

Meet the author

Winnie Dunn, PhD, OTR, FOATA

Creator of Sensory Profile 2 and Adolescent/Adult Sensory Profile



Where did you study?

I was in the first graduating class of occupational therapists at the University of Missouri and earned my Master's degree in special education with a specialty in learning disabilities. I earned my PhD in applied neuroscience at the University of Kansas and have a lifetime teaching certificate and a license to practice occupational therapy.

Professional experience?

I started out in the Missouri public schools as a learning disability specialist in addition to offering my occupational therapy expertise in the Liberty Missouri school district. I was the first certified special education professional they had ever hired, allowing me the privilege of designing their special education programs from the ground up.

Because I had the entire population of children to consider, I thought about how my knowledge affected everyone from the very beginning. I spent a lot of time with teachers, with children in their classrooms, and in meetings problem solving what might be interfering with their learning.

As I began working on my doctoral degree, I also collaborated with several community agencies to establish services for children and their families in outlying areas of their community. Many of these families were driving long distances to take their children for therapy services, causing a hardship for the entire family. By receiving services in their own communities, they began to experience quality care right in their backyards.

I also collaborated with one of the city's universities to offer community-based graduate courses for special education, assessment, and planning for children who had different learning needs.

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Because they were just beginning to mainstream children with special needs into regular public schools, the professionals there felt unprepared to serve those children properly. Teaching these courses gave me greater insight into the fears and challenges that other professionals faced and allowed me to tailor courses around them.

These experiences prepared me to be the chair of the occupational therapy program at the University of Kansas, a position I have held for three decades. The KU OT program was in transition when I joined them, moving their program from the liberal arts campus to the medical center campus. I was able to support everyone, making the transition as smooth as possible. When I began, they offered one bachelor's degree in occupational therapy. They now offer five degrees, all of them at the graduate level.

Whom do you most admire (and why)?

I have to say I admire the people that are around me every day the most. The men and women on my faculty and staff show stamina, creativity and tenacity and have created an incredible program with amazing graduates. My children and their partners, their children, my siblings and their partners and children, my parents and my husband all show me how to live large and happily and deeply.

What projects are you currently working on?

I recently completed the standardization of the second edition of the Sensory Profile assessments. With a team of colleagues, I've been working on a number of projects illustrating the strong relationship between sensory processing and participation in everyday life. They are particularly focused on demonstrating that all children, not just children who have conditions, are affected by their sensory processing patterns. By conducting projects with a strength-based approach in mind, we are illustrating the vast amount of sameness among us all.

My role at this point in my career is to support the development of others' career paths. I mentor many doctoral students and young faculty that wish to have a research focus; academic career and mid-career faculty who are dedicated to quality programming, excellent education, and service to our community.

What do you do in your leisure time?

My life is really full. I do seriously love the work I do and all the incredibly talented people that I work with every day. This is a big and important part of my life. Part of what makes me productive at work however is that I have many other interests as well.

I love to read, I adore all the verbs associated with the kitchen (e.g., chop stir sauté bake braise arrange mix) and extend that interest to an equal adoration for eating good quality local food in restaurants. I cross-stitch; you know how long anyone has worked for me by how many small cross-stitch projects they have on the wall of their offices.

I love many aspects of design. How to arrange food on the plate, how to select layers and accessories for one's outfit, how to design the schedule for an activity filled party, designing an enticing invitation; I get a lot of pleasure out of all of these things.

My family owns "Circle Back Farm," which boasts six beehives, 100 blackberry bushes, 40 fruit trees, and a very large vegetable garden. We preserve some

of the harvest for our family and donate the rest to local shelters. As busy as I am when I'm here in the city, I am equally dialed down when I'm at Circle Back Farm.

What is your favorite book?

To Kill a Mockingbird. It is a great story about a family trying to find their way through a difficult period in history and I love the way the father captures small moments in everyday life to teach his children the lessons of being a person with strong character.

I grew up and witnessed many challenges to people's rights including civil rights and women's rights; I frequently think about the grace that the father and the story used to help his children navigate with the same issues before them.

What types of music are you most drawn to?

Whenever people ask me about music I have to say that I'm imprinted to the soulful music of the Motown era. Many strong women emerged from this period of entertainment, and not just Motown artists. Aretha Franklin, Tina Turner, Bette Midler are all examples of women who did not follow the prescribed plan for being a successful entertainer. I always think about the fact that we remember them because they were themselves.

How can we learn more about you and your projects? Do you have a website?

You can learn more about the occupational therapy program at the University of Kansas Medical Center by visiting: <http://www.kumc.edu/school-of-health-professions/occupational-therapy-education.html>

