese word meaning “river” (Teah & Iwama, 2015). According to Turpin and Iwama (2011), the river is used as a metaphor to describe a person's life journey as well as the experiences and challenges that they go through. There are several elements that make up this model such as: rocks, riverbanks, driftwood, river flow, and spaces (Teah & Iwama, 2015). An individual's life is represented by the water that flows in the river (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). The river walls symbolize the contexts that surround the person such as social and physical environment. The

rocks represent life circumstances that are perceived as problematic to the person (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). The driftwood symbolizes personal attributes and resources (Teah & Iwama, 2015). Finally, the space between the obstacles emphasize the importance of increasing the space between the objects, rather than focusing on the objects themselves (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). Overall, by increasing the space between the obstacles, harmony will be achieved. The interview schedule was developed by using the Kawa model constructs to develop interview questions. In this study, the Kawa model was the lens used to understand the life history of Shep with a wider evolution of occupational therapy practice. The researchers used these compounds to get an understanding about the relationships, obstacles, and environments that impacted Shep's life's work experiences as an occupational therapist.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research study that used a life history approach to focus on the participants' involvement in the evolution of OT practice. This qualitative study was completed as an assignment for an OT qualitative research class and is a small part of a larger study being completed by the project directors. A life history approach allowed the researchers to understand the life of the participant and how their career as an OT advanced his life. This oral history approach also allowed researchers to explore the historical framework during Shep's career in OT and how he has influenced the profession. 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 was collected via "ZOOM" and recorded through a camera application on a laptop and through a cell phone. 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. Other questions not included in this schedule were asked as follow up questions to statements made by the participant. There were no gatekeeper issues because initial contact was made by the project directors. The interview length was approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes. The interview was conducted on October 20th, 2019 at 12:30 pm in a private room at the University of North Dakota School of Medicine and Health Sciences and the participant was at his home. The interview was then transcribed verbatim, which translated into approximately 58 pages of transcribed text. Trustworthiness was established by the two researchers review of the verbatim transcription as well as additional guidance and review by the project director. To ensure confirmability, memos were added by the researchers to the transcription. The researchers also maintained reflexive journals throughout the length of the research to reflect any thoughts or emotions about the information. The reflexive journals allowed the researchers to gather insight over the information being collected, while at the same time creating an audit trail of the data analysis process. In addition, they also provided evidence that the researchers did not skew the results obtained from the interview. Each of these procedures contributed to the validity and reliability of the study by eliminating any bias and making sure that the findings were accurate, consistent and representative of the participants life.

Data Analysis

The initiation of data analysis began after transcribing the interview verbatim from the audio and video recording. The project director assisted throughout the data analysis section and guided the researchers through the initial coding process. Initial review of the interview

generated 16 codes, which emerged into three main categories. Three themes were then developed for each category. One assertion was formed by condensing the themes from each category that was developed.

Open coding was first used to analyze the data. The codes were determined by reviewing the recurring patterns within the interview then collapsing the information into both codes, and categories. The initial codes included components such as travel, India/culture, occupations, accomplishments, leadership/jobs, questions and legislation (see appendix). Axial coding was then used to connect the information and form categories which were determined by meaning and common themes. This was completed by reviewing quotes, questions, and memos. After categories were developed, the researchers created overarching themes that reflected the main aspects of Shep's OT profession. The Kawa model influenced the interview and data analysis process. This allowed researchers to gain a deeper understanding about the turning points and contextual factors that have shaped and impeded the participants career.

Findings/Results

Shep shared a variety of personal life experiences that helped shape him as a person as well as an occupational therapist. The Kawa model was used as a guide for directing the data analysis. This information was used to find themes based on three major categories that have helped shape Shep's path from the past to his present roles in occupational therapy. These three categories emerged from the data analysis and are outlined as well as described below along with the corresponding themes. The categories outlined here represent a brief illustration of the major aspects that highlight Shep's career as an occupational therapist.

Category One: Personal

Theme one: Shep values his home and community life which has helped him appreciate all the relationships in his life.

Shep highlighted several examples of his personal journey as opportunities arose in his relationships. He maintains his values which has allowed him to grow and progress as a human being who interacts with others. Shep finds relationships in his life to help him enhance his home and community life.

“The friends and significant others that is what community is. Of course, the material community has its own resources and all but for people, it doesn’t matter much at all. Community practice is really a joy. It is the joy that you see people in action and participate which is the real praise. Sometimes it is in the hospital people are damaged, so you are only seeing part of that person there. In a real setting, you will see way more than you actually would in a clinic. So, it is very important in my life. In any chance, if you are in the clinic if you get to measure the impact of their community or can’t see the community for that person then you are losing a lot.”

Theme two: Shep’s experiences regarding medical and health care professions has shaped the way he values task analysis and occupation based interventions.

When asked about how his experience in the medical and health care profession Shep shared that activity analysis was an influential factor in his practice as an occupational therapist.

