The Henry B. Favill School of Occupations and Eleanor Clarke Slagle

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During the World War I era, Eleanor Clarke Slagle directed Special Courses in Curative Occupations and Recreation at the Henry B. Favill School of Occupations, in cooperation with the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, in Chicago, Illinois. This paper describes this pioneer course in occupational therapy education. The influence of the settlement house setting, course descriptions from the school's bulletin, and Slagle's philosophy with related experiences drawn from her correspondence and curriculum vitae are presented. The program of study was short-lived (1915 to 1920). There are indications that although this program was highly regarded under Slagle's leadership, it was not continued after her resignation and departure from Chicago in 1920.

Eleanor Clarke Slagle

Occupational therapy professional education had embryonic beginnings at Hull House, a settlement house in Chicago, Illinois. "The first real school for the professional training of occupational therapists was established—the Henry B. Favill School, Chicago, of which your director [Eleanor Clarke Slagle] was the head and its chief inspiration" (Kidner, 1928, p. 185). These were the words of T. B. Kidner, past president of the American Occupational Therapy Association, in an address delivered before the Annual Institute for Chief Occupational Therapists of New York, March 21 to 23, 1928.

By the late 1800s, the settlement house concept begun in England had spread to the United States. Through social services provided by well-to-do young men and women, this concept was hoped to solve social and industrial problems brought on by modern conditions of urban life. Jane Addams, a social service worker, believed in this experimental humanitarian approach and, with Ellen Gates Starr, founded Hull House in 1889. The sociocultural concerns that were dealt with in Hull House included initiation of court reforms; assistance to immigrants adjusting to their new environments; provision of safer places for social gatherings; and development of more effective child labor laws and programs to improve the care of persons with mental illness (Addams, 1910).

On May 10, 1908, the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy was established in Hull House, with Dr. Graham Taylor as its director. Taylor (1936) described the purpose of this school as being "to promote through instruction, training, investigation and publication, the efficiency of civic, philanthropic and social work and the improvement of living and working conditions" (p. 158). It was in conjunction with these programs and in this atmosphere of humanitarian social service that the Society for Mental Hygiene established an occupational department in 1909. The purpose of this endeavor was the prevention of mental breakdown. Staff members recognized that many persons referred to them needed occupation for therapeutic, economic, and diversional reasons. The staff members were unable to find a sufficient number of placements for their clients with mental illness who had the capacity for productive work. A workshop was started by the occupational department as an experiment. Follow-up data on these clients showed this experiment to be so successful that the staff members realized its beneficial potential for persons with other disabilities.

As a result of this positive outcome, the society decided to engage a teacher with foresight and suitable training to initiate a course of study for persons who would direct other such occupational departments, including workshops. In 1915, the society recruited Eleanor Clarke Slagle to return to Chicago as the director of what was to be called the Henry B. Favill School of Occupations (Thomson, 1917).
Background

An experimental course in occupations and amusements for attendants in public hospitals for the insane was offered for the first time in the summer of 1908 at the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy (Twentieth Biennial Report, 1909). The course was offered to attendants, rather than to nurses, because the attendant was viewed as the constant companion of the patient. This course was organized by Julia Lathrop, social worker and assistant to Addams, with the help of a local rabbi, Rabbi Hirsch. The philosophy of the program was to substitute "the educational for the custodial idea in the daily care of the mentally unsound" (Twentieth Biennial Report, 1909, p. 58). The methods were those used by the best teachers of little children, that is, the teaching of the use of muscles and mind together in games, exercises, and handicrafts. It was recognized that games and exercises were the most effective stimuli for certain patients; for others, it was the making of objects. The course of study included lectures on the educational value of occupation, both work and play, and daily practice in various forms of suitable handicrafts, games, and exercises. The attitude toward the care of persons with mental illness was that they needed to be restimulated by occupation, instruction, and amusement (Twentieth Biennial Report, 1909).

The scope and approach of this course of study were supported by Dr. Adolph Meyer, a psychiatrist. Meyer worked with the Hull House group in relation to his interest in the care of persons with mental illness in Illinois state hospitals. Meyer, working at Kankakee State Hospital, had observed that occupational therapy was limited to housekeeping, sewing, and carpet making. He recognized that some mental disorders were due to conflicts through poor adaptations, and in these conditions, training in normal activities and development of productive interests could bring new outlooks to the person for use outside of the hospital (Chicago School of Civics, 1908–1911).

