THE THERAPEUTIC RECREATION (TR) PROFESSION IN CANADA:
WHERE ARE WE NOW AND WHERE ARE WE GOING?

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The Historical Setting

National Organizations

In 1974 Peter Witt published a study which addressed recreation service to people with disabilities in Canada. Witt reported that few community recreation services were available to people with disabilities. Those services which existed consisted of segregated programs offered by voluntary agencies. As a result, four national agencies consisting of the Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled, Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded, Canadian National Institute for the Blind and Canadian Mental Health Association, with the support of Health and Welfare Canada, formed a cooperative project entitled the National Inter-Agency Recreation Project (NIARP). The purpose of the project was to demonstrate that four national voluntary associations could work together on a common concern and to encourage others, including their provincial counterparts, to work together cooperatively on the task of increasing the opportunities for community based recreation services for people with a disability (Muleski, 1979).

Several outcomes resulted from the collaborative approach of NIARP. Relative to Therapeutic Recreation (TR) services, the most significant ones were:

- the formation of a standing committee of Canadian Parks/Recreation Association (CP/RA) on recreation and persons with a disability (initiation begun in 1978)
- the opportunity to attend national meetings to discuss service provision
- the formation of provincial and territorial advisory councils with a mandate similar to NIARP
- an increase in the general level of knowledge of the need for community based recreation services to augment clinically provided programs

In 1978 CP/RA adopted a national policy on the provision of leisure services to persons with a disability (CP/RA, 1981). The policy identified key issues and directions through which CP/RA intended to address those concerns. Of significance to TR was CP/RA's commitment to work with municipalities and governments to insure the provision of community based services to persons with a disability. In addition, CP/RA indicated a willingness to disseminate research information in this area, to encourage government
moneys for a national coordinating effort, and to promote provincial recreation organizations to meet these identified needs.

Concurrently, acknowledgement of the demand to address the recreation and activity needs of persons with disabilities was developing in the Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (CAHPER). Originally founded in 1933 as the Canadian Physical Education Association, the organization later added health (1947) and recreation (1948) to its mandate. The meaning of the "R" in the title, while historically significant, seems to lack definition. At various times in the organization development the "R" seems to have represented recreation educators, physical recreation, and/or professional development of community recreators (Gurney, 1983).

As early as 1960 members of CAHPER began speaking out about the need of persons with disabilities. In 1976 the Adapted Programs Committee was formed. Accomplishments of the committee have been vast. Most significant to the area of TR is the position paper adopted in 1982 which stated that all students studying for a bachelor's degree in physical education and/or recreation should have a course in their program dedicated to persons with a disability. (CAHPER Adapted Programs Committee papers).

Today's Context

Post Secondary Education

A key area of concern for Canadians wishing to become employed in the area of TR is the availability of college and university programs which offer TR courses. According to Gagnon, Ostiguy, and Swedburg (1993), there are 22 universities offering a program in recreation or a related area such as physical education, leisure studies, physical activity studies, outdoor recreation, or tourism. Of these, five offer a concentration in TR or special groups. Concordia University is the only university offering a degree titled TR.

Forty-four colleges offer recreation programs: three focusing on TR. At the graduate level, seven Canadian universities offer the opportunity for studies beyond the bachelor's degree. Currently there are no Canadian universities offering a doctorate degree in recreation or in TR.

The Provincial Environment

The relationship of the provinces to the national development of TR services (TRS) has existed through organizations such as NIARP, Fitness and Amateur Sport, Ministries of Health and Welfare, and the interaction of professionals at conferences and meetings. A portion of the session held at ITRS was devoted to representatives from each province/territory sharing the current environment for TR. In addition, for those provinces/territories having no representation at the International Therapeutic Recreation Symposium (ITRS), a description was solicited to be included in this paper. The growth and development of TRS and the support for professionals is varied. However, there appears to be a growing grassroots call for a more organized national system of support.
**British Columbia**

A new professional association, The British Columbia TR Association (BCTRA) was established two years ago. Its goals are varied and include the promotion of the discipline, the provision of educational and research opportunities, the development and adherence to professional standards, the opportunity to link with other professional groups, and the provision of a future direction for TRS in British Columbia. There is also an Activity Director's Association.

Presently Douglas College in New Westminster is the only educational institution within British Columbia that offers a comprehensive two year diploma program in TR. Other educational institutions offer a variety of courses in recreation and leisure studies.