“Any activity, it has a beginning, a process and an end. In practice with education you know I can say that it has been a struggle all along to convince a student to see the importance of activity analysis and utilizing activities for a better outcome. When you see a patient, you look at that patient, what are they doing, how are they doing and why they

are not doing certain things the way they should. Those are all part of analysis; you don't have to have a clear background in order to look at them do simple things.”

Theme three : Shep uses his diversity awareness to enhance his surroundings and dedication to the OT field.

Shep believes in the importance of diversity and multicultural awareness. Shep states that a therapist can assist the person in the recovery phase by holding culture close to therapeutic activities. He acknowledges that an individual cannot separate themselves from their cultural background and should use this to enhance their practice within the occupational therapy profession.

“So, my culture is in my blood, so when you ask whether you hold close to it, it is in my blood, but that doesn't mean that I don't understand or appreciate other cultures. That's why I am into multicultural things. So, to answer your question, I definitely do but I don't particularly practice that, you know, meaning that other than going to some social group, Indian association of some sort of now and then whenever they have a celebration or something.”

Category Two: Perspectives

Theme one. Shep articulated the important role that family, work colleagues and employers had on his ability to adapt and grow.

Even though Shep admitted there were challenges with various coworkers and partners, he believes they shaped him into the person he is today. Shep emphasized the importance of a working team environment, specifically how this results with the most beneficial gains.

“My first job I was thrown into the wilderness kind of thing and I'd have to state a

department from scratches. You know as a new graduate, I didn't have any known how, but in a teamwork setting I was working with an orthopedic surgeon. Even though he wasn't a powerful figure, he came down, talked to me. What to do, how to do, and how to get along. Those kinds of things helped me a lot, you know so the key element there is support system you know. How the support system, professional support system helped me get along, go forward." [...]

"All of them were under my supervision and gave me a chance to grow for my own self."

Theme two. Through his determination, Shep used therapeutic use of self and cultural awareness to connect with his clients.

While there are many cultural backgrounds, Shep volunteered his time with various organizations such as the Multicultural and Diversity Inclusion AOTA organization. Specific positions allowed Shep to learn about cultural awareness and diversity factors that aided in relationship building and communication with clients. Shep guides a client centered practice through motivating his clients with a therapeutic use of self-role.

"But extending yourself into occupational therapy, you cannot very easily decipher through that and show you that this is the way, you know the person who I am is a conglomeration and collection of all my background including my cultural background. So, it had its own part. One has to be constantly drawing inward and modifying the way you want to act, talk and all those things. You know if you are going to help a person so if you are stuck in your own cocoon then trying to help somebody else it may not have the desired effect."

Theme three. Shep's experiences working in various facilities has motivated him to be a lifelong learner and to appreciate interprofessional collaboration.

Shep was able to receive various perspectives and mentorship through his roles in workplaces. Shep commented on how his experience as an occupational therapist includes being a continued learner and to reflect on his past situations in order to inspire growth.

“So, for me, that has been sort of a lesson learned at that time which I felt back on um when I encounter some sort of thing happening which is impacting my progress. [...] At that time of course, I didn't have the diversity piece in me, in my vocabulary you know that came out later on when I was out of most of the leadership [pause] but I am still working on that.”

“You know, I definitely won't run away from it, but I will still try to figure out what are the options for any situation, you know problem solving that is there is more than one way to solve a problem.”

Category three: Practice Influences

Theme one. Shep's passion for multicultural diversity resulted in changes to program development and policies at the state and national level.

When Shep began his occupational therapy career, his level of understanding for cultural diversity helped to impact the need for inclusion of multicultural identity in the occupational therapy field. The alignment with his values and interest led him to enhance the cultural acceptance at the state and national level.

“I feel I contributed to that process a lot which is very satisfying but when I taught another universities the issue was not hard students, you know when a student comes from a not so well background with an education otherwise including economics and otherwise then they are life is in turmoil [...]. How to get money, how to get to deal with food, how to interact with people all those things are not as you expect them.”

Theme two. Shep's determination for AOTA's Representative Assembly and advocacy for community education resulted in greater opportunities for OT services.

After working as a therapist for several years, Shep became a member of the AOTA Representative Assembly to help advocate on a political platform. This sparked his interest in increased educational opportunities and advocated for leadership expansion.

“I also taught some students who were trying to become OT's and PT's so starting, developing programs and bringing it up has its own challenges and that's satisfying but the most satisfying is what I said, helping the underprivileged student population to get to the graduation point.”

“Chicago State University was founded to help people from the community who were predominantly people of color and minorities receive an education. [...] So it is a span of time I helped people to go through the program and be successful.”

Theme three. Shep's commitment to the value of OT in healthcare and fought to expand services in all his work environments.

Shep highlighted several examples in his professional journey where he was presented opportunities to take risks and expand occupational therapy services. One of the most important turning points includes the transition of relevance of occupational therapists in the medical field.

“I used all that from my own mission about what OT is. The glory and the importance and that activity, activity is life itself. [...] Nowadays , many doctors know what OT is. Because I struggled, when I started in this country, also doctors did not know what OT is because they are the keyholder in many ways even now they are the keyholders. [...] You know I could very easily see a patient from the street and figure something out. I may not

be swirled in the medical aspects of it but in terms of the problems, and the possibility of the person. An OT can very easily assess that as good as a doctor.”

