Providing Inclusive Leisure Services
Worldwide

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Abstract

There is a need at an international level to educate potential and current professionals in systematic ways to promote inclusion of all citizens into leisure services. The model described in this article identifies actions that promote positive attitudes toward people experiencing oppression. This article highlights strategies presented in the model that reduce or eliminate social, psychological, and physical barriers to experiencing inclusive leisure services. The model provides a structure to guide professionals worldwide to be ethical and celebrate inclusion, uphold human-civil rights, and promote social, psychological, and physical leisure engagement.

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Introduction

With each day that passes, communities across the world are becoming more diverse. Many people view this increasing diversity as a sign of the health and vigor of our world, but the broad range of linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and ability differences that exist internationally challenges today’s professional. As a result, as worldwide leisure service professionals we provide programs to individuals with a variety of interests and characteristics. We must work with and understand those from many cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds as well as people with a range of ages, abilities, and economic resources.

People across the world experience barriers for various reasons that inhibit their pursuit of leisure. As seen in Figure 1 in the outer circle, a figurative wall comprised of social, psychological, and physical barriers often inhibits individuals from experiencing leisure, reducing their ability to be happy and to flourish. In the social domain, negative attitudes toward people represent a major obstacle to successful involvement. Throughout the world, people in privilege often do not fully accept, discriminate against, or devalue various individuals and groups such as members of ethnic, racial, socio-economic and religious groups experiencing marginalization. Equally, people who experience marginalization also receive these negative forces from members of other disenfranchised groups. Unfortunately, social barriers based on negative attitudes of members of a community toward individuals may inhibit inclusion efforts or deprive them of assistance for success. At times, negative social encounters result in people experiencing psychological responses further creating barriers to experiencing leisure. In addition, various health impairments and disabling circumstances create substantial
obstacles for people to access leisure pursuits. Many people have conditions that create challenges to communication that may limit their social interactions that reduce their sense of mobility; unfortunately, physical or environmental barriers we often create intensify these limitations.

This paper is intended to encourage readers to develop empathetic understanding of the lives of people who are often oppressed, ignored, marginalized, or not included in leisure services within any community across the world and then to inspire readers to engage in responsible and respectful actions. To achieve this intention, this paper provides an introduction of an educational model for learning about considerations and strategies to promote inclusive leisure services at an international level; Figure 1 depicts this model.

**An Educational Model for Inclusive Leisure Services**

To address these barriers, the model highlighted in this paper and described in detail in the book Inclusive Leisure Services (Dattilo, 2017) provides a structure to create an awareness of concepts that are relevant to providing inclusive leisure services. Such ideas are inclusion and ethics related to leisure involvement reflected in Figure 1 by the arrow breaking through barriers to leisure that facilitate inclusive leisure services at the left side of the model and a similar arrow on the right side of the model devoted to upholding human and civil rights and legislation.

**Be Ethical**

Ethics involve rules of behavior based on ideas of what is morally right or wrong that have us consider implications of our behaviors beyond ourselves and choose actions that demonstrate respect for others. If we
recognize oppression and work to apply ethical standards, demonstrate compassion, and commit ourselves to being empathetic, we will likely decrease our ignorance and increase understanding of the lives of diverse people who encounter oppression. We are then in a better position to provide meaningful and enjoyable inclusive leisure services. Though demonstrating compassion and empathy are ideal ethical ways to interact with others, doing the right thing does not motivate all people. Fortunately, provision of inclusive leisure services is mutually advantageous to all involved. People who are not motivated to be compassionate may sustain their support for inclusion and embrace diversity when considering that there is shared benefit to welcoming individuals who have been oppressed into programs since inclusion and diversity contribute to the success and flourishing of organisms, organizations, and communities.

There are underlying ethical assumptions associated with this educational model for inclusive leisure services. The assumptions cluster into three overall categories with one category referring to all humans, another to ideals for which we strive, and the final category applies specifically to providing leisure services. The following are assumptions associated with humans: all people deserve our respect, everyone has the right to self-determination; and we cannot reduce anyone to one characteristic. Ethical assumptions relating to ideals for which we strive include inclusion is good and diversity enriches our world. Finally, assumptions connected to providing leisure services are with great power comes great responsibility, we ought to consider perspectives different from our own, and critical and constructive thinking contribute to a just society.
Celebrate Inclusion

To be included is to be a part of the whole, a part of a group. Inclusion involves presence of someone or something in a group or community. When using the word inclusion in the context of people experiencing oppression, we assume that inclusion is good. To achieve inclusive leisure, we counter oppression by creating accommodating leisure environments as we consider unique needs of each participant. We foster reciprocity among participants to encourage feelings of acceptance and being welcome. Inclusion is what we do and how we demonstrate respect.