**Alberta**

The Alberta TR Association (ATRA) was founded in August, 1985 and currently has chapters in Lethbridge/Medicine Hat, Calgary, Edmonton, and Grande Prairie/Peace River. The goals of the association include the promotion of TRS in Alberta, the development of a credentialling procedure, the networking of professionals in TRS, and the development of a workload measurement system. The association has established standards of practice, code of ethics, philosophy, and a strategic plan. The association hosts an annual conference in October.

There are currently three Alberta educational institutions preparing professionals to work in TR. The University of Alberta offers a degree in Recreation Administration with a major in Special Populations, Lethbridge Community College offers a two year diploma program in TR with a focus on geriatrics, and Mount Royal College offers a two year diploma program in TR. Other educational institutions offer a variety of courses in recreation and leisure studies, physical education, and tourism.

**Saskatchewan**

TR professionals in Saskatchewan are presently represented by three organizations: The Saskatoon TR Association (STRA), the Regina TR Association (RTRA) and the Saskatchewan Activity Society (SAS). As well, the Saskatchewan Recreation Society (SRS) is a practitioner-based, volunteer organization which addresses the interests of leisure service professionals, included those in TRS.

Educational opportunities in Saskatchewan include the University of Regina which offers both a Physical Activities Studies Degree and a Gerontology Certificate Program, the University of Saskatchewan which offers a Physical Education Degree and SIAT-Kelsey Campus which offers a Recreation and Leisure Diploma Program.

**Manitoba**

Provincial associations currently in Manitoba are the Manitoba Parks and Recreation Association, the Manitoba Activity Therapists Association and a TR Committee.

Educational opportunities include a Recreation Studies Degree at the University of Manitoba and an Activities Program at Red River Community College.
**Ontario**

There are a variety of associations operating in Ontario. Some of these include: the Ontario Recreation Society, the Activity Directors' Association and the TR Manager's Association. Other than the Ontario Recreation Society, most groups are city or population specific.

Various educational institutions throughout Ontario offer recreation programs. These include Georgian University, Algonquin, Peterborough (2 year diploma), University of Toronto, University of Waterloo (TR Option), Brock, Carleton, and the University of Ottawa.

**Quebec**

An English provincial association is currently being formed. A name has not yet been chosen. This association has already hosted a provincial conference. Information was not forthcoming on whether there is a French TR association.

Concordia University offers a degree in TR, the only one currently offered in Canada.

**New Brunswick**

It was difficult to find information about professional associations in New Brunswick, although it appears there is an Activity Directors' Association.

The University of New Brunswick at both the Fredericton campus and the St. John campus offers a degree in Physical Education with either a major in recreation or sport science as well as limited adapted physical education courses. There is also a new recreation program beginning at the French university, University du Moncton.

**Nova Scotia**

There are two organizations, the Recreation Association of Nova Scotia and the Recreation Council on Disability in Nova Scotia (supported by the Nova Scotia Sport and Recreation Commission). In addition, there is an Activity Directors' Association. The Recreation Council on Disability in Nova Scotia serves as both an advocacy agency and offers a voluntary registration program for recreation practitioners. As well, they offer an annual conference, workshops, newsletters, policy development, government lobbying, and member networking.

Educational opportunities in TRS are available at Dalhousie University. St. Francis Xavier University offers programs in physical education and recreation. Acadia University has a new program in recreation and special populations.

**Prince Edward Island**

It was difficult to find information concerning TRS in Prince Edward Island (PEI). At this point there appears to be professional support through CP/RA.

There does not appear to be any specific program in recreation, TRS, or physical education at either the University of PEI or Holland College.
**Newfoundland**

The Newfoundland Parks and Recreation Association has a standing committee on leisure services and disabled people. As well, there is a Recreation Practitioners Group and an Activity Directors' Association.

Although there is not a specific program in recreation or TRS at Memorial University, a Physical Education Degree is offered.

**Northwest Territories**

Currently there is not a professional association for TRS practitioners in the Northwest Territories. There are, however, a dozen long term care facilities which offer TR services.

**Yukon**

There are currently two recreation therapists working in Yukon, both based in small facilities. Due to numbers, a professional association specific to the Yukon would not be possible.

Although there is a college, there are not recreation or TR courses offered.

