

Evaluation of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Gail Bass, PhD, OTR/L

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Introduction

The life history of Dr. Gail Bass was one of 31 life history interviews conducted as part of a larger project of *Life Histories of Individuals Who have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) in North Dakota and Wyoming*. The purpose of this Life History is to gather information about the evolution and history of OT practice from individuals who have been influential in developing OT. This study is intended to help current and future occupational therapists understand how the career has evolved throughout the existence of the profession. The life history of Dr. Gail Bass is a case study that examined her experiences as an OT practitioner, educator, and learner. This study used the Kawa model to guide the interview and data analysis. The model uses the analogy of a river representing the flow of their life history with rocks representing barriers, driftwood representing aspects that could either facilitate or hinder the flow of their river, and the riverbed representing the contexts that surrounds the individual (Turpin & Iwama, 2011)

Description of Participant

Dr. Gail Bass graduated with her bachelor's degree in Occupational Therapy at the University of North Dakota in 1972. She continued her education and later received a M.S. in Elementary/Early Childhood Education and Special Education. In 2004, Dr. Bass received her Ph.D. in Teaching and Learning Higher Education. She has had many experiences in a variety of settings within rural practice. Dr. Bass has helped expand the profession by being the first OT in the rural area schools in Minnesota and in one of the hospital she worked at. She has received certification in multiple areas of teaching and is licensed to practice in multiple states. Dr. Bass is a member of AOTA and NDOTA. She was the Vice President of Education for NDOTA from 2008 to 2012 and served on the Representative Assembly for AOTA for four years. She has presented on a number of topics related to OT nearly every year since 1985 and helped publish a number of works. Dr. Gail Bass finds occupational therapy as a very holistic and fulfilling career.

Literature Review

In reviewing literature of key events that took place throughout Dr. Bass' career, the following events were identified:

- In 1986 the Education (No. 2) Act helped children with special healthcare needs from birth to three years by enrolling them into early intervention programs (Price, Murphy & Cureton, 2004).
- Occupational therapy shifts its focus back to occupation-based practice in the 1990's (Bauerschmidt & Nelson, 2011).
- In 1991, Southern California offers the first occupational therapy Doctorate Program (AOTA, 2017).
- In 2006, AOTA announces occupational therapy requirements changed to master's degree (AOTA, 2017).
- Importance of continuing education for occupational therapists emphasized (Vachon, Durand & LeBlanc, 2009).

Methodology

Study Design: A qualitative research study using a life history approach was used to complete this study. Using this design allowed the researchers to learn about the participants involvement in occupational therapy throughout her educational and professional career. It also allowed the researchers to gain a thick, rich detail of the participant's understanding of her experiences.

Participant Selection: The participant was obtained by the project directors and assigned to the researchers. Informed consent was given to the participant and returned to the project directors. No gatekeeper issues were identified.

Data Collection: A semi-structured interview was conducted via phone call and was audio recorded. The researchers completed the interview in the University of North Dakota, Casper campus conference room. After completion of the interview, the researchers transcribed the interview verbatim. Once the transcription was complete, codes were identified and put into categories with themes and finally, an overall assertion.

Data Analysis and Findings

Throughout the data analysis process, the Kawa model helped the researchers identify barriers and facilitators to the flow of Dr. Bass' career.

- The researchers started with 27 codes and narrowed it down to 18 codes.
- Each of the 18 codes were put into the following categories and themes
 - **Education**
 - Dr. Bass found specialty certification to be important in providing skills for rural practice.
 - She stressed the importance of continuing education in rural practice to help OTs stay up to date on current practice.

"It was really important for me to have opportunities for continuing education and to be able to meet with other OTs and other professionals who are practicing in rural areas."
 - She views occupation-based practice as an important emphasis for education programs.
 - **Professional Opportunities**
 - Dr. Bass identifies occupational therapy as a very holistic and fulfilling career.

"Because to me the OT practice was just so much more fulfilling and it couldn't get any better".

"I think it's such a holistic career that is very satisfying".
 - She expressed that there are a wide range of opportunities and settings in the field and there is a never a typical day.
 - She considers herself fortunate to be involved in policy making.
 - **Evolution**
 - Dr. Bass found that changes in legislation played a big role in her service delivery.

"For my practice, the evolution of the Special Ed Law and how it kind of changed the way we did things in school made a huge difference on my practice".
 - She expressed the importance of advocating for our profession and our skills.
 - Dr. Bass finds benefits and draw backs in the changes towards doctorate program.

Assertion/Conclusion

Assertion: Dr. Gail Bass emphasized that a career in occupational therapy requires diligence in pursuing continuing education, certification, using occupation-based practice, and being aware of legislative issues. Through advocacy and involvement, she has had a very fulfilling career.

Dr. Gail Bass has displayed passion for occupational therapy through presentations, publications, and practice. Dr. Bass has had opportunities to practice in multiple settings where many changes that have influenced to the profession have taken place. She has found continuing education an important aspect to promote evidenced-based practice in rural settings. Occupation-based practice has become a solid foundation in her works as a practitioner and educator. Dr. Gail Bass has experienced many legislation changes such as the Education (No. 2) Act in 1986 (Price, Murphy & Nelson, 2011) that have played a big role in her service delivery. With her experience and knowledge about the profession, Dr. Gail Bass has played part in policy making and the profession of occupational therapy. It is evident there has been changes that have facilitated and hindered the flow of her life and career.



Photo provided by Dr. Gail Bass

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