Looking Back


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This article presents a content analysis of 26 Slagle lectures, representing 30 years. Lectures were analyzed for primary, secondary, and tertiary themes, and eight recurrent themes were identified: practice, professionalism, education, philosophy/ideology, theory, research, marketing, and history. Implications of these findings for role definition and professional status are addressed.

O ccupational therapy appears to be in an era of specialization. Within each area of specialization, there are myriad areas of concern, and published papers tend to reflect these special interests. As a result, it may be difficult to get an overview of the profession. It is conceivable that there are central themes or issues of concern that run throughout the occupational therapy literature. It is assumed that these themes may be reflected by the Eleanor Clarke Slagle lectures.

The Eleanor Clarke Slagle lecture is the highest scholarly honor awarded in our profession. Its purpose is to stimulate interest, develop improved methods of practice, and encourage participation in research, education, and all other aspects of occupational therapy (Eleanor Clarke Slagle lectures, 1973). Cromwell (1977) stated that, as a body of scholarly work, it reflects the progression of the profession’s development and the emphases or directions of [the] theoretical and practice activities since 1955. From a review of the themes of the lectures, one can elicit a graphic model of the influences that have marked and perhaps guided our educational and clinical programs of occupational therapy” (p. 648)

Method

Using a two-level content analysis, the written body of the Slagle lectures 1955–1985 was examined. Content analysis is defined by Berelson (1971) as “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” (pp. 18–19). No lecture was awarded in 1964, 1968, 1970, 1977, and 1982; therefore, the total number of lectures subjected to analysis was 26.

On the first level of the analysis, the text of the lectures was reviewed, and that process led to the development of several categories representing general themes of concern or interest within the profession. On the second level, each lecture was individually analyzed and its primary, secondary, and tertiary themes were identified. The primary theme was determined by both the title and the introductory statements denoting the purpose of the lecture. The secondary theme, if present, was identified as that offered in support of the primary theme. A tertiary theme was defined as a separate topic area used in support of the primary or secondary theme.

Results

The following eight themes or categories were identified from the first level of analysis:

1. Practice—the performance and delivery of occupational therapy, either clinically or administratively
2. Professionalism—professional identity, status, characteristics, and/or standards

3. Education—the teaching and/or learning process of students in occupational therapy

4. Philosophy/Ideology—the body of ideas or the critique and analysis of fundamental beliefs related to the nature of man and society, and the nature of occupational therapy in regard to these issues

5. Theory—"a system of assumptions, accepted principles, and rules of procedure devised to analyze, predict or explain the nature or behavior of a specified set of phenomena" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1982, p. 1269) for which scientific evidence has been accumulated

6. Research—increasing the body of knowledge of occupational therapy through scholarly and systematic scientific inquiry

7. Marketing—merchandising and delivery of occupational therapy in the health care system

8. History—pertaining to past events in the profession

Table 1 shows the frequency of occurrence of these eight themes.

Discussion

Some lectures contained more than three themes. However, these additional themes were deemed to be of minor importance. Minor themes were not a focus of this study.

Practice is the most prevalent theme discussed, appearing 16 times. Eight lectures focused on the role of the therapist in various aspects of practice: as administrator (Sokolov, 1956); in precocial evaluation (Wegg, 1959); the role and function of the occupational therapist (Yerxa, 1966); in psychiatric treatment (Ackley, 1962); as a health agent either in traditional settings (West, 1967) or in community prevention programs (Finn, 1971); and the development of the role of the practicing therapist (Fiorentino, 1974; Hollis, 1979).

The other eight lectures addressed practice either as a secondary or tertiary theme. Three concerned the implications for practice as it related to their primary theme of theory. Rood (1958) related practice to neuromuscular theory; Llorens (1969) related practice to developmental theory; and Moore (1975) related neurophysiological theory to practice. Two discussed equipment and devices used in practice (Stattel, 1955; Zimmerman, 1960); one lecture addressed clinical affiliations as an arena to develop practice techniques (Brunyate, 1957); one examined the implications of touch (Huss, 1976); and one addressed the process of clinical reasoning in treatment (Rogers, 1983). Throughout the 30 years of Slagle lectures, no single encompassing practice role definition has been identified and agreed on to the satisfaction of the profession.

