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The Status of Leisure Education: Implications for Instruction and Practice

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Responsible preparation of therapeutic recreation professionals must include knowledge and opportunities for students to acquire identified competencies of professional practice. Of the many competencies identified as important in the therapeutic recreation field, leisure education is consistently noted. There is little agreement, however, over what we should call it, how we should provide it, what it should encompass, and how future practitioners should be prepared for it. Although many sources have suggested solutions for these dilemmas, only a few studies have first viewed the actual status of leisure education either in higher education or in practical settings. Understanding the status of leisure education in both these settings can be helpful to understanding the needs and potential directions of leisure education instruction and practice in the future. The purpose of this paper was to determine the current status of leisure education instruction within higher education as well as in practical therapeutic recreation settings. Additionally, it discusses pertinent issues and implications relevant to the problems cited above.

KEY WORDS: *Leisure Education, Professional Preparation, Professional Competencies*

College graduates in therapeutic recreation are expected to be prepared as competent professionals. Responsible profes-

sional preparation in therapeutic recreation should provide knowledge and opportunities for students to acquire identified com-

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petencies of professional practice. Of the many competencies identified as important in the therapeutic recreation field, leisure education is consistently noted. Unfortunately, however, this competency brings with it much controversy.

Much has been written about leisure education models, programs, and techniques. There is little agreement, however, over what it should be called, how it should be provided, what it should encompass, and how future practitioners should be prepared to deliver it. Although many sources have suggested solutions for these dilemmas, only a few studies have attempted to view the actual status of leisure education either in higher education (Weiner & Gilley, 1977) or in practical settings (Compton, Witt & Sanchez, 1980; Grossman & Kindy, 1984). Although these studies essentially only described leisure education, they also gave some perspective of what is currently being offered in terms of leisure education in therapeutic recreation. Understanding the status of leisure education in both these settings can be helpful to understanding the needs and potential directions of leisure education instruction and practice. The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it will determine the current status of leisure education instruction within higher education as well as in practical therapeutic recreation settings. Second, it will raise and discuss pertinent issues and implications relevant to the problems cited above.

Leisure Education Versus Leisure Counseling Defined

The term "leisure education" has been the focus of many semantic battles over the last ten to fifteen years. In the early and middle 1970's the term leisure counseling was used almost exclusively to describe many different programs ranging from specific clinical counseling interventions to broadly viewed resource identification programs. During this period, the term leisure

education was used only occasionally, usually to describe school oriented programs. Brightbill and Mobley (1977) noted that leisure education was chosen and used exclusively regardless of its application. In the late 1970's and early 1980's, however, many sources noted the use of the terms leisure education and leisure counseling interchangeably (Chinn & Joswiak, 1981; Hayes, 1977; Loesch & Wheeler, 1982; Shank & Kennedy, 1976). This added to the confusion since some professionals perceived specific differences between the terms and some did not. The middle and late 1980's saw a trend toward a more consistent use of these terms. Today, the term leisure education is commonly used in a variety of settings including many clinical arenas (e.g. Aguilar, 1987; Pollingue & Cobb, 1986; Zoerink, 1988). Additionally, the term leisure counseling is used more commonly in reference to a specific clinical technique used within the leisure education framework. For the purposes of this paper, the term leisure education will be used as an umbrella term which includes leisure counseling and other related techniques unless otherwise noted.

The focus of many therapeutic recreation rehabilitation and treatment programs is to prepare and enhance the successful transition and integration of clients into community and home settings where these individuals can conduct normal lives as independently as possible. It is well established that leisure awareness and participation can aid this transition significantly (Browder, 1987; McDonnell, Wilcox, Boles & Bellamy, 1986). It is also clear, however, that lack of leisure awareness, skills, and knowledge can limit the integration of individuals with disabilities into their respective communities (Schleien & Ray, 1986). These skills and awareness must often be facilitated and taught. Leisure education programs regardless of their title can provide this guidance and instruction. The focus of leisure education is to create leisure

opportunities through awareness, knowledge, and skill development so that individuals can pursue leisure independently and use it to maintain physical and mental well being.

Leisure Education and Leisure Counseling in Professional Preparation

Controversy exists over how leisure education fits as an identified part of professional preparation in therapeutic recreation curricula. Some believe these skills should be learned in actual practical settings (O'Morrow, 1976; Riggins, Sylvester & Moore, 1985). Others have proposed a complete curricular emphasis just in leisure counseling (Grossman & Kindy, 1984). There are several things to consider when determining the place of leisure education instruction in higher education. First, it is important to identify the purposes of professional preparation and curriculum development. Second, it is necessary to establish the importance of leisure education as a competency in the provision of therapeutic recreation services.

