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Occupational Therapy: Celebrating 100 Years of Art and Science

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Occupational Therapy: Celebrating 100 Years of Art and Science

Keywords

Centennial, knowledge base, trends in the literature

Happy 100th birthday to the profession of occupational therapy (OT)! One hundred years, while seemingly a large span of time, is only really separated by a generation. My grandfather was 17 years old when the profession was founded, and a week ago we celebrated my daughter's 17th birthday. In this short span of time, OT has developed into an extraordinary profession that provides crucial services to solve the daily problems of people of all ages with varied diagnoses, life circumstances, and cultures.

The practice of occupational therapy is an art and a science. Not only have we grown the knowledge that makes up our scientific base, but we have grown in our art, as well. We have become better in our perception of the person as an integrated whole, and we have deepened both our respect for the rights and dignity of each person and our recognition of the individuality of our clients. At the same time, we understand the universality of the human condition, and we have grown in our ability to empathize with people while maintaining the necessary professional boundaries that allow for objective analysis of each person's situation (Mosey, 1996). This 100-year anniversary is an opportunity for the profession to celebrate how far we have come, analyze the changes we have gone through, and look forward to continuing to grow our knowledge base to better meet the needs of the people who seek our services.

Examining the Trends in the OT Knowledge Base

In her well-known Eleanor Clarke Slagle Lecture, Dr. Mary Reilly stated, "The best stock in trade that any critic has is a discerning eye for

trends and an ability to pattern and verbalize them" (Reilly, 1962, p. 2). Each year that I teach the Theory in OT course I take her advice and have my students explore the trends in the literature of the profession of OT. We start at 1950 and work our way through the current year. For this assignment, I have the students choose a year and gather information that includes the topics, types of inquiry, author credentials, and the number of authors for each of the articles that were published that year. The students bring that information to class and write it on a large piece of paper to display and present to the class (see Figures 1-3). As a class, we discuss the trends that have occurred in the knowledge base of the OT profession. Invariably, the class reaches the same conclusions that include the following main points.



Figure 1. Students recording data for each year.



Figure 2. Student 1 presenting trends data.



Figure 3. Student 2 presenting trends data.

Topics. Publications for the profession of OT started out mostly focused on descriptions of diagnoses. Some of the conditions discussed are signs of the times. For example, in the early publications there are articles describing frontal lobotomy, polio, and tuberculosis. In keeping with the rehabilitation movement, there are also many articles about blindness, adaptive equipment, and physical disability. In the 1960s, the topics shift to psychiatric care, culture, and pediatrics. The pediatric articles mainly discuss sensory integration, sensory processing, and cognitive-perceptual-motor skills. In the 1970s, there are still many articles about psychiatric care, and a focus on adolescent populations begins to emerge. The topic of assessment instrument development begins to be published, and some attention to geriatric care emerges in this decade, but there are still many articles on the topic of pediatrics, with reflexes beginning to be a popular focus. In the 1980s, the profession's embrace of the medical model becomes evident with numerous publications on the reliability and validity of tests and measurements. It is not until the early 1990s that articles about AIDs are published, although the condition had

been well known in the US for about 10 years. In the 1990s, occupational science is introduced, and by the end of this decade the use of the term “occupation” seems to replace all other terms, such as function, activity, and task. In the 2000s, evidence-based practice is introduced and eventually dominates the publication topics in every practice area. Research in OT education also begins to be published. Currently, the topics are still dominated by pediatric practice, with a focus on sensory processing and handwriting. Other current topics include research in rehabilitation and geriatrics with some current emerging research in cognition, driving, and the role of OT in new practice areas.

Types of inquiry. The types of inquiry used in the articles were initially descriptions of disabilities and case studies, which remained the main type of inquiry until the 1980s, when some publications began to focus on the reliability and validity of instruments. With the focus on occupational science in the 1990s, more qualitative methods were published. This was followed by an increase in quantitative studies ushered in by the evidence-based practice focus. Currently, there is a balanced distribution of research articles that use qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies.

Author credentials. The credentials of the authors have also changed over time. In the 1950s, many medical doctors were publishing descriptions of diagnoses in the OT literature. There were very few occupational therapists publishing, and those who did generally did not have an advanced degree. By the 1970s, however, most of the authors are occupational therapists with master's degrees, and

about a quarter of them have doctorate degrees. By the 1990s, most of the authors are occupational therapists with doctorate degrees, and by the 2000s there is almost always at least one author with a doctorate credential.

