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Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Dr. Gail Bass, PhD, OTR/L

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Abstract

Objective. The purpose of this qualitative Life History study is to gather information about the evolution and history of occupational therapy (OT) practice from individuals who have been influential in developing OT.

Method. A one-hour, semi-structured interview was conducted with Dr. Gail Bass to gather information on her experiences in her works of occupational therapy. Once the interview was completed, it was transcribed verbatim by the researchers. Open coding was then used to identify codes, then categories, themes, and finally an overall assertion.

Results. Three major categories emerged from Dr. Bass' life history consisting of education, professional opportunities, and evolution. These findings indicate that she has had a successful and fulfilling career in the profession of occupational therapy.

Conclusion. 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.

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 an individual's 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 surround the individual (Turpin & Iwama, 2011)

Literature Review

In 1986, The Education for the Handicapped Amendments (PL99-457) helped children with special healthcare needs from birth to three years by enrolling them into early intervention programs (Price, Murphy & Cureton, 2004). This amendment consists of two acts that helped the Special Education Act come into play a year before Dr. Bass had started working in the school systems (Price et al., 2004). This law had a large impact on the way that Dr. Bass practiced as an OT in the schools because a lot of the children she worked with were still in institutions. Children were being deinstitutionalized and put into the school system, allowing Dr. Bass to work with more children and complete more early interventions. Early on, Dr. Bass saw that kids were put in classrooms in the public schools to meet the law but their classrooms were down in the basements by the boiler room, or the classrooms the furthest away from the other children. The law developed over time, leading to the movement towards mainstreaming (Price et al., 2004). Moving along through the late '80s, Dr. Bass found that mainstreaming was a key aspect that influenced her practice as an OT. Dr. Bass began to see more disabled children in the school system working alongside with the rest of the children, Dr. Bass stated, "...there was that real push to have the kids with disabilities educated with their peers."

Dr. Bass found the biggest evolution in the profession to be the shift back to an occupation-based practice focus. When Dr. Bass started as an occupational therapy practitioner after her graduation in 1972, the profession was heavily based on following the medical model.

There were no OT theories to go by at this time according to Dr. Bass. Instead, occupational therapy was arts and crafts based. As her practice went on, occupational therapy found itself shifting its focus back to occupation-based practice in the 1990s (Bauerschmidt & Nelson, 2011). Occupation became the priority rather than just giving them exercises or work as Dr. Bass explains it. This shift allowed therapists such as Dr. Bass to look at her clients with a more holistic view as compared to when she first started her practice.

In 1991, Southern California offered the first occupational therapy doctorate program (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2017). This program was the gateway that led to further doctorate programs throughout the nation over time. The profession was still at a bachelor's entry-level during this time, but the doctoral programs were an opportunity to gain a greater understanding. In 2006, AOTA announced that occupational therapy requirements changed to a master's degree (AOTA, 2017). Dr. Bass found this as a very positive shift in the profession. ACOTE indicated that by 2027, entry-level occupational therapists will be at the doctoral level (AOTA, 2018). Dr. Bass found positives about this move stating, "... there's more emphasis on evidence-based practice, the importance of doing research, the importance of advocating for our profession and I think that comes with that higher level..." She also expressed concern as the move to doctoral programs will become a cost factor for students. It is hard to know the full effects this move will have on the profession until it has taken place.

Throughout her time of practice, Dr. Bass has found it very important to continue her education as a rural practitioner. The importance of continuing education was also emphasized in occupational therapy literature. According to Vachon, Durand, and LeBlanc (2009), it is encouraged that occupational therapists use an evidence-based practice model to implement research evidence in their practice. In order for OTs be able to effectively implement evidence-

based practice, it is essential they partake in continuing education. Continuing education has allowed Dr. Bass to meet with other OTs and other professionals who are practicing in the rural area and expand her knowledge.

Theory

The Kawa model was used to guide this study. The Kawa model was developed in Japan to understand the interaction between the person, environment, and occupation from an Eastern perspective (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). Metaphors of rivers, driftwood, rocks, and river walls and bed are used to help explain an individual's life (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). The water of the river in this model represents the flow of an individual's life from birth to the end of life. Rocks represent obstacles and challenges, the river bed and walls represent the environment/context, and driftwood represents influencing factors such as personal attributes and resources (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). Between each of the items, there is space which represents where life energy still flows and opportunities for enhancing the flow (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). The central concept of the Kawa model is harmony, balance, and wellbeing (Turpin & Iwama, 2011). Harmony is the state of being or the life flow, balance is the individual and community coexistence and interdependence, and wellbeing is the state when the elements coexist in harmony within the context of all elements (Turpin & Iwama, 2011).

Through completion of the semi-structured interview, the researchers were able to gain an understanding of Dr. Gail Bass' experiences, opportunities, and contexts. Using the information provided, the researchers were able to identify barriers and attributes that may have hindered or facilitated her life flow. Next, the researchers prioritized the information according to the perspective of Dr. Bass and examined the major points brought up in the interview process to determine codes and themes.