Professionalism is discussed by 10 of the lecturers. Four lecturers attempted to validate occupational therapy as a profession (Ackley, 1962; Fiorentino, 1974; Gilfoyle, 1984; Yerxa, 1966). Three addressed the need for occupational therapy to work toward validation through the fulfillment of criteria for a profession (Baum, 1980; Fidler, 1965; Johnson, 1972). The other three lecturers focused on professional responsibility; that is, whether it was our responsibility to change with the times (West, 1967), the responsibility of faculty to engage in scholarly or scientific pursuits (Jantzen, 1973), or the responsibility of therapists to socialize new graduates into the profession (Brunyate, 1957).

Professionalism, then, is the second most frequently discussed theme in the Slagle lectures. The subject has been controversial, as evidenced by the different opinions encountered in this analysis. Occupational therapy has not yet come to terms with its role or its status identity.

Eight lectures addressed the education of occupational therapy students, either focusing on educational process or educational content. Educational process was addressed in five lectures. Brunyate (1957) discussed the functions of the clinical affiliations; Fidler (1965) delineated the criteria of the educational process; Jantzen (1973) made a plea to consider education as a career choice; Baum (1980) expressed the need for clinicians and educators to engage in dialogues toward common goals; and Gilfoyle (1984) advocated action toward making a graduate degree the entry level into the profession. Content, or subject matter in the curriculum, were the themes in three lectures. Rood (1958) suggested the need for advanced study centers to stimulate professional growth. Finn (1971) and Moore (1975) stressed the need for curriculum adjustments to meet changing needs in practice and new scientific developments, respectively. As evidenced by the variety of themes in this category, the growth and development of content and process in occupational therapy education has been a stimulating, ongoing concern and has assisted the profession in trying to keep abreast with the needs in health care.

Eight of the lectures addressed ideas about or inquired into the nature of occupational therapy (Ayres, 1963; Bing, 1981; Gilfoyle, 1984; King, 1978; Mosey, 1985; Reilly, 1962; Sokolov, 1956; Yerxa, 1966). Two were concerned with the value or worth

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1 The dates given with Slagle lecturers in the text are the year in which the lecture was delivered; in some cases, the year of delivery is earlier than the year of publication cited in the reference list. All lectures from 1955-1984 can be found in A Professional Legacy, published by AOTA (1985).
of occupational therapy to society (Sokolov, 1956; Reilly, 1961), while one concerned the internal values of the profession (Gilfoyle, 1984). King (1978) addressed the need for a unifying concept for occupational therapy. However, it is unclear at times whether this concept is based on philosophy or theory, because the terms are used interchangeably. Bing (1981), mentioned the philosophy of the founders of occupational therapy in his historically oriented lecture. Rogers (1983) formulated a "conceptual framework for guiding the development of a clinical science for occupational therapy" (p. 601). Existentialism is the only school of philosophy mentioned in any lecture that focused on a particular view of the nature of man (Yerxa, 1966). Mosey (1985) addressed two approaches to the process of articulating the identity of the profession—monism and pluralism—and expressed a preference for adopting the latter. Although other lectures vaguely alluded to philosophical and/or ideological concepts of thought, those comments could not be considered as tertiary themes because they were tangential.

Six lectures addressed theory as their primary theme. Theory, as a category, was not found as a secondary or a tertiary theme in any of the lectures. Rood (1958), Ayres (1963), and Llorens (1969) presented lectures on neuromuscular theory, perceptual-motor theory, and developmental theory, respectively. Moore (1975) addressed neurophysiological theory, focusing on the limbic system. Reilly (1961) presented her theoretical formulation based on the concepts of work, occupation, and play. King (1978) presented her concept of adaptive responses as a comprehensive theory on which the profession can base its practice. Each of these lecturers attempted to develop a rationale for why the profession should adopt her theoretical orientation.

