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From Where I Came

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From Where I Came

**Description**
Ancestral places provide a powerful glimpse into the lives of our descendants. Visiting ancestral places may impart a greater understanding of the generation or generations that came before and therefore provide connectivity. An ancestral place may be a birthplace, family roots, culture, or tradition. It starts with a deep longing to find this connectivity and then moves to traveling to *From Where I Came*.

*From Where I Came* is a website ([http://fromwhereicame.wordpress.com/](http://fromwhereicame.wordpress.com/)) that resulted from a journey to family roots in Lithuania. It answers the questions of why a person longs for specific foods, prefers a particular terrain and weather, and feels comfortable in a certain lifestyle. It invites others to tell their story of culture, heritage, and self-identity.

Occupational therapy students distributed surveys via e-mail or in person to willing participants within two weeks of interviews or written submissions to the From Where I Came website. Four surveys were distributed and all participants returned the surveys with every question answered. Each survey consisted of six questions on a five-point Likert scale that highlighted topics of social connectedness, cultural discovery, and personal identity related to each participant’s experience of submitting their story or being an interviewee. Three open-ended questions were included at the end of the survey to capture participant thoughts and suggestions intended for further research.

**Disciplines**
Occupational Therapy

**Rights**
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From Where I Came

Connect your heritage to place

http://fromwhereicame.wordpress.com

Authors:
Kevin Daverman OTS, Brielyn Pager OTS, and Linda A. Hunt Faculty Advisor
The title of the proposal
From Where I Came: Connect to Heritage

A statement of methodology

Occupational therapy students must fulfill an Innovative Practice Project starting fall, 2013 and continue spring 2014. They will commit to the following project description:

Project provides an opportunity to help people articulate their stories about traveling to one’s ancestral home. It may be about heritage, traditions, culture, or just what it means personally to return to one’s place of heritage. It will require visiting with individuals of all ages, interviewing, and helping each person write their story of what it means to “go home”. It may include going through photographs and listing to family narratives. Edited stories will be posted on a website. Possible partners include Vietnamese Community in Oregon, The Portland-Suzhou Sister City Association, Nā Hawaiʻi -- Hawaiʻian Cultural Awareness Education, Inc., Oregon Jewish Museum, and Latino Community Association. This is an opportunity to connect to others of one’s culture in a meaningful way. Students will be involved in outreach to minorities in the community.

Students will self-identify minority partners. Depending upon the story to be told, the students will use the following technology options: video recording of an interview, voice recording of interview, selection of pictures, photos, and other meaningful artifacts to be photographed, and/or a written story about the experience. With the client’s consent, the student will upload information created onto a website designed for this purpose. Students will be involved in outreach to minorities in the community.

A statement on the importance of the research or practice

This website provides an opportunity to write about traveling to one’s ancestral home. It may be about heritage, traditions, and culture. It was developed it because the proposal author found the experience of visiting the town where her dad, grandparents, and great grandparents were born and raised so moving that she wanted to share the visit with others. She believed that this could be a forum for others to talk about their experiences as well. Plus, those thinking about such a journey may learn from what others found helpful planning travels. Therefore, the goal of the website is to be inspired to discover one’s heritage. See draft of the website at: http://fromwhereicame.wordpress.com/

Narrative approaches to understanding the human condition are gaining advocates in the social sciences, mental health, and gerontology. Reminiscence is part of this narrative approach and is defined here as the recall of personally experienced episodes from one’s past. Reminiscence has continued to attract researchers and practitioners ever since Butler’s (1963) seminal article on the life review. Currently, reminiscence is investigated and/or applied by several disciplines, including occupational therapy, nursing, recreational therapy, social work, education, theology, gerontology, and several divisions of psychology (e.g., developmental, cognitive, personality), to name only a few (Webster, Bohlmeijer, & Westerhof, 2010). Missing history in one’s life may diminish one’s self-identity. Having continuity of one’s ancestral history and experiencing a cultural of place may help to strengthen identity.
Because reminiscence theory, research, and practice are important multidisciplinary topics of relevance to many types of research and application issues, it is planned that the work will be sustained with new students and interviewees each year. This Berglund Center Fellowship will launch the process for how this project should be implemented and evaluated each year. It will help improve the existing website through the Berglund Center’s expertise. This proposed project will assess the impact of the Internet upon individuals and their communities worldwide as people explore various international locations of birth and communicate their stories internationally. Here, the Internet is instrumental in fostering communication, teaching about cultural experience, and learning information that promotes self-identify and pride in one’s heritage. Plus, the long-term goal is to bring students from other disciplines into the project including anthropology and social work students. Future research will examine how various ethnic groups relate stories; how much information is disclosed; and identify common themes.

The successful completion of this project will allow Pacific University students in the School of Occupational therapy to become aware of the power of reminiscing with clients. They will learn how they may carry this knowledge and skill set into occupational therapy practice. Hopefully, with students joining from various Pacific University programs they will learn how other disciplines provide another lens to the story that is elicited from clients.

A bibliography to show an awareness of current practices or relevant materials pertaining to the application for applied research.