Inclusion infers that all people have the right to be a part of opportunities and responsibilities available in their communities. The phrase a part from the start is central to inclusion. Inclusion of people into leisure programs is more than preferred best practices; it is an ethical and human right mandate. If we develop a feeling of community and support within all participants, we will likely succeed in achieving the goal of inclusive leisure services.

Uphold Human-Civil Rights and Legislation

Across the world, leisure is limited for people experiencing oppression. Oppression involves the domination and repression of a person or group by another person or group in power who exert authority in an excessive and unjust manner with recipients encountering this injustice repeatedly. Oppression leads to violation of values or rights such as freedom, justice, and peace. Human rights are basic freedoms all people are entitled to regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, race, religion, language, or other status. People are to achieve these universal rights without restrictions or discrimination. Human rights consist of those that are social and political, such as the right to life, liberty, and freedom of expression often expressed
in through our leisure. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948 by the United Nations stipulates such rights. Violations of human rights result in unjust systematic disparities and inequities that negatively influence individuals and groups’ health and human development.

**Promote Social Engagement**

The model contains a list of ways to promote social engagement during leisure participation that focus on strategies to enhance and improve attitudes. Figure 1 presents this concept at the bottom of the model by an arrow breaking through social barriers to inclusive leisure services. Leisure service professionals can take certain actions to reflect positive attitudes, including using sensitive terminology, encouraging positive contact with diverse participants, and advocating for equity. *Equity* is concerned with fairness, impartiality, and justice with the manner in which people are treated.

Relationship development, the core of inclusion worldwide, involves providing support to foster connections between all participants. For people to access valued social roles, they must have the chance to grow and learn with their peers. To nurture positive contact between people we structure experiences by facilitating proximity, fostering familiarity, and promoting interdependence. We increase opportunities for active participation by dividing participants into small groups, providing a small area for participation, partner people with similar interests and make accommodations for everyone. Positive contact occurs via cooperative learning involving small groups required to share with one another and help each other learn, thus creating interdependence. It is valuable to select materials that encourage interactions and promote sharing. In addition, it is often useful to choose those materials used in fantasy play, dramatic activities,
and creative arts. Programs that teach people social skills or how to initiate and respond to social contacts promote positive peer interactions. The ultimate goal of nurturing positive contacts is to foster understanding of others and develop connections, ideally friendships, among participants.

**Inspire Psychological Engagement**

The model includes information on promoting psychological engagement. Figure 1 presents this concept at the top left of the model by an arrow breaking through psychological barriers to achieve inclusive leisure services. To help facilitate such engagement, the model provides suggestions on ways to create environments that foster self-determination. Self-determination is an internationally valued personal characteristic that contributes to the optimal experience of enjoyment and makes effort and investment of attention worthwhile. Self-determination results in having control over our lives in areas we value such as leisure, making decisions without interference from others, and having the freedom to live as we choose. As we exhibit effort and attention, we tend to experience enjoyment that contributes to our sense of competence, autonomy, and connections with others, which reinforces self-determination.

Another technique to facilitate psychological engagement is leisure education. We deliver leisure education to diverse audiences in various venues across the world designed to facilitate the interrelated positive experiences of leisure, happiness, and flourishing. Given that the United Nations has identified leisure as a right of all humans, everyone is entitled to opportunities to experience leisure and it is important that everyone have the chance to be educated for leisure. According to the World Leisure Organization, the premise of leisure education is that all individuals,
irrespective of race, socioeconomic status, gender, color, religion, ability, age, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic have the right to experience leisure.

**Foster Physical Engagement**

The model contains two primary suggestions to promote physical engagement. Figure 1 presents this concept at the top right of the model by an arrow breaking through physical barriers to inclusive leisure services. One strategy is to apply principles of universal design. Universal design involves formation of inclusive environments combining various design concepts to make products and environments accessible and usable to all people so that they have a range of meaningful options. The seven international principles of universal design help to guide the design process, evaluate existing designs, and educate designers and consumers worldwide about characteristics of usable products and environments. The principles include equitable, flexible, simple and intuitive, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use. We apply universal design principles during all stages of building and purchasing including facility design and equipment procurement, construction and equipment installation, and equipment or building maintenance.

