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Dr. Lela Llorens

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The featured sponsor of this issue of *The Open Journal of Occupational Therapy* (OJOT) is Lela Llorens, PhD, OTR, FAOTA. Dr. Llorens, Professor Emeritus of the Department of Occupational Therapy at San Jose State University, is well known for her rich history of contributions as a clinician, scholar, educator, and administrator in occupational therapy, a career that has spanned over 50 years. It is indeed an honor to feature her as a sponsor of the Winter 2013 issue of OJOT.

Dr. Llorens began her career following the completion of a Bachelor of Science degree in Occupational Therapy at Western Michigan University (WMU). At the time of her enrollment, WMU's occupational therapy educational program was one of only five in the United States. She fondly recalls the profound influence that Marion R. Spear, the founding program director, had on her professional development. She recalls that Miss Spears had high standards for her students, including personal decorum, academic achievement, and service to the community. She took a personal interest in her students and, according to Dr. Llorens, "instilled the kind of loyalty that you didn't want to let down." Dr. Llorens is able to instill the same inspiration that Miss Spear did for her through the WMU Foundation's Lela Williams Llorens Scholarship, awarded through the Department of Occupational Therapy.

After completing her degree in occupational therapy, Dr. Llorens pursued advanced degrees with the completion of an MA in Vocational Rehabilitation from Wayne State University and a PhD from Walden University. Dr. Llorens also holds a Certificate in Gerontology from San Jose State University.

Throughout her career, Dr. Llorens was nationally recognized for her contributions as a clinician, educator, scholar, researcher, and author, and for her leadership as an administrator in higher education. She is the recipient of the American Occupational Therapy Association's (AOTA) highest award, the Award of Merit,

which she received in 1986. Her exploration of the developmental process, including a focus on cognitive-perceptual-motor dysfunction, led her to articulate the “Developmental Theory of Occupational Therapy,” which was delivered to the profession in the 1969 Eleanor Clarke Slagle lecture. In addition, Dr. Llorens is an inductee of the Roster of Fellows of the AOTA and a recipient of the A. Jean Ayres Research Award and the AOTF Presidential Commendation Award. In a recent interview, Dr. Llorens recalled that every position she held as an occupational therapist encouraged her to practice, research, and write. She credits the mentors with whom she worked early in her career for influencing her to pursue these scholarly activities. She notes that she began practicing at a time when “there were more questions than answers” and her clinical curiosity, paired with her motivation to improve the lives of the children with whom she worked, inspired her to begin asking questions about development. Dr. Eli Z. Rubin, an early mentor, encouraged her to ask and answer those questions. She participated in an interdisciplinary team to explore fundamental questions about working with emotionally disturbed children.

In 1985, as chair of the AOTA Research Advisory Council, Dr. Llorens co-authored an article exploring the current state of and recommendations for the future of research in occupational therapy. Reflecting back on those recommendations, made almost three decades earlier, Dr. Llorens recognized the many accomplishments the occupational therapy profession has made. These include the establishment of doctorate level degrees, both clinical doctorates and PhD programs of study, which have helped to build the body of basic and applied science in the profession. Additionally, she noted the value of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and explained how they are often used together in the same study. She believes this has allowed a better management of the knowledge created in the profession. Lastly, Dr. Llorens believes that the emergence of the study of Occupational Science has further strengthened the body of knowledge related to occupation.

Dr. Llorens suggests that research in the future should focus on evidence-based practice to better validate the effectiveness of interventions used in occupational therapy. In addition, she recommends that there be continuing research on the impact of occupational therapy practice in the community to protect our identity and recognition as a viable profession in this area.

Dr. Llorens recognizes the benefits of the open access offered by OJOT, as it provides information to practitioners and researchers in a format that is increasingly accepted and preferred by the professional community.

Since retiring from San Jose State University in 1996, Dr. Llorens has continued to contribute to the profession by being involved in professional organizations, mentoring occupational therapy students, consulting, and guest lecturing. Not wanting to be a “hanger on”, Dr. Llorens has transitioned her talents to other pursuits in retirement. She is an active volunteer and participates in a writing club in which she works on writing her “memoir stories.” There can be no doubt that her writings are replete with memories of trailblazing, questioning, advocating, discovering, articulating, and adapting in the field of occupational therapy.

Written by: Molly Bathje, MS, OTR/L

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