Snyder & Scott (1982) suggested that undergraduate curriculum development should be "determined by the nature of the work in which [teachers] engage; and should insure adequate breadth and depth in scholarship in the field of specialization" (p. 51). Reynolds & O'Morrow (1985) identified the primary task of therapeutic recreation education as the "preparation of students to assume professional roles and responsibilities for improving life of individuals with [various] problems through recreation experiences" (p. 133). Mobily (1983) stressed the need to integrate professional competencies into therapeutic recreation curricula. "Quality preparation precedes quality service" (p. 19). Rancourt (1986) while discussing components of undergraduate curricula asked therapeutic recreation educators to consider if thera-

peutic recreation majors have been "provided with sufficient theoretical and experiential opportunities relative to program development as it relates to client needs and developmental stages" (p. 27).

Therapeutic recreation specialists, as practitioners who might deliver leisure education programs for their clients as part of their specialization, should be provided with adequate preparation to meet these professional expectations. As Stark, Lowther, Hagerty, & Orzyck, (1986) noted, professional competence can be considered to be the primary objective of most education programs. This is an essential consideration for therapeutic recreation professional preparation.

Both leisure counseling and leisure education have been identified as competencies necessary to therapeutic recreation practice. Henderson (1981) conducted a study which determined the continuing education needs of therapeutic recreators. From 50 topics presented as continuing education interests or needs among practitioners, leisure counseling ranked seventh.

Compton, et al. (1980) surveyed 30 rehabilitation, private, community, and commercial agencies to determine the status of leisure counseling. They found that rehabilitation facilities indicated that they perceived a wide range of leisure counseling techniques to exist. These facilities also suggested that an individual with leisure counseling skills was desirable for employment.

Stumbo (1986) reevaluated 24 curricular content areas for practice in therapeutic recreation which were originally identified in 1981 and currently used by NRPA/AALR Council on Accreditation. One phase of her study required the generation of any competencies considered important by the respondents that were not listed in the original 24. Leisure education was identified as one of 13 new competency areas. Specifically cited were the role, content, and techniques of leisure education as a needed

competency. Additionally, in later phases of this study, Stumbo asked 263 entry level (three years or less experience) Therapeutic Recreation Specialists to rank the 37 competencies based on how important they were to the respondents' present job, the frequency of use of the component, and the importance of these competencies to the therapeutic recreation practice in general. The results indicated that leisure education ranked seventh in terms of how important it was to therapeutic recreation field overall.

Additionally, Mobily, MacNeil & Teague (1984) conducted a study to determine the extent to which competencies taken from National Council on Therapeutic Recreation Certification application forms were considered to be essential to the practice of therapeutic recreation by therapeutic recreation practitioners. From 20 core items, leisure education ranked fifth consistently, regardless of the background of the respondent.

It seems, therefore, that since leisure education and leisure counseling are considered important competency areas, and that they meet criteria of professional preparation, that consideration needs to be given to them in terms of consistency in instruction to practitioners and provision to consumers.

Leisure Education and Leisure Counseling Instruction in Higher Education

Weiner and Gilley (1977) did a study which looked at the status of leisure counseling instruction in higher education. Their study solicited responses from department chairs of 100 recreation curricula in the United States. Their results indicated that only 28% (28) of the 100 respondents offered leisure counseling in any form and only 58% (16) of those who said they offered it, offered it as a separate course.

The current study, however, sought to determine the current status of leisure edu-

cation and leisure counseling in both higher education and practical therapeutic recreation settings in terms of provision of services and perceptions regarding the skills of service providers. Although similar, the current survey was not intended to duplicate exactly the Weiner and Gilley study (1977).

For the current study, two separate questionnaire survey instruments were used; one for the institutions of higher education and one for practical settings. The first consisted of a total of 168 survey questionnaires mailed to chairs of recreation and leisure curricula departments listed in the 1986/87 Society for Parks and Recreation Educators (SPRE) catalog. This questions in this instrument used both the terms "leisure education" and "leisure counseling" since trends indicated a shift in terminology use toward leisure education and away from leisure counseling. One hundred and thirty-three (79%) were returned.

The results of the current study can be seen in Table 1. Although not statistically comparable, to the Weiner and Gilley study, some increase in the number of colleges and universities that provided leisure education or leisure counseling instruction within their recreation/leisure curricula was noted. In addition, there was considerable increase of programs which offered leisure education or leisure counseling as separate classes rather than as topics addressed within specific units of other classes increased. Finally, the results indicated that 57% of the respondents required it and 31% offered leisure education/counseling as an elective.