Number of authors. The number of authors per article has progressively increased from mostly single authors to multiple authors. Articles by one author are most prevalent until the 1980s, when there is an increase in the number of articles with two to three authors. By the 2000s, multiple authors per article is typical, and currently there are rarely any research articles published by single authors. In 2016, the average number of authors per research article was four.

In summary, the OT literature has grown from focusing on descriptions of disorders and treatment programs by single authors to qualitative and quantitative research articles that are mainly published by multiple authors. The current articles typically have at least one author with a doctorate degree. And, the topics of the literature have varied over the years depending on the diagnoses that are prevalent at the time and the populations that are of concern to society.

Continuing to Grow the Profession: The Contribution of OJOT

The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy (OJOT) was developed to continue to advance the knowledge base of OT in practice and education. OJOT is the first open-access, blind peer-review journal in the OT profession. Since its first publication in the fall of 2012, OJOT has published 46 Applied Research articles, 25 Topics in Education articles, six Guidelines for Practice and

Technological Guidelines, and nine Opinions in the Profession. We also continue to publish our ever-popular Occupation and the Artist column featuring occupational therapist and client artists who provide cover art and discussion in each issue. The submissions to OJOT have increased exponentially since the journal's inception, resulting in a decrease in our acceptance rate despite an increase in the number of articles we publish in each issue.

Since the inception of OJOT, numerous people have provided unwavering support for this endeavor. As we celebrate the 100th year of the profession, OJOT would also like to celebrate the generous contributions to the journal by some of the occupational therapists who were named to the list of the 100 influential people in OT

(<http://www.otcentennial.org/100-influential-people>). The work of OJOT has been generously supported by numerous people without whom we could not function. Among these contributors, seven of them were named to this prestigious list. Dr. Fred Sammons has been a generous sponsor of OJOT and has served on the Advisory Board since its inception. Dr. Barb Hemphill served on the Advisory Board, has been a sponsor, and has authored two articles. Dr. Jim Hinojosa has also served on the Advisory Board since the beginning of OJOT and has authored three articles, including an Opinions in the Profession article in this issue that discusses how society's philosophy has shaped OT practice for the past 100 years. Dr. Charlotte Royeen joined the Advisory Board of OJOT two years ago. She serves on the Editorial Review Board and is also an author of an Opinions in the Profession article published in this issue that

presents three self-reflection questions and 10 client-centered questions to use in OT assessment to promote eudemonic care. Dr. Paula Kramer recently joined the Editorial Review Board. And finally, Dr. Thomas F. Fisher coauthored an article that was published in OJOT in 2013 that discusses caregiver perceptions of a pediatric multidisciplinary feeding clinic, and Dr. Lucy Jane Miller is a co-author of an upcoming publication entitled “A Retrospective Pre-Post Treatment Study of Occupational Therapy Intervention for Children with Sensory Processing Challenges” that is currently in the copy editing phase of publication. Congratulations to these outstanding occupational therapists, and thank you not only for your contributions to OJOT, but also for the innovations, leadership, and scholarship that make you deserving of being on the list of 100 influential people in the profession of OT.

Conclusion

When the profession was only 40 years old, Dr. Mary Reilly (1962) contemplated questions about the direction the profession was headed for meeting society’s demands. Her first answer was that “we must recognize the fact that we have grown and have changed as we grew” (p. 4), and she concluded that,

Society demands that its problems be answered. Therefore, to any group that aspires to be a profession, there is placed before it a clear-cut mandate. This mandate says that if we wish to exist as a profession we must identify the vital need of man which we serve and the manner in which we serve it. (p. 4)

Dr. Reilly’s words still hold true for the profession of OT as we celebrate 100 years of growth and look forward to continuing to grow and adapt to meet the needs of the people we serve. As OJOT persists in its mission to provide open access to clinical solutions and educational resources, we hope to contribute to the continued growth of knowledge in both the art and the science of the OT profession.

[Diane Powers Durette, Ph.D., OTL, FAOTA](#) is the cofounder of OJOT and has served as Editor-in-Chief since the first issue was published in the fall of 2012. She is a professor in the Department of Occupational Therapy at Western Michigan University and was inducted into the American Occupational Therapy Association Roster of Fellows in 2016. Her areas of research include self awareness after acquired brain injury, evidenced-based practice, visual disorders, and cognitive rehab. She has extensive experience with scholarly writing, editing, and publishing.

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