Slagle registered at Hull House for study in social work. During visits to Kankakee State Hospital, she became concerned about the deleterious effects of idleness on the patients she observed. With the advice and encouragement of Lathrop and Addams, Slagle enrolled in the course in occupations and amusements and successfully completed her studies during the summer session of June 26 to July 28, 1911 (Chicago School Yearbook, 1908–1911). In 1912, Slagle returned to administer the fifth summer session of the course that she had so recently taken.

Several years later, Slagle reflected on the importance of this course of study in correspondence with Dr. William Rush Dunton, Jr. They were organizing the National Society for the Promotion of Occupational Therapy during this time. In a letter dated May 4, 1917, Slagle wrote:

"To go back to the School of Civics and Philanthropy course given here for several years, I want to say that the interest stimulated in all parts of the country in the normalizing effect of occupational work, was due entirely to this course which covered only six weeks. Miss Tracy had at that time started her work with nurses at Adams Nervine and I do not agree with Miss Tracy at all that this work must be carried on by a nurse. A nurse's training would be important, as additional education along any line gives a better background; but if the nurse or teacher or any person who is giving this work does not understand the problem which she is seeking to help interpret along these lines, it won't matter very much how she may excel in craftsmanship. It is the problem of the individual and of special groups that must be interpreted. (Slagle, 1917)"

The "Miss Tracy" referred to in Slagle’s letter was Susan E. Tracy, a nurse educator who published Studies in Invalid Occupation in 1910 (Licht, 1967), the first American book on occupational therapy. Tracy was an influential pioneer in establishing occupational therapy in this country (Licht, 1967).

The Henry B. Favill School of Occupations

The Henry B. Favill School of Occupations was established in the experimental occupational department of the Illinois Society for Mental Hygiene. In 1917, the school was named as a memorial to Dr. Favill, a physician in Chicago who had taken a keen interest in preventive medicine, public health, and civic reform. Favill had served as the first vice-president of the society. Additionally, the work of the occupational department had its beginning in his office; he was supportive and provided steadying counsel during its formative years (Favill, 1917).

When Slagle returned to develop and head the Favill School, she concurrently served as director of occupational therapy in Illinois’s state mental hospitals. In working with patients with mental illness in these settings, she introduced habit training, a form of treatment that she had developed in 1913 and 1914 while at the Phipps Psychiatric Clinic in Baltimore. Slagle’s system of habit training was used to train regressed and deteriorated mental patients in "decent" bodily and social habits. Handwork, games, and organized play were an important part of this 24-hr schedule of supervised and regulated activities (Slagle, 1934).

As director of the school from 1915 to 1920, Slagle drew upon her academic background of social work, her course of study in occupations, and her work experience with patients with mental illness. On her curriculum vitae, Slagle noted that she had "organized a training school for Occupational Therapists called the Henry B. Favill School of Occupations. Work was designed primarily for mental patients but the demand was so great that all types were admitted" (Slagle, no date, no page). The course for occupational therapists was sponsored by the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, Hull House, in cooperation...
with the Henry B. Favill School of Occupations of the Illinois Society for Mental Hygiene.

In a letter to Dunton, Slagle (1918) wrote,

I meant definitely that gymnastic work should be work and not play, that social dancing and all recreational and play activities should be under the definite head of recreations. I regarded all social activities as important, very important, but I do deplore more than I can possibly make you understand the confusion that exists in the minds of persons relative to gymnastic work which is given for the purpose of work and habit training and gymnastic purposes and that which is given as physical culture which seems always to be confused with social arts and graces. . . . I am definitely not opposed to play activities, so definitely in favor that I recommend everywhere that trained recreational workers should be included on the staff of the occupational department.

From its inception, the school included in its course of instruction medical, physiological, psychological, and sociological principles as well as arts and crafts and physical recreation. Principles of administration, organization, and management also had a prominent place in the curriculum. The course was 5 months long and was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of theoretical and technical training at the school, and the second part consisted of practical work in state institutions or civil hospitals. The technical courses were given in the morning and the lecture courses were offered in the afternoon at the school clinics for 8 to 10 hr a week. Each student spent one period, from 2 to 3 hr a week, under supervision in a selected institution.

The lecture courses were Administration of Charitable Institutions, Medical Agencies in Relation to Social Service, Industrial and Public Hygiene, Principles of Case Work, The Psychology of Play, Psychopathic Principles in Occupational and Recreational Treatment, and Hospital Organization and Management.

The technical courses were Kinesiology, Folk Dancing, Gymnastics, Games, Hand Work, and Organization of Occupational and Recreational Departments.