To explore selected areas of instruction of leisure education and leisure counseling, the current study solicited information regarding leisure education and leisure counseling models and assessment instruments taught. Models that were taught through these curricula ranged greatly, with 29 different types listed. The two most commonly taught models were the Peterson & Gunn

Table 1.
Leisure Education Instruction in Institutions of Higher Education

Descriptors	n	(% of Total)
Institution Type (<i>n</i> = 133)		
University	99	(75%)
Four year college	22	(17%)
Two year college	8	(6%)
Community college	3	(2%)
Unknown	1	(.007%)
Highest Degree Offered (<i>n</i> = 133)*		
Doctoral	20	(15%)
Masters	68	(52%)
Bachelors	119	(89%)
Associate	10	(8%)
Instruction		
Leisure education offered	101	(77%)
Leisure education not offered	32	(23%)
Of those that offered leisure education (<i>n</i> = 101)*		
As separate course	53	(52%)
Within course	41	(41%)
Combination	7	(7%)
Required	64	(63%)
Elective	29	(29%)
No Response	8	(8%)

* Because of multiple response, the totals do not equal 100%.

model (78%) and the McDowell model (65%). Similarly, 34 different assessment instruments were taught in these curricula. The Leisure Diagnostic Battery (LDB) (62%) and the Leisure Interest Inventory (LII) (61%) were taught by the most respondents. Interestingly, in a study which surveyed the use of models and assessment instruments by 157 therapeutic recreation practitioners (Bedini, 1986), the respondents reported high use of the Peterson and Gunn model (41%), although there was little consistency beyond that. In fact, an additional 25 different models were identified as used by these practitioners. The same study determined that few practitioners used the assessment instruments taught by educators. Specifically, 34% of the practi-

tioners used any of 29 different tools, with 15% using a self designed instrument. Table 2 summarizes these results.

Status of Leisure Education/ Counseling in Practical Facilities

For the second phase of the study, eighty four facilities with therapeutic recreation departments were randomly selected from the American Hospital Association's Directory of Hospitals and mailed surveys. Fifty-two responses (60%) were usable. Results can be seen in Table 3. Of the 52 respondents, 49 (94%) offered leisure education, leisure counseling, or a combination of both in their departments. Interestingly, 61% referred to their programs as leisure

Table 2.
Models and Assessment Instruments Most Often Taught and Used

	Models	
	Used in Instruction (<i>n</i> = 133)	Used in Practice (<i>n</i> = 157)
Peterson & Gunn	78 (73%)	64 (41%)
Hayes	37 (34%)	1 (0.5%)
McDowell	65 (60%)	14 (9%)
Other (miscellaneous)	48 (44%)	47 (30%)

	Assessment Tools	
	Used in Instruction (<i>n</i> = 133)	Used in Practice (<i>n</i> = 157)
Leisure Diagnostic Battery	58 (62%)	16 (10%)
Leisure Interest Inventory	57 (61%)	17 (11%)
Leisure Assessment Blank	54 (57%)	8 (5%)
None	—	35 (22%)
Own/Other	30 (32%)	53 (34%)

Note. Because of multiple responses, the totals do not equal 100%.

¹ Data from Bedini (1986).

education while only 8% offered only leisure counseling. The remaining 31% offered a combination title of both leisure education and leisure counseling. Eighty-two percent of these programs were offered by a recreation therapist alone, 14% were offered by a combination of a recreation therapist and another therapist, and 2% were offered solely by occupational therapy or some other therapist. The median number hours of leisure education/counseling offered per week was two and 57% of the departments required attendance of the clients.

When asked if skills in leisure education were competencies that were sought of newly hired, entry level recreation therapists, 65% of the respondents stated that they included these skills in the job description directly. Ninety-eight percent of the respondents said they looked for those skills

in an applicant in partial determination of hiring. Finally, when asked if these supervisors felt that the entry level recreation therapy personnel were well prepared to provide leisure education to clients, only 45% said "yes", 49% said "no." These results have implications for curriculum development (see Table 3).

Finally, when asked about program content, the respondents indicated that their instruction is comprised of sixteen major content areas. Instruction and guidance in areas such as leisure awareness, leisure knowledge, leisure values, activity skills, and resource knowledge were provided by more than 80% of the respondents. Areas such as social skill training, motivation, planning skills, and decision-making skills were taught by more than 60% of the respondents (see Table 4).

