

Evolution of Occupational Therapy Practice: Life History of Mary Hager, MA, 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 this 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. The Kawa Model was integrated into the life history approach, which allowed for an in-depth focus of turning points within the participant's career.

Description of Participant

Mary Hager is a retired occupational therapist and has remained an active member of state and national occupational therapy associations.

Education:

- In 1974, Mary graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Therapy from the University of Wisconsin-Madison
- In 2001, Mary continued her education by obtaining a Master of Arts Degree in Special Education from Marshall University

Career:

- In 1975, Mary began her first job at Charleston Area Medical Center as a Chief OT. She carried this position until 1977.
- In the same year of 1975, Mary took on a second job at the Cerebral Palsy Clinic of Charleston, West Virginia, and later became the Director of OT in 1981.
- In 1983, Mary shifted to the education setting as she took a position in the Kanawha County school district as an itinerant OT.
- From 2015-2018, Mary was the Assistant Director for Current Transitions. In 2018, Mary transitioned to the Co-Director for Current Transitions, where she currently stands.
- Today, Mary resides on the legislative chair of WVOTA and the AOTA representative as Assembly Recorder.

Literature Review

- Centered on the participant's time in practice, a literature review was completed comparing the shifts in practice with her personal turning points. The first decade of her career was indicated by a shift in professional identity, as the field of occupational therapy transitioned from relying on other professions for its distinct role to transition into an independent profession of its own (Reed & Peters, 2008).
- In 1978, West Virginia obtained statewide licensure for the profession of occupational therapy, as well as the development of the first occupational therapy educational programs in the state (West Virginia Occupational Therapy Association [WVOTA], 2019), which created a shift in the configuration of the profession and the duties of practicing therapists.
- For school-based practice, use of Sensory Integration Theory is used within occupational therapy when sensory-related issues are suspected to affect a child's ability to access the general and special education curriculum, behave adaptively, and participate in activities at school (American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 2009).

Methodology

The study conducted was qualitative in nature and researchers used a life history approach to gain an understanding of turning points within the participant's career. The participant was selected from a participant list compiled through a purposive sampling method by the project directors. Informed consent was obtained prior to the interview and the project was approved by the UND Institutional Review Board and because of the study design the formal IRB process was waived.

The semi-structured interview was guided by an interview schedule prepared by the project directors; the questions on the interview schedule were designed to be used with all individuals interviewed as part of the larger project. The student researchers were allowed to modify or add interview questions as needed for each specific interview. The interview questions were based off the constructs of the Kawa Model, which provided an in-depth look into the participant's career, significant turning points, and contributing factors that enhanced or hindered professional growth and development.

The data collection process included obtaining the participant's CV via email, which was received after the interview was completed. The interview allowed for the collection of qualitative data about the participant's life history linked to her career in OT. The interview was completed in 60 minutes and was conducted through a phone call.



Data Analysis & Findings

The interview was transcribed verbatim and codes were created and collapsed into categories and themes. Trustworthiness was established using verbatim transcription, peer reviews, two researchers coding, cross-checking data with the participant's CV and keeping a reflexive journal throughout the research process.

Collaboration

- Importance of interdisciplinary and client collaboration was key to success
- Fostered a strong learning environment for students to solve problems quickly and effectively
- Willingness to hear others' thoughts and opinions in order to understand their viewpoint is vital to prioritizing goals and reaching them

Challenges

- Challenges facilitated professional and personal development and growth
- Advocated for occupational therapy throughout the educational setting
- Identified solutions to difficult or complex issues

Opportunities

- Professional support cultivated a desire to be further involved
- Opportunities supported strong feelings of gratitude
- Ability to have witnessed the benefits of professional and personal connections

Leadership

- Leadership opportunities provided advancement in the profession of occupational therapy
- Has remained an active member on a state and national committee to transform and influence future policy changes
- Built professional relationships to share ideas and foster a feeling of goodwill

Discussion

Assertion: Throughout Mary's career, collaborating, growing from challenges, opportunities, as well as situations where leadership could flourish, had an impact on the type of experiences she had and the competencies she developed while working in educational and political settings.

Within the first 10 years of her career, a shift in professional identity emerged as occupational therapy went from relying on other professions for its distinct role, to transitioning into an independent profession of its own (Reed & Peters, 2008). This paradigm shift guided Mary as she began her career in the hospital setting, and later in the educational and political setting. Throughout this time, Mary developed a support network, which allowed her to further advocate for the necessity and usefulness of occupational therapy in the state of West Virginia.

In 1978, West Virginia confirmed statewide licensure for the profession of occupational therapy, as well as the development of the first occupational therapy educational programs (West Virginia Occupational Therapy Association [WVOTA], 2019). After graduating, Mary moved from Madison WI, to start her career in West Virginia as an occupational therapist at Charleston Area Medical Center in Charleston and the Cerebral Palsy Clinic of Charleston. As her professional identity grew and developed, so did her role and responsibilities within various settings.

As Mary's career continued to grow, another turning point emerged as she transitioned into the education setting. She later became certified in Sensory Integration and Praxis Theory. Although this theory was new to the education setting, Mary believed in working with other school professionals to help children with sensory-related issues that affected their ability to access the general and special education curriculum (American Occupational Therapy Association [AOTA], 2009). Mary's dedication in the education setting led her to continue advocating for the profession, as she continues to serve as a Recorder for AOTA, and on the Legislative Chair for WVOTA. Overall, Mary's time as an occupational therapist witnessed multiple transitions in the profession, which challenged her career, however, essentially advanced her professional growth and development.

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References

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