



“It’s also important to acknowledge that we have now a right. We have a right to play, we have a right to culture, we have a right to be happy and we have the right to express that through traditional games and sport. It’s our expression being lived out.”

Chief Wilton Littlechild, Commissioner for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

Abstract

Leisure and recreation (LR) are Western constructs developed primarily by Western cultures (Dieser, 2012; Fox, 2006). The Calls to Action developed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada are inclusive of recreation, however, current gaps exist in the Therapeutic Recreation (TR) profession in understanding Indigenous perspectives on LR (Dieser, 2014). This qualitative exploratory research study investigated Indigenous peoples and knowledge-holders’ perspectives on LR. Research methods included six one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. Descriptive analysis resulted in three dominant themes: 1) differing purposes for participating in LR; 2) the importance of understanding individual and community contexts; and, 3) the role of the non-Indigenous person in addressing Indigenous issues. These findings are significant to the TR profession in understanding Indigenous views of LR, the recreation therapist’s role in using LR in order to become an ally to Indigenous communities, and their contribution to reconciliation efforts in Canada.

Literature Review

- Leisure and recreation is a Western construct described by individualistic cultures in North American and European institutions (Dieser, 2012; Fox, 2006; Saskamoose, 2016)

- TR profession is lacking cultural awareness (Dieser, 2014)

“...rarely are any cross-cultural thoughts expressed in the TR assessment....the dimension of cross-cultural sensitivity is either non-existent or covered briefly.” (Dieser, 2014, p.2)

- Notable gap in perspectives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous health (Crooks, 2014; Iwasaki, 2009; Saskamoose, 2016) National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health (2017) describe health as:

“Good health is generally understood as a balance of the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional dimensions of self, and the ability to live in harmony with family, community, nature and the environment.” (p. 1)

Methods

Participants:

- 6 participants; Indigenous and non-Indigenous
- Varied academic and community backgrounds

Methods:

- One-on-one, semi-structured, skype or phone interviews
- 10-12 interview questions; interviews lasted 60-90 minutes
- Descriptive analysis performed on Nvivo
- Minimal ethical considerations; addressed by communicating with participants throughout the process

Findings

Analysis resulted in fifteen codes. These codes were subsequently grouped into three themes as follows:

CODES

Table 1: Frequency of Codes

Frequency of Codes		
Code	# of Participant Reference	Frequency of Reference
Community	6	22
Learners	5	21
Culture	5	20
Inclusion	6	19
Mindful	6	15
Context	3	15
Structure	5	14
Connection	6	12
Wellbeing	4	11
Healing	3	10
Resilience	4	7
Value	5	6
Trust	3	5
Purpose	3	4
Survival	1	2

THEMES

1. Different purposes for participating in leisure and recreation

- Community
- Connection
- Inclusion
- Health/Wellbeing
- Healing/Resilience

“When I got into the field, my purpose for providing leisure for the youth was that intrinsic motivation, that self-awareness. But everything that I worked through, found that purpose in leisure settings in most Indigenous communities are about community. Are about gathering together, about cohesion. A place of sharing.” – Betty

2. The context in which leisure & recreation are experienced is relevant

- Individual differences
- Community differences
- Structure

“We don’t even have the same words so when you are looking at something like this, it matters what do you define leisure as? What do you define recreation as? And why do you define it that way?” –Theresa

3. The role of the non-Indigenous person addressing Indigenous issues

- As learners
- Dealing with trust and relationship building
- Mindfulness

“Usually what I have observed or noticed is that it’s very important to learn, or to understand what’s taken place in whatever community they are in.” – Casey



Discussion

- The Therapeutic Recreation (TR) profession can be an ally to Indigenous communities in working towards reconciliation. We need to understand our role as a Canadian allied health care profession in working towards reconciliation.
- TR can develop programs with the community that are designed by communities and are community-led. The programs will respect the purpose, and the context that is required for communities to engage in meaningful leisure and recreation
- These findings bring awareness to TR practitioners who are working with anyone who comes from a different perspective; sex, ethnicity, age and culture all provide unique lenses to view the world through. If the TR practitioner can bring purpose as it means to the client, rather than the practitioner, the experience will resonate deeper and be more effective.



Recommendations

- Educate ourselves:** We have lots of learning to do as a society in Canada and as a profession in the Canadian Health Care system. Educating ourselves on local and national issues is vital to moving forward in reconciliation and in creating an inclusive practice.
- Be open minded:** Engaging in conversations that make us uncomfortable and challenge our understanding are ultimately beneficial in the long run.
- Listen:** Ensure we are creating programs and initiatives that are ground up rather than top down.
- More research:** Putting voices into literature is useful for gathering funding for communities to use in order to develop their own initiatives and programs.



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