Description of Participant

To gain an overview of Dr. Bass' working history, the researchers reviewed her resume prior to the interview. Through a review of her resume, the researchers learned that Dr. Gail Bass graduated with her bachelor's degree in Occupational Therapy from the University of North Dakota in 1972. She continued her education and later received an 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. Through the interview process, it was found that Dr. Bass has helped expand the profession by being the first OT in the rural area schools in Minnesota and at Riverview Hospital. Additionally, in her first year of practice, she was the Department Head of Occupational Therapy at Riverview Hospital.

Throughout her career, she has also spent many years as an educator for the University of North Dakota Occupational Therapy Department. Dr. Bass is still participating in the role of an educator as an adjunct faculty now that she is retired. She has received certification in multiple areas of teaching and is licensed to practice in multiple states. Dr. Bass is a member of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) and the North Dakota Occupational Therapy Association (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.

Methodology

A qualitative research design using a life history approach was used to complete this study. Using this design allowed the researchers to learn about the participant's involvement in occupational therapy throughout her educational and professional career. The life history approach also allowed the researchers to gain a thick, rich detail of the participant's experiences throughout her time as an occupational therapist in the rural area.

The participant was obtained by the project directors and assigned to the researchers. Informed consent was given by the participant and returned to the project directors. During this process, no known gatekeeper issues were identified. A semi-structured interview was developed by the project directors for the researchers to use during the interview process. The researchers contacted the participant via email for the participant's resume to review before the interview. There was also a brief phone call to set up an interview time. The interview was conducted via phone call and was audio recorded in the University of North Dakota, Casper campus conference room. The researchers read the purpose of the interview and verified the participant's credentials, then alternated asking questions to the participant. After completion of the interview, the researchers transcribed the interview verbatim, which took approximately four hours. Once transcription was completed, codes were identified and put into categories with themes and finally, an overall assertion was gathered.

The researchers displayed trustworthiness throughout the research process. Triangulation involved reviewing notes taken during the interview, reflective journaling throughout the process, and the opportunity for member checking. The project director, an expert in qualitative research, consulted with the researchers periodically via phone calls and email to verify the work of the researchers during the life history project. This process allowed for better validity and reliability during the research.

Data Analysis, Findings/Results

After completing the interview transcription, the researchers started the process of analyzing data through the use of open coding. Each of the codes were then put into categories and themes were identified. Once the themes were identified, an overall assertion was obtained. The Kawa model was used during this process to identify and understand contexts as well as barriers and facilitators to the flow of Dr. Bass' life and career. The researchers started with 27 codes and narrowed it down to 18 codes by combining similar codes together to gain a greater understanding of Dr. Bass' priorities and experiences. Codes were selected based on the emphasis Dr. Bass placed on topics, ideas, and events. The topics, ideas, and events that were brought up a number of times were selected as codes first. Additionally, a topic was not coded if it was only brought up once or had little to emphasis. Each of the 18 codes were then put into three categories with three overarching themes identified for each of the categories.

Category I: Education

The category of education was identified as Dr. Bass often spoke about education and related many of her experiences back to her education as well as to what she currently teaches. From the data collected, the first theme that researchers decided on was; Dr. Bass found specialty certification to be important in providing skills for rural practice. When discussing specialty certifications, Dr. Bass expressed the importance of them depending on the work location. She also mentioned that specialty certifications give OTs more skills.

The next theme that was identified was that she stressed the importance of continuing education in rural practice to help OTs stay up to date on current practice. When asked to prioritize a list of values and beliefs in terms of enhancing professional practice and development, Dr. Bass rated continuing education as number one. The justification Dr. Bass

provided for rating it number one was; “It was really important for me to have opportunities for continuing education and to be able to meet with other OTs and professionals who are practicing in rural area.”

The last theme that arose was that she views occupation-based practice as an important emphasis for educational programs. Occupation-based practice was prioritized as number two by Dr. Bass when she was asked to prioritize values and beliefs in terms of enhancing professional practice and development. Dr. Bass justified this rating by saying “I really believe in that things are much more meaningful if our clients are doing something that’s purposeful and meaningful to them.” Additionally, she discussed the transition of occupational therapy going from a medical model back towards the occupation-based models and how this change has made the profession more holistic.

Category II: Professional Opportunities

Upon review of Dr. Gail Bass’ resume, the researchers noticed many different opportunities she has had throughout her career. To gain a better understanding of her experiences, the researchers asked her to elaborate on some of the settings she worked in and positions she had held. She mentioned that she had many different opportunities including working in school co-ops, being the first OT to work in a rural co-op in Minnesota and being the first practicing OT at Riverview Hospital.

A theme that emerged in this category was that Dr. Bass identifies occupational therapy as a very holistic and fulfilling career. Multiple times throughout the interview, Dr. Bass mentioned using a holistic approach to identify the needs of the client and make interventions meaningful. Additionally, it was until she was not accepted into the physical therapy program that Dr. Bass found out about occupational therapy which she stated was “the best thing that ever

happened...” She continued to elaborate by saying “I think something like that was meant to happen. Because to me, the OT practice was just so much more fulfilling, and it couldn’t get any better.”

