



Photo provided by Marabeth Kopp

# Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Marabeth Kopp, COTA/L

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## Introduction

- The life history of Marabeth Kopp was one of 30 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 project is to gather information about the history and evolution of occupational therapy (OT) practice in North Dakota and Wyoming through life histories of individuals who have been influential in developing OT in these two states.
- This study is intended to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a look at the history of OT practice North Dakota and Wyoming and how it has evolved overtime.
- This project examines the life history of Marabeth Kopp and her experiences as a certified occupational therapy assistant (COTA).
- The foundational theory used to guide this project was the Kawa Model.

## Methodology

- The participant was assigned to the researchers from a list that was developed by the course instructors through purposive sampling.
- This was a qualitative study to develop a collection of life histories using the life history approach.
- This was a one-time interview that was audio recorded, and was about one hour in length.
- Informed consent was given and there were no gatekeeper issues.
- The interview took place at a coffee shop in Casper, WY.
- The interview was structured via an interview schedule developed by the course instructors. The researchers were allowed to modify the interview schedule and the modified interview was reviewed by the course instructors prior to interview.
- The audio recording of the interview was transcribed verbatim, and then coded to develop categories, themes, and an assertion.

## Description of Participant

- Marabeth describes herself as compassionate, flexible, easy to get along with, patient, and able to work well with others.
- Marabeth Kopp pursued a Bachelor's of Arts in Literature at Flagler College and graduated in 1991.
- Marabeth graduated from Casper College with an Associates degree in Occupational therapy in 1999.
- She initially wanted to work at a pediatric clinic, but she stated that she fell into working with the geriatric population and has worked with this population since she graduated with her AS degree.
- She began working in 1999 at Shepherd of the Valley Care Center as an OTA, where she performed home evaluations, education, and assisting the OTR.
- She currently works at Life Care Center of Casper as an OTA, where she provides interdisciplinary care and supervises level I and level II OTA students.

## Literature Review

- OTA first emerged in the 1960's, and was put forward to be voted as a separate entity in 1965. It was initially created to alleviate the demand for OTs and provide another avenue for others to pursue the field with less education requirements (St. Catherine's University, 2017).
- In 1973, Medicaid for elderly residents of the state were linked to eligibility for Federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) (CMMS, 2015).
- In 1983, the first COTA was placed on the Representative Assembly as a representative for the OTA division. Also, with Medicare, inpatient acute care hospital prospective payment system became based on patients' diagnoses and replaced cost-based payments (CMMS, 2015).
- 1986, the RA established the COTA Advisory Committee.
- In 1988, the COTA forum at the AOTA annual conference became a permanent feature of the conference event.
- In 1999, the dispute over NBCOT trademarking COTA ended.
- Within recent years, evidence-based practice in healthcare has been influenced by the current amount of research available and accessible to the researcher, which has been increasing (Stube and Jedlicka, 2007).

## Data Analysis

- The Kawa Model was used to guide the process of data analysis.
- The categories that emerged from the codes of the transcription are: evolving practice, OT components, flexibility of the profession, and interdisciplinary.
- These categories were then analyzed to find themes/patterns to understand Marabeth's experience as an OTA, and her overall perceptions and beliefs about the profession of occupational therapy
  - From these themes, an overall assertion was then formulated.

### Findings

- From the category of **evolving practice**, the following themes emerged:
  - Marabeth has experienced changes in healthcare that have impacted how she practices and conducts billing procedures.  
*"We really have to justify every single thing we're doing and why we're doing it, more than I feel like I ever have in the past."*
  - Changes in Medicare/Medicaid have impacted her practice.  
*"[Practice] has evolved. A lot of it is involved with the healthcare with Medicare and changes in Medicare dictating a lot of things with how we practice."*
  - Marabeth's education differs from current occupational therapy curricula, so she uses continuing education to ensure she is using evidence-based practice.
- From the category of **OT components**, the following themes emerged:
  - Marabeth considers many components of occupational therapy as important and appreciates the wide variety that the profession can offer  
*"You can do anything, you can work in so many different settings. ...you have a big choice of what you can do."*
  - She prioritizes activity analysis, occupation, and the person-centered nature of the profession as the most important components of occupational therapy.

- From the category of **flexibility within the profession**, the following themes emerged:
  - Marabeth was drawn to occupational therapy for its flexibility and changing opportunities within the profession.  
*"You have a big choice of what you can do ...it's a good variety you're not gonna ever get bored. Every day is going to be different."*
  - Marabeth initially pursued an education in literature, but decided to become an occupational therapy assistant after she learned about the profession.
  - She initially wanted to do pediatrics, but found other settings that she enjoyed more.
- From the category of **interdisciplinary care**, the following themes emerged:
  - Marabeth stresses the importance of having good relationships with other healthcare professionals.  
*"I can't stress the importance of trying to have a good relationship with the nurses, the doctors, ... the social workers. ...From the people in the kitchen to the nurses at the desk, you know you want to have a good relationship with them because they see the resident"*
  - She believes that having good communication and collaboration is in the best interest of the client.  
*"Just remember that it's just as important for the residents that everybody around gets along and has their best interest at heart."*

## Conclusions

- Overall assertion: Marabeth's practice as an OTA has evolved over time, ultimately affecting how she prioritizes components of OT, her appreciation of interdisciplinary health care, and the flexibility of the profession.
- She identifies the use of occupation and activity analysis as important aspects to her practice, although she also stresses that interdisciplinary care is vital to client centered goals.
- It is evident that Marabeth appreciates the flexibility of the profession, and the variety of practice areas available.
- As the profession has evolved to require evidence-based practice, Marabeth has adapted her practice to meet the changing demands.
- Marabeth values her job as an OTA and the impact she makes in other people's lives. Marabeth embodies what it means to be altruistic and to care about the needs of others.  
*"I've really been able to make a difference in the lives of every single person I've worked with"*
- It is discernible that Marabeth appreciates working with others and demonstrates that the role of occupational therapy extends beyond occupation to touch the lives through therapeutic relationships.  
*"[The client was] really down having a hard time... and so I was just trying to make her laugh. I thought of that comic... it really made her day, you know, it makes you feel good. So that wasn't really technically therapy, you know, a therapeutic intervention and so much as it was just trying to make her day greater."*

## References

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