Research appeared as a theme four times but never as a primary theme. The need for research was alluded to in various other lectures but not with enough significance to warrant categorizing it on the tertiary level. Four lecturers addressed the need for increasing research to validate practice or theory (Ayres, 1963; Jantzen, 1973; Reilly, 1961; Stattel, 1955). No reference is made to methodology, practitioner preparation, or resources for engaging in research. There is no evidence in the Slagle lectures that research has yet become enough of a primary theme or professional concern to compete with practice, education, or the like. The lecturers may have been aware of the interests of their audiences, who are primarily practitioners.

Marketing occupational therapy in the health care system was the primary theme of two lectures (Baum, 1980; Johnson, 1972). It did not appear as a secondary or tertiary theme in any Slagle lecture. Johnson for-

Table 1
Themes in the Eleanor Clarke Slagle Lectures, 1955-1985

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Professionalism</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Philosophy/Ideology</th>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Marketing</th>
<th>History</th>
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<tr>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>Brunyate</td>
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<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Rood</td>
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<td>1959</td>
<td>Wegg</td>
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<td>Reilly</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Ackley</td>
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<td>Yerxa</td>
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<td>1973</td>
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<td>1975</td>
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<td>1981</td>
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<td>1983</td>
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<td>1984</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
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Note: 1 = primary theme; 2 = secondary theme; 3 = tertiary theme.
ulated a model of strategy to increase the market for occupational therapy. Baum advocated that occupational therapy direct its efforts toward becoming an autonomous profession with an independent identity contributing to the health and care of the individual.

Both lecturers used "professionalism" as a secondary theme. This may be an indication that a new concern needs to be linked with an old or familiar one to be introduced into the profession. This theme has appeared twice in 13 years and therefore cannot be considered a major professional concern at this time in this body of written work.

The history of the profession was the primary topic in only one Slagle lecture (Bing, 1981). It recounts the development of occupational therapy from "recurring patterns and themes of the past 200 years" (p. 500) to the founding and development of the profession in this century. One other lecturer (Hollis, 1979) used a historical framework to recount her professional career. She offers an intimate and personal approach to changes in the health care delivery system.

The fact that history is the newest area of concern or theme indicates that the profession is now considered to be established and to have a history. Future Slagle lectures may tell us whether this theme is a true interest area of occupational therapists.

Summary

Five categories are identified as major concerns or themes of occupational therapy over the past 30 years of Slagle lectures: practice, professionalism, education, philosophy/ideology, and theory. Although research did appear in the first lecture, it was not frequently addressed thereafter. Marketing and history, appearing in later lectures, are not considered major themes. The future will indicate the importance to the profession of these last three categories.

Each category affects or is affected by the others. For example, practice affects or is affected by theory, professionalism, philosophy/ideology, and education. Professionalism is related to practice, education, and philosophy/ideology. Education is influenced by theory, practice, professionalism, and philosophy/ideology.

Two particular recurrent concerns deserve special comment: role definition and professional validation. Of the 56 primary, secondary, and tertiary themes, eight deal with role definition and seven with professional validation. Combined, these two concerns account for 15 (or 27%) of the themes in all the lectures. These concerns are combined because both are strongly related to elements of professional identification: identification of role and status.

The hesitancy to pursue investigation of these issues over the past 30 years may indicate a reluctance on the part of the profession to identify itself. This lack of a strong identification has far-reaching consequences. For instance, if the role of occupational therapy were clearly defined, research might be more focused, marketing the service might be more easily accomplished, professional status would be made clearer, and theoretical bodies of knowledge could be used more effectively to substantiate the practice of occupational therapy. It is therefore curious that, with the interrelatedness of these major themes, the prevalence of discussions regarding role definition, and the continuing concern about professional status, a clear identification of occupational therapy has not been determined.

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References