The program of instruction was designed to prepare the students to treat persons with physical or mental illness, soldiers with disabilities, and school-age children with learning disabilities (“Special Courses,” 1917).

The Favill School had a particularly unique feature—the community sheltered workshop, described previously, which had served to inspire the inception of the school. Instruction was given to approximately 25 outpatients, who were described as “mentally defective” individuals in good physical health who engaged in such occupations as basketry, weaving, cement casting, toy making, embroidery, and furniture making (Staff, 1919). It was the recognition that occupational therapists needed to be educated to develop and direct such programs of treatment that had served as the driving force behind the Favill School of Occupations.

During this era of intense program development in Chicago and in Illinois, Slagle’s scope of influence was illustrated in her curriculum vitae:

1917: (2 weeks) (On Leave). Invited by Military (2 visits) Hospitals Commission, Canada, to visit and observe work in Military Hospitals and to make recommendations relative to the extension of Occupational Therapy at Toronto University.

1918: By special arrangement, conducted and organized first Red Cross class in Occupational Therapy under Chicago Chapter. Work increased so rapidly that it was necessary to merge with State work and Henry B. Favill Training School. By invitation of the Surgeon-General’s Office, Washington, D.C., became Consultant in Occupational Therapy and Pre-Vocational work to the Department of Rehabilitation. Accepted appointment in December as “Supervisor of Aides,” duties being to study the needs and help in plans of organization of Occupational Therapy. Visited and reported on twenty-one hospitals. Resigned, account of serious attack of influenza.

1919–1921: Was President of National Society for the Promotion of Occupational Therapy. (Slagle, no date)

In his musings on “The Passing of the Henry B. Favill School,” Dunton (1921) said,

The Henry B. Favill School was built up by careful work and at one time was the best place in the United States where instruction in occupational therapy could be secured. Its graduates, who served as aides, were considered the best trained in Army service. This does not mean that graduates of the Boston, Philadelphia, or of the temporary school organized in New York by Mrs. (Harold) Mansfield were not quite as satisfactory; but they entered upon their work somewhat later, and it must be admitted that the pioneer work was done by the Henry B. Favill School, which supplied the stimulus and model for the others.

It is, therefore, greatly to be regretted that this excellent institution should be allowed to fall from the high place it occupied, or to pass away entirely.

It would appear, however, that, upon the resignation of its Director, Mrs. Slagle, and her departure from Chicago, that no one felt it his or her duty to combat the influences which were apparently bent upon the destruction of the School” (pp. 77–78).

Dunton invited an alumna of the program, Geraldine R. Lermit, to express her thoughts on the closing of the school. Lermit was the chief aide of occupational therapy at the United States Public Health Service Hospital in Chicago. She wrote,

Practically all the Reconstruction Aides from the Middle West received their training from the School, under the inspiration of its Director, Mrs. Eleanor Clarke Slagle, who in 1915 left her position at the Phipps Clinic, Johns Hopkins, to come to the middle west as Executive Director for the Henry B. Favill School, and if it is not too boastful for one of its graduates to claim, there was no group of Aides better fitted in this country to carry on the needs which rapidly and multifariously arose.

The remarkable consecration to the work of Occupational Therapy which characterized Mrs. Slagle, acted almost invariably as a deep personal inspiration to everyone whose work was taken under her direction and it is perhaps, because of that effect, that so many of us felt that without her the School could not continue, at least as we had known it.

At all events, when the war was over and the unusual needs created by it had vanished, the need for training seemed to fall off and the Henry B. Favill School proceeded to die a natural death from lack of recruits and like many another worthwhile institution brought to a high efficiency by war needs, it passed out of existence early in 1920, shortly after the New York Society of Occupational Therapy had obtained Mrs. Slagle as Executive Secretary.

(Lermit as cited by Dunton, 1921, pp. 78–79)

Summary

When professional occupational therapy educational programs were developed later in university and college set-
tions, similarities to the Favill School program could be recognized in the scope of curriculum content and in format of delivery with the use of lectures, applied laboratory experiences, and supervised clinical practice.

In reviewing this vignette of occupational therapy history related to the beginning of professional education, it becomes evident that the Favill School program was a model for the future. Based on solid educational principles; incorporating broad-based theoretical and practical elements; addressing physical, psychological, and sociological problems of treatment; and preparing students for organization and administrative responsibilities, it offered a substantive course of study under the eminent direction of Eleanor Clarke Slagle.

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