

Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Elizabeth Skidmore, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

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Introduction

This life history is one of 30 life history interviews which are part of a larger project, Histories of Individuals Who Have Been Influential in Developing Occupational Therapy (OT) at the National Level and Beyond. The purpose of study is to provide current and future generations of occupational therapists a view of the history and how occupational therapy practice has evolved from its inception to current practice through the life history stories of occupational therapists who have held leadership roles at the national level and beyond. It is anticipated that the life history process will be a powerful way to gather this information.

Description of Participant

- Dr. Skidmore grew up in Grand Ledge, Michigan, and is currently serving as a professor, OT Department Chair, and Associate Dean of research at the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- Her expertise is in neurological rehabilitation, focusing on how cognitive impairments impact occupational performance and rehabilitation.
- She graduated with her Bachelor of Science degree in Occupational Therapy from Western Michigan University in 1996
- Practiced as an OT for three years before pursuing her Master's in OT in 2001 and PhD in Rehabilitation Science in 2003.
- Dr. Skidmore became the first OT to receive the US President Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers in 2016.
- Named by AOTA as top 100 most influential therapists.

Literature Review

- When Dr. Skidmore was in school, a bachelors degree was required to practice in occupational therapy. In 2007, the requirement was switched to a Master of Occupational Therapy degree (History of Occupational Therapy, 2019).
- In 1997, the Balanced Budget Act was passed, which introduced prospective payment to rehabilitation services through Medicare, and thus increased the use of OT services (Ngo et al., 2009).
- In 1999, AOTA's representative assembly passed Resolution J, which supported the move of entry level occupational therapy education from a baccalaureate degree to a post baccalaureate degree (Brown et al., 2015).
- Resolution J was mandated to occur by ACOTE by 2007 (Brown et al., 2015).
- Dr. Skidmore discussed the topic of interprofessional healthcare, talking about how new the idea was during her education and early career.

Methodology

Study Design

- This was a qualitative study using a life history approach to gather and analyze data.

Participant Selection

- Participant was randomly assigned to interviewers by project directors who used purposive sampling.

Data Collection

- Informed consent was obtained via email prior to the study.
- A semi-structured interview was completed over video calling and contained open-ended questions inspired by the Kawa model.
- The interview was completed via Zoom video chat and took two hours.

Data Analysis

- The interview was transcribed verbatim by both researchers and member checking was completed.
- Data analysis was completed using coding. 21 key topics or phrases were identified as the codes.
- Further categorization led to the emergence of four categories, ten themes, and two final assertions.



Dr. Elizabeth Skidmore, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA

Data Analysis/Findings

21 codes were identified using interview quotations, which led to the emergence of four categories, ten themes, and two final assertions.

Categories:

Motivation

- Family and educational experiences have shaped Dr. Skidmore's vision for the future and continue to drive her in her career.
- Dr. Skidmore uses challenges to motivate her as she solves problems and seeks for new ways to enhance her work.

Values

- Family has influenced Dr. Skidmore's values which guide her work in education and occupational therapy.
- Dr. Skidmore consistently demonstrates her values in her personal and professional life.
- Dr. Skidmore is humble in acknowledging her accomplishments, sharing that she was fortunate that she had the opportunities.

Opportunities

- Dr. Skidmore has sought out educational and career opportunities that have helped focus her research, practice and education, resulting in increased confidence and enhanced leadership skills.
- Mentorship and interprofessional opportunities have guided Dr. Skidmore's personal and professional development.
- Dr. Skidmore attributes much of her success to her mentorship experiences as well as her unique educational and career opportunities.

Systems

- Dr. Skidmore acknowledges her leadership roles in overarching systems which allow her to advocate for the needs of others and her profession.
- Dr. Skidmore believes in advancing the profession by teaching the next generation to be advocates.

Discussion/Conclusions

Assertions:

- As a lifelong learner, Dr. Beth Skidmore found OT to be a field that supported her desire to solve complex problems, work collaboratively with health care professionals of other disciplines, and make an impact on the lives of others.
- Dr. Skidmore's life experiences have shaped the values which have guided and motivated her to seek diverse opportunities and advocate for others within her roles as a researcher, educator, and therapist.

Dr. Skidmore has been influential as a therapist, researcher, and educator. She takes on opportunities that challenge her, and she continuously seeks to gain understanding of others and use research to guide her decisions. She has received national acknowledgements and awards, but tells students that the successes she has experienced when mentoring or working one-on-one with individuals have been her greatest achievements. Dr. Skidmore is passionate about her work, yet she sets aside time to engage in activities that contribute to her mental and spiritual well-being, demonstrating a unique life balance.

Acknowledgements

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Resources

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