Another theme that arose was that she expressed that there is a wide range of opportunities and settings in the field and there is never a typical day. This theme was evident as Dr. Bass discussed the many opportunities she had, and the settings she worked in. Throughout her career, she worked in a variety of settings ranging from a hospital setting to school districts, to teaching. When asked what a typical day looked like when she was practicing, Dr. Bass explained that it depended heavily on where she was, but “there was no two days that were the same.”

The third theme identified was that she considers herself fortunate to be involved in policy making. It is evident through a review of her resume and interview that Dr. Bass has had many opportunities and accomplishments in her career in occupational therapy. However, Dr. Bass made a point to mention "I see myself as have being really fortunate for being involved in some policy making things." which lead the researchers to identify this theme.

Category III: Evolution

Evolution of the profession was brought up in different aspects during the interview. Due to Dr. Bass’ extensive experience and time spent in the field of occupational therapy, she has seen the profession evolve in many ways. Examples of changes experienced by Dr. Bass include the evolution of learning about theories and using them in practice, technology advancements, moving from a medical model to occupation-based models, legislation, and changes in educational programs.

One theme that the researchers identified was that Dr. Bass found that changes in legislation played a big role in her service delivery. This theme was evident as she was in practice when the Special Education Law came into place. The impact changes in legislation had on practice were evident when Dr. Bass stated, “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.” The changes to her practice included intervening with children at an earlier age as well as seeing children with special needs being mainstreamed and providing interventions in regular classrooms.

Another emergent theme was that she expressed the importance of advocating for our profession and our skills. While the profession has changed and developed, Dr. Bass emphasized that it was important for OTs to continue to advocate for our profession. She also expressed that changes in education programs have put more of an emphasis on the importance of advocating for the profession of occupational therapy.

The last identified theme was that Dr. Bass finds benefits and drawbacks in the changes towards the doctorate program. When asked about her thoughts regarding the changes to the doctorate program, Dr. Bass identified positive and negative aspects of the change. One positive identified by Dr. Bass is that “it puts OT and OTA on a level playing field with PTs.” Another positive aspect she mentioned was with the higher level of education, more of an emphasis is placed on evidence-based practice and research. Drawbacks that were determined by Dr. Bass include the cost for students, more years in school, and the uncertainty about an increase in pay for doctorate level graduates.

Discussion/Conclusions

From the data collected, an overall assertion was developed: 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. Bass identified positive and negative aspects of the change towards the doctorate program. She identified positives of advocating for our profession and a greater emphasis on research. Negatives that Dr. Bass identified, were the cost and time factors associated with the higher degree. Dr. Gail Bass has displayed a passion for occupational therapy through presentations, publications, and practice. Dr. Bass has had opportunities to practice in multiple settings where many changes have influenced the profession. She has found continuing education an important aspect to promote evidence-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 education acts 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. Many changes have occurred in the profession of occupational therapy from the time Dr. Bass started practicing. Each of the changes she faced added to her life and practice experience, making her the practitioner she is today. It is evident there have been changes that have facilitated and hindered the flow of her life and career.

The findings of this study add to knowledge about the evolution of occupational therapy practice as it provides the experiences of an individual who experienced evolutionary changes while practicing. Dr. Bass gives great examples of how changes in legislation directly influenced

the interventions she was able to provide. Additionally, this study allows current OT practitioners to understand how changes influenced practitioners in a manner that provides more insight than would be possible from a textbook.

Appendix

Life History of Gail Bass Ph.D., OTR/L
 Kyler Peterson, OTS & Alisha Roberts, OTS

Codes

Education Arts and crafts College classes Becoming an OT Transition from work to school	Work opportunities Unique experiences Accomplishments Work relationships Advocating Collaboration Organizations/committees Challenges	Doctoral change Legislation/law Technology Theory Early intervention
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Categories

Education	Professional Opportunities	Evolution
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Themes

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr. Bass found specialty certification to be important in providing skills for rural practice. 2. She stressed the importance of continuing education in rural practice to help OTs stay up to date on current practice. 3. She views occupation-based practice as an important emphasis for educational programs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr. Bass identifies occupational therapy as a very holistic and fulfilling career. 2. She expressed that there are a wide range of opportunities and settings in the field and there is a never a typical day. 3. She considers herself fortunate to be involved in policy making. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Dr. Bass found that changes in legislation played a big role in her service delivery. 2. She expressed the importance of advocating for our profession and our skills. 3. Dr. Bass finds benefits and draw backs in the changes towards doctorate program.
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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.

Resources

The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. (2018). ACOTE 2027 mandate update and timeline. Retrieved from <https://www.aota.org/Education-Careers/Accreditation/acote-doctoral-mandate-2027.aspx>

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