Final Assertion

Shep values personal development and activity analysis to develop a therapeutic relationship with his clients. This has shaped his career path by motivating him to advocate for others in all situations, enhancing his commitment to lifelong learning, and dedicating his time to create greater opportunities for the occupational therapy profession.

Discussion/Conclusion

As Kuzhilethu “Shep” Kshepakaran began his schooling in the 1950s through the 1960s, there was reshaping occurring in the profession on the national level. In the 1950s the field of OT shifted from using arts and crafts as a means for intervention to a method focusing on implementing rehabilitation techniques with medicine as a guide (Christiansen & Haertl, 2014). The rehabilitation movement increased the demands for health professionals. During the year of 1958, AOTA published a guide that leads to higher degrees for occupational therapists. The shift into the master’s level education impacted Shep as he was finishing his schooling during this time (AOTA, nd). In addition, this transition impacted the view of occupational therapy schooling creating advanced responsibilities and standards for occupational therapists to follow. In 1964, the emphasis of the scientific based movement led to the emergence of models, theories, and frames of references to help guide the profession and enhance education at the graduate level. This movement impacted Shep as he was a part of this transition and found that he needed to learn theory to have a better understanding of OT practice as he worked with students in the educational realm. Shep has always placed value in activity analysis that guides occupational intervention. Shep, coming from India, found that there was a need for occupational therapy

worldwide. As he completed his education at the University of Puget Sound, he dedicated himself to help create occupational therapy programs in several locations both in the United States and internationally. Because of his interest in teaching occupational therapy, Shep saw OT through a wider lens and began seeing the distinct value of the profession.

The Kawa theoretical model was used to guide the life history study process. The life of Kuzhilethu “Shep” Kshepakaran represents the metaphorical river within this model (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). For Shep, the water is represented by his personal priorities throughout his life which are expressed through the categories within this study. The emerging categories in the life of Shep have been a developmental process shown by his pursuits in following his personal beliefs, incorporating his perspectives and values as well as influencing occupational therapy practice. Shep’s positive outlook and experiences in the educational field are considered to be driftwood or influencing factors throughout his life. The success that Shep has had in his career were not because of the lack of struggles he faced but rather how he overcame them.

The interview with Kuzhilethu “Shep” Kshepakaran provided a deep insight and understanding of his life through his occupational therapy career. Through the use of the Kawa model (Turpin & Iwama, 2011), the researchers were able to gain a sense of turning points in Shep’s life and the barriers he faced which helped lead to his accomplishments as well as his contributions to the occupational therapy profession nationally. As stated in the literature review, there were multiple changes in the laws and regulations that happened in the beginning of Shep’s practice and during his career that influenced his path as an occupational therapist. Shep entered the occupational therapy field during a time when OT was facing changes, but still found success in staying true to himself and his practice. Shep adapted to the shifts in the OT field as well as transitions in the healthcare system. Shep was able to make contributions to the profession with

his involvement in the AOTA organization with his membership on the Representative Assembly, his teaching and development in occupational therapy programs, as well as the articles he helped to write over the course of his career. The significant number of accomplishments that Shep has provides guidance for his passion as he uses his job to help others. In his role as an influential occupational therapist, he remains a role model for OTs in the field. Shep is an important figure in the OT realm. Shep is truly an inspiration in the profession of OT leading him to make significant impacts on the evolution of occupational therapy as a whole.

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Appendix

Life History of Kuzhilethu “Shep” Kshepakaran M. Ed., OTR/S, CAPS, FAOTA

Codes

Personal

Travel
Family, Friends, Relationships
Home/Environment
Garden
India/Culture
Occupations

Perspectives

Activity Analysis
Past Experiences
Accomplishments
Leadership/Jobs
Questions & Answers

Practice Influences

Organizations
Getting Involved
Education
Legislation

Categories &

Themes

- Personal
 - Shep values his home and community life which has helped him appreciate all the relationships in his life.
 - Shep’s experiences regarding medical and health care professions has shaped the way he values task analysis and occupation based interventions.
 - Shep uses his diversity awareness to enhance his surroundings and dedication to the OT field.
- Perspectives
 - Shep articulated the important role that family, work colleagues and employers had on his ability to adapt and grow.
 - Through his determination, Shep used therapeutic use of self and cultural awareness to connect with his clients.
 - Shep’s experiences working in various facilities has motivated him to be a lifelong learner and to appreciate interprofessional collaboration.
- Practice Influences
 - Shep’s passion for multicultural diversity resulted in changes to program development and policies at the state and national level.
 - Shep’s determination for AOTA’s Representative Assembly and advocacy for community education resulted in greater opportunities for OT services
 - Shep’s commitment to the value of OT in healthcare and fought to expand services in all his work environments

Assertion

Shep values personal development and task analysis to develop a therapeutic relationship with his clients. This has shaped his career path by motivating him to advocate for others in all situations, enhancing his commitment to lifelong learning, and dedicating his time to create greater opportunities for the occupational therapy profession.