Celebrating the 85th Anniversary of CAOT

Brenda McGibbon Lammi

CAOT is proud to be celebrating its 85th anniversary. To honour the occasion, Sue Baptiste, CAOT President and Guest Editor for this issue, and I, invited authors with different perspectives to provide articles that reflect the recent and distant past of the association and the profession. In doing so, it was impossible not to look to the future and realize the impact the past has on our professional journey.

In addition, upon renewal of your CAOT membership, you received a pin. This pin is a new tradition for CAOT and, from now on, will be given out to new members of the Association. Wear your pin with pride and know that you are a part of a strong group of professionals that are making a difference to the lives of many.

You will also notice that OT Now has a new look, both on the cover and within the pages. There are also changes to the columns, with some new ones being added and existing ones being updated. The changes to the columns reflect the growing diversity of our profession and feedback received from you, the readers. Watch for the columns throughout the upcoming year. I encourage you to send me your comments, suggestions, and (as always) your submissions.

I hope that you will enjoy this special issue of OT Now, celebrating the 85th anniversary of CAOT; and in doing so, take pride in our professional roots and be excited about our future.

Occupational therapy: The foundations, the changes, the future

Sue Baptiste, Guest Editor

Despite the image in my mirror in the morning, I still cannot understand how time has flown so fast. Without wishing to sound trite, I really do not know where the years have gone – that is, until I think back on my career and the amazing experiences I have had, then I can recognize my good fortune; my good luck in being around as the occupational therapy profession has gone through a stormy adolescence, a confused early adulthood and now is engaged in a fascinating journey towards full maturity.

The foundations
I began my training program, on the first day of class, being seated in a circle, one behind the other with long, thin strings tied to the chair in front so that we could all make our scissor cords using macrame knots. We were to learn all about occupational therapy while working with clients who were residents in a private psychiatric hospital; and learn we did. We entered the field with detailed skills in arts, crafts, activities and sports, many of which would never be deployed in the interest of helping clients return to a meaningful life. And yet, despite the apparent focus on the ‘doing’, we managed to embrace some strong interactive and analytical skills as well.

The dissonance became clear, residing within the forced fit with the medical model. Slowly but surely, we began to recognize that the roots of our discipline provided
many of the answers. We, as occupational therapists, evolved from our work with war veterans - in helping them return from the horrors of war to take a meaningful and integrated place in their communities. The fact that activities and handicrafts were often the tools to enable that transition was absolutely that – a set of tools. The deeper implication of engaging with people to help them determine their abilities and future focus was the real objective, the deeper purpose of the occupational therapy role. This central and critical ‘raison d’être’ remains and is reinforced today. It took the shaky first steps of the 1960’s and 1970’s to provide the courage to move ahead.

From these early years of searching and experimentation, came a new way of looking at what we do and why we do it. The late 1970’s and 1980’s gave us a sense of clarity with the development of models of occupation and occupational performance. Research efforts began to emerge that tackled the identification of evidence which pinpointed the difference occupational therapists make in the lives of those with whom they work. Occupational therapy roles evolved along with the discipline itself; workplaces were no longer centred mainly within institutional settings; work within community agencies and private practices became more common.

And so it continues. We have reached a place today where it is no longer a great surprise to read of research evidence that illustrates the value of occupational therapy interventions. Emerging practice roles are being identified on a regular basis; occupational therapists now engage with people in multiple environments. A medical diagnosis is no longer the portal to client involvement. We appreciate the value of our philosophy and professional mission to the lives of well citizens, who are trying to maintain their health and to remain as active participants in their communities. We now frame our work through partnerships with clients, focusing upon occupational engagement in the context of each client’s life and choices.

### Multiculturism and occupational therapy

The particular nature of our professional development in the Canadian context has occurred in parallel with the evolution of Canada itself, through many different eras of expansion and enrichment largely through the policy of and commitment to immigration as a main source of population growth.

> “I think that a stalwart peasant in a sheepskin coat, born to the soil, whose forefathers have been farmers for ten generations, with a stout wife and a half dozen children, is good quality” (Clifford Sifton, Minister of the Interior, 1900).

Thus was the national context at the time of the turn of the 20th century. In that year, 41,681 immigrants were admitted to Canada. Population growth was reliant upon people coming from countries and lives that had been forged from the soil; these folks had the skills and courage needed to forge a presence in the unturned earth and wilderness of the little charted Canadian continent. Such individuals were tempted to leave countries such as Ireland, the Ukraine, Scandinavia and parts of Eastern Europe due to hardship and famine. Workers were also needed for the final stages of building the national railroad, for developing manpower for the skilled trades. To this day, the settlements that resulted from the efforts of these people remain and have become key towns and cities across the Canadian landscape. This was the beginning of what is known today as the ‘policy of multiculturalism’ as announced in 1971. In the intervening seventy years and beyond, expectations for immigration numbers expanded, examples of which are presented in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>7,206,643</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>10,376,786</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>11,506,655</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>24,083,500</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>26,994,045</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As these ever-increasing numbers of newcomers were welcomed to Canadian shores, the governmental structures were created to support the processing, checking and acceptance of these individuals and families.