The publication of Robert Butler's seminal article in 1963 regarding life review processes launched a desire to understand and elucidate the role of memories in the lives of older adults. Parker (1995) proposed promoting a better understanding of reminiscence processes through a framework that included continuity throughout one’s life. Missing history in one’s life may diminish one’s self-identity. Having continuity of one’s ancestral history and experiencing a culture of place may help to strengthen identity. Reminiscence here is viewed as cognitive activities across the life span of self and ancestors where the proposed project may enhance the mental and emotional health of others. Those reading the website postings may also find mental and emotional health by learning about from where their ancestors came even though they are not able to travel there themselves. The development of this website may be helpful in establishing reminiscing groups. It appears that group reminiscence leads to greater frequency and enjoyment of reminiscing, and to an interest in continuing further peer group activity (Sherman, 1987). The website may be beneficial to share in group therapy and launch insightful conversations about culture. This has merit for exploration by students for group activities serving older adults in Pacific University’s Gerontology and Occupational Therapy programs.

A description of necessary equipment and how that equipment will be provided

Equipment will include the iPad. The School of Occupational Therapy has purchased an iPad; one more may be necessary to serve two students. The iPad also provides a camera. Apps may need to be downloaded for recording interviews and other media. Photoshop will need to be available for editing pictures of people, places, and artifacts.
A description of assessment processes

The experience will be evaluated by participant surveys and interviews. Students will write a reflection paper and will be interviewed by a faculty member to capture comprehensive reflections of the experience. Outcomes will include:

1. Development of a professional website for content.
2. Written stories and media posted on the website.
3. Qualitative and quantitative data of the experience.

Methods

Occupational therapy students distributed surveys via e-mail or in person to willing participants within two weeks of interviews or written submissions to the From Where I Came website. Four surveys were distributed and all participants returned the surveys with every question answered. Each survey consisted of six questions on a five-point Likert scale that highlighted topics of social connectedness, cultural discovery, and personal identity related to each participant’s experience of submitting their story or being an interviewee. Three open-ended questions were included at the end of the survey to capture participant thoughts and suggestions intended for further research.

Results

The quantitative data results showed sharing an ancestral story was an 87.5% positive experience for the four participants as 21/24 questions were marked “agree” or “highly agree” (see Table 1). Among the responses received from the three open-ended questions, individuals wrote:

1. Question regarding sharing a visit to their ancestral home:
   “It made me really think about the thread of where I came from and how that impacts who I am today.”
   “Makes me more grateful for my ancestors and want to learn more about them and I appreciate them.”
   “Understanding one's roots helps one understand oneself.”
   “I realized it was nice being able to say out loud what I think and feel about my family, heritage, and just overall culture.”

2. Question regarding participating in this project:
   “…Has also made me realize that I want to know more about my family's experiences growing up and persevering in communism.”

3. Question regarding the interviewing process:
   “Maybe have topics ready such as food, transportation, family, landscape, etc. ready because it helps spark observations one had or reflections that don’t necessary come up with an open ended question.”
“I think having interview questions that were answered and then put in a summary would make more sense than the tedious task of writing out every word that I said during the interview.”

Conclusion

In a time when technology is deeply integrated within society, the internet age may lead to depersonalization if life stories are not shared. From Where I Came was created to allow people to share experiences of heritage, traditions, and culture through the medium of a virtual environment.

Telling and retelling of significant events often times occurs through the context of social interactions. Sharing self-narratives with peer groups, family, and friends influences one’s identity and provides meaning to one’s life. Children who know their heritage have a stronger sense of control and an increased self-esteem.

The Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process (OTPF) provides a summary of occupational therapy practice guidelines that describe the profession. Specifically, it relates to practitioners, students, educators, researchers, payers, and consumers. Included in the OTPF are domains related to cultural, social, and virtual environments. Leisure participation, leisure exploration, and social participation also contribute to the goal of promoting occupational health and wellbeing and are outlined in the OTPF.

While all individuals may submit stories, this website encourages ethnic minorities to post as these groups may have fewer opportunities finding others who relate to their story.

References


Table 1: Survey Results from post-interview/submissions for “From Where I Came” Project (results posted April 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Highly Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Highly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoyed sharing my personal experiences with people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy hearing about other people’s personal experiences related their heritage and/or ancestry.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the past I have had the chance to talk to family members, friends, or acquaintances about my ‘ancestral home.’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting my ‘ancestral home’ made me think deeper about my own identity.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting the chance to read other people’s stories of visiting their ancestral home is of interest to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing this interview has encouraged me to find out more about my own cultural heritage.</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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**INTRODUCTION**

**THE PROCESS**

- Students interviewed individuals about their travels to their ancestral home
- Updated the website to be more user-friendly
- Community contacts were sought out via telephone, e-mail, press release, ‘postcards’, and in person
- Educational institutions expressed interest in collaborating to post additional stories
- The Oregonian featured a travel to Lithuania from the website and encouraged others to submit their story

**OUTCOMES**

- Visiting an ancestral home made participants think deeper about their own identity
- Sharing stories was personally meaningful to participants
- When the meaning of the trip is not shared, it may seem like any other traveling experience
- Identify common themes between ethnic groups
- Offer therapeutic interventions based on customs, beliefs, and activity patterns
- Increase awareness of reminiscing benefits
- Assess the link between the Internet and how it influences the sharing of stories
- Seek funding to improve marketing of the website and support a more interactive website
- Research how being connected to past family may contribute to strong self-identity

**CONCLUSION**

Exploring one’s ancestral homeland is powerful. Connecting to family and place may lead to stronger identity and esteem. This in turn may provide one with a greater sense of purpose due to this self-discovery.

**WEBSITE LOCATION**

Please visit us at:
http://fromwhereicame.wordpress.com/