The second strategy is to make adaptations to activities, materials, the environment, the way we teach, and the participants themselves. Equipment and materials used in recreation programs can be adapted including their size, speed, weight, stabilization, durability, and safety. Traditional recreation activities are adapted to facilitate active participation by all individuals. We must work to adapt environments in which leisure participation occurs or make recommendations for changing the environment. We also work with
the individual to make adaptations as we help position the person, provide supportive physical aids, recommend evaluations for sensory aids, provide opportunities for increased mobility, are open to alternative ways to communicate, and teach them skills. If participants are not developing leisure skills and knowledge at a rate consistent with their potential, there are ways to modify instructional strategies to meet their needs more effectively and efficiently. These adaptation efforts occur with assistance from participants, families, colleagues, advocates, and experts. When we believe all people deserve to be included in any program and we do what it takes to make it happen, inclusive leisure services become a reality.

**Influencing Considerations**

The model identifies several considerations associated with selected participant characteristics, accompanied by strategies designed to address these considerations. Figure 1 presents these considerations in the white circle immediately outside the center of the model identifying the purpose of inclusive leisure services.

**Culture.** One characteristic is a person’s culture, which broadly includes ethnicity, religion, race, and sexual orientation, among other variables. A way to promote human rights is to offer people of diverse cultural backgrounds a chance to experience leisure together and to welcome them into our programs. Participation in leisure services that foster opportunities for positive interaction among diverse participants helps to establish friendships and reduce negative feelings toward group members who do not share certain characteristics.
Economic resources. Another consideration is the economic resources available to people, their income strongly influences participation. To facilitate leisure for people with low income we welcome participants and work to be their ally. Professionals must work to improve safety, make programs affordable, facilitate access, offer leisure education, and address homelessness by making personal connections, providing support, and working for supportive policies.

Age. The age of the individual influences leisure engagement and considering strategies to sustain healthy is valuable. Healthy aging involves finding a balance between celebrating changes that occur from enhancing character development as well as accumulation and reflection of life experiences with adjusting and adapting to changes occurring from decreasing physiological and cognitive skills. Considerations for inclusion of older adults into leisure services include encouraging physical and mental engagement, achieving a balance between continuity and novelty, nurturing connections and communicating effectively, promoting intergenerational programs and peer interactions, fostering selection, optimization, and compensation, facilitating use of technology, and creating ways to contribute and volunteer.

Abilities. The model also addresses the characteristic of ability, while encouraging service providers to welcome people of all abilities. To promote inclusion of people with disabilities we become responsive, emphasize people first, encourage autonomy, and involve participants. To facilitate participants’ sense of control and choice we facilitate independence and interdependence, determine necessity of any accommodation, and view accommodations as transitional. It is helpful to involve people with
disabilities in all aspects of leisure program development. To include these individuals in the accommodation process conversations are useful in, determining feasibility of accommodations, and ensuring safety. It is critical that we take whatever actions necessary to help people become included in community leisure programs.

**Family.** Finally, the model addresses the balance that families experience when social, psychological, or physical barriers confront one or multiple members of the family unit. Behind most people who receive leisure services is a family. Given diversity of families, *family* may defined as all members of a household under a roof who have a common interest and commitment to its members. It is imperative that leisure service providers send the message through words and behavior that all types of families are valued. Communication is critical to any meeting between service providers and service recipients, and involving families in these communications is helpful. Connecting with family members increases opportunities for mutual respect as providers come to learn and appreciate family patterns and values.

**Conclusion**

As leisure service providers, we are in an excellent position to enhance the lives of people experiencing oppression. Although there is tremendous potential for leisure to enhance lives of all individuals across the world, many people experience oppression and consequently do not fully realize this potential. One solution is to educate leisure service professionals on ways to promote inclusion. Once we recognize our role in enhancing quality of life for all people, it follows that we must develop strategies to promote inclusive leisure services. If we value and enhance and all individuals’ talents and
through leisure programming, we support all people can and do make valuable contributions to community life. A strong, inclusive community life makes for improved quality of life for everyone.

References