From just after the First World War (WWI), there was a growing need for resources to manage the complex needs of new Canadians. The government department accountable and responsible for the immigration portfolio changed radically throughout the twentieth century. Bills were introduced to organize the process of immigration and multiculturalism have been celebrated:

- 1917: Office of Immigration and Colonization
- 1936: Department of Mines and Resources
- 1950: Department of Citizenship and Immigration
- 1959: World Refugee Year
- 1971: Policy of Multiculturalism announced
- 1976: New Immigration Bill
- 1989: Bills C-84 Citizenship & Immigration Act
- 2004: Bill C-11 Refugee Reform

While the numbers of immigrants reduced in proportion to the total population over time, the countries from which they originated became more widespread and representative of the global community. Through the years 2001 to 2006, for example, immigrants arriving in Canada have levelled out to approximately 200,000 per year. The most recent available census data comes from the 2006 census. This compendium of information reveals that the most recent arrivals come from India, the Philippines, China, the United Kingdom and the United States. Apparently, nearly 150 languages were reported

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**About the author**

Sue Baptiste MHSc, OT Reg. (Ont), is President of the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists and is a full professor in the School of Rehabilitation Science at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.
as mother tongue. A large proportion of newcomers begin their Canadian lives by settling in Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec, moving to other provinces once established. In contrast to those earlier settlers, these immigrants are more educated with 51% of them reporting that they have university degrees up to the level of PhDs and post-doctoral experiences.

It is against this tapestry of the world’s peoples that we, as occupational therapists, have a rich opportunity to become involved in working with them to enable their acculturation as Canadians while respecting and valuing their individual cultural heritages. A large part of being able to do that is to support the creation of an occupational therapy workforce that resembles the population of our country. While I have a great affection for occupational therapists in general and Canadian ones in particular, I do fear for our national professional profile – we are quite white. And being quite white does not address the central need for mirroring those with whom we work. With all the good will and persistence in the world, there is nothing so comforting as to meet someone across a desk who knows your country, looks like you (even a little bit) and can speak your language. I find myself being energized and enthused at the thought of taking on this task – to people our profession to represent as broadly as possible the nature of the people of Canada.

Towards that end, the Occupational Therapy examination and practice preparation project (OTepp) is underway. This project is funded in part by the Government of Canada’s Foreign Recognition Program and by the Government of Ontario, and is being implemented in partnership with the CAOT and McMaster University, to develop curriculum that will assist internationally education occupational therapists (IEOTs) write the national certification examination and enter practice in Canada.

The future
It has been quite a journey. I have memories that span many decades, moving from technical skill development to formulation of theory, the emergence of practice models and a growing comfort with front line advocacy and lobbying. And yet it was from our history and from our shared experiences that we were able to undertake this journey. At this point in our profession’s evolution, it would serve us well to slow down for a moment and take stock of where we are now, from whence we have come, and the options for our future paths. This special issue of OT Now, celebrating the 85th anniversary of CAOT does just that. Lynn Cockburn reflects on where we are now, by taking a thorough and engaging look at the last ten years of our profession. Brenda Head and Judith Friedland provide us the means to reflect on our past by examining the work of two occupational therapy pioneers, Jessie Luther and Helen P. LeVestonte, with surprising similarities to our profession today. What is known about these two pioneers would be impossible without the keeping of oral histories. The importance of which is explored by Barry Trentham, connecting our past with our present. The history of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists and the Canadian roles is described by Anne Carswell. Claudia von Zweck, CAOT Executive Director, reflects on the roots of CAOT National Office in Ottawa, Ontario, and provides an introduction to current staff - CAOT’s present. The influence of our past on our present is undeniable in all of these pieces.

Our legacy
Over the past two years, I have had the opportunity to become involved in the development of the Occupational Therapy Legacy website, a link from the CAOT website, which will be going ‘live’ in January 2011 – the same time that this edition of OT Now will be hitting your mailboxes, both real and virtual. As we were designing the website and deciding what content should be posted, where and how, it seemed to make sense to cameo, in OT Now, the concept of our Canadian occupational therapy history as the legacy and foundation of occupational therapy present and future. Welcome to the latest edition of OT Now; we hope you enjoy the chance to reflect on the contributions of pioneers of our profession, to consider the opportunity to gather personal histories from colleagues, and to get ready to forge ahead into our next chapter.