**Canadian Parks/Recreation Association**

CP/RA is a national voluntary organization dedicated to the enhancement of quality leisure lifestyles and environments for all Canadians. It utilizes education, information sharing, policy development and other national initiatives to affect community based leisure opportunities. CP/RA is in a transitional planning phase moving toward a national collective approach to foster the values and benefits of leisure for all Canadians. This collective will represent all groups of sectoral interest who are committed to a shared national vision of recreation. While in the past CP/RA primarily focussed on the role of municipalities in recreation services, the future holds the possibility of a partnership, pulling together provincial and national affiliates from a variety of service approaches. In this light, CP/RA is looking toward other groups to join together in an expanded national body to address the needs of professionals and consumers in maintaining a valued leisure lifestyle.

**The Potential for Tomorrow**

Service providers in the area of TRS are living in a world where jobs require more knowledge of how to treat people and not conditions. Total quality management and total quality assurance supports cross training and interdependence as the future for organizations. The economy dictates merged departments and supervisors trained and educated in areas other than TRS. The Canadian view and definition of TRS has been formed in countries outside Canada by people who work in a health care system unlike Canada's system. Many Canadians spend more time in professional development activities in the United States because of the lack of national opportunities here. A national professional association often emerges when there is an expressed need for communication and professional development at the national level, Canadian representative at ITRS were asked to comment on their hopes and fears for the future of TRS development in Canada.
**Hopes**

The most prevalent hope was that a national association would be created which could provide credibility for the discipline of TR. This credibility would be accomplished through the following:

- the recognition of the discipline of TRS
- an increased profile of TRS
- standardized professional standards, job descriptions, and job titles
- introduction of certification or registration procedures
- a united educational front
- an influencing voice in education and professional preparation
- community and clinical TR professionals working together
- emergence of Canadian national leadership
- a political voice
- research
- national gatherings/networking/professional development - equal representation from all provinces.

Other hopes expressed were:

- that we look, at a wide variety of systems/options for national development
- that a national association would be set up to include everyone
- that there would be resources (people and financial) to carry out the plans

**Fears**

The fears expressed were varied. Some were generic, some involved concerns of continuing without a national association, some were concerned specifically with a national TR association affiliated with CP/RA. The fears included:

**Representation**

- the national association formed would be too narrowly focussed (too clinical or population specific)
- all ethnic and consumer groups would not be represented
- there will be unequal representation of degree, diploma, experience based professionals
- there will be an over-representation of clinical over community professionals
- isolated and rural areas would not be included

**Duplication**

- we’ll end up with two national associations trying to represent TRS
- we won’t learn from the problems experienced in the United States

**Uniqueness**

- we’ll adopt U. S. philosophies without creating one unique to Canada
- a national body will encourage the loss of specialization
- the special needs of facilities will get lost in a national association
Recognition
- occupational therapy will "take us over" if we don't form a national association
- even with a national association, unions will enable unqualified people to move in to TRS positions

Organization
- without a national body we will continue to experience isolation
- if a national association is not formed, TRS in Canada will stagnate
- a national association would push too soon for identity through certification
- work in a national association will take away from time spent in service delivery
- leadership won't be organized correctly
- grandfather clause would be included
- resources (people/financial) won't be available
- current enthusiasm for TRS development won't be maintained.
Specific fears associated with becoming affiliated with CP/RA were:
- CP/RA is too global and generic
- the "old boys network" won't enable a joint venture to work for TRS
- TRS goals will not be met
- TRS won't have a sufficient voice
- CP/RA is concerned with their own dwindling numbers and that is why they want TRS

Action
In recognition of the hopes and fears expressed, and understanding the uniqueness of the Canadian context, a national coordinating committee was established with representation from each province/territory. With the session presenters serving as facilitators the committee was charged with investigating the alternative for the development of a national association representing TRS personnel. The following action plan was accepted:
- the completion of a paper summarizing the session
- the distribution of the paper to all who were in attendance at the session
- the submission of the paper to the editorial committee of Global Therapeutic Recreation
- the exploration of options for national development
- the preparation of position papers on options for consideration by the coordinating committee (examples: affiliation with CP/RA, CAHPER, American TR Association, National TR Society; stand alone association)
- securement of funding for a meeting of the committee
- discussion of position papers at a national meeting of the committee
- prioritize alternatives by committee
- presentation of alternatives to all those present at the ITRS session for "voting"
- development of an action plan based on the "vote"
Conclusion

The geographical, political, and cultural context of Canada presents challenges to any group trying to meet the needs of a diverse group of people working in TRS. Consideration of the options available will stimulate debate not only among those on the national coordinating committee, but those in the field of TRS. The important thing to remember is represented well by Robert Fulghum in his book *All I Really Needed to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*: When you go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.

References