Table 3.

Frequencies of Leisure Education (LE) and Leisure Counseling (LC) in Practical Facilities

Descriptors	<i>n</i>	(%)
Title		
Leisure Education only	30	(61%)
Leisure Counseling only	4	(8%)
Combination LE and LC	15	(31%)
Who Provides		
Recreation Therapist	40	(82%)
Recreation Therapist & Others	7	(14%)
Other Therapists Only	2	(4%)
Attendance		
Voluntary	20	(43%)
Required	27	(57%)
LE/LC Skills Required in Job Description		
Yes	32	(65%)
No	17	(35%)
LE/LC Skills Considered in Hiring		
Yes	48	(98%)
No	1	(2%)
Entry Level Practitioners Demonstrate Competence		
Yes	22	(45%)
No	24	(49%)
Both	3	(6%)

n = 49.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was not only to provide a brief update of the status of leisure education in higher education and in practical settings, but also to discuss the need for leisure education in higher education and in therapeutic recreation practice. The questions of whether leisure education has a place in recreation curricula as well as whether consistency exists between what is being taught and what is being done are often raised.

Data indicated that leisure education instruction has increased in recreation/leisure curricula. Weiner & Gilley (1977) projected that by the academic year 1980 there would be a 100% increase in offerings of leisure

counseling specifically as a separate course. Although unknown for 1980, a great number of curricula offered leisure education or leisure counseling as course content in 1987. This increase does not necessarily represent the quality of programs, however. Concern over whether the content is appropriate or useful in practical settings is highlighted by the fact that the employers noted a deficiency in entry level professionals in their ability to offer leisure education and leisure counseling programs.

The data also indicated that the existence of leisure education programs in practical facilities is high. The fact that leisure education is being offered by a large number of facilities that offer therapeutic recreation programs raises several issues.

Table 4.

**Leisure Education and Leisure Counseling
Content Areas Provided by Practitioners**

Content Areas Rankings	n	(%)
1. Leisure Awareness	47	(96%)
2. Leisure Knowledge	43	(88%)
3. Values Clarification	42	(86%)
4. Activity Skills	42	(86%)
5. Resource Knowledge	41	(84%)
6. Social Skills	36	(74%)
7. Motivation	32	(65%)
8. Planning Skills	31	(63%)
9. Decision-making Skills	31	(63%)
10. Self-confidence Building	29	(59%)
11. Problem-solving Skills	28	(57%)
12. Time Management	28	(57%)
13. Money Management	20	(41%)
14. Stress Management	19	(39%)
15. Transportation Skills	18	(38%)
16. Assertiveness	16	(33%)

n = 49.

Note. Because of multiple responses, the totals do not equal 100%.

First, whereas it is important to acknowledge the volume of programs being offered as an indication of an attempt to meet a perceived need in the field, the issue of quality and consistency in content must still be considered. Grossman & Kindy (1984) cautioned that practitioners without knowledge in leisure counseling are setting up and running programs. Although this is a potential problem, this fear can be tempered by the fact that the data show some consistency among content areas being provided in the facilities. As noted, areas such as leisure awareness, leisure knowledge, leisure values, resource knowledge, and activity skills were offered by over 80% of the programs. Similarly, another seven areas were offered by over 55% of the programs. This would suggest that leisure education is not only viewed and defined simi-

larly by practitioners but also is addressing similar needs among settings and populations.

Additionally, curricula in leisure studies and recreation need to identify what type of leisure education instruction they are providing. As noted earlier, the goals of professional preparation include preparing individuals to practice. As Smith (1976) maintained, there is sometimes a gap between the pre-service instruction and the actual practice. Leisure studies curricula need to be proactive and take control in the design of their professional preparation instruction for leisure education. This is not to say that curricula should ignore what is being done in the practical settings, however. Curricula must be aware of what is being practiced and consider the frequency with which several content areas are being provided. Stark et al. (1986) identified six types of competence that universities should strive to provide in professional preparation. These include conceptual, technical, integration, contextual, adaptive, and interpersonal competencies. Although leisure education encompasses many practical skills, general conceptual and theoretical issues are essential and unique to leisure education as well. Therefore, regardless of whether a particular curriculum is training oriented or proposing a broad based education, instruction in leisure education in terms of these six components is important to the preparation of therapeutic recreation professionals. A combination of academic and existing practical concepts need to be explored and identified.

Related to the issues of curriculum content for leisure education is the importance of efficacy research for leisure education. How can the consistency of what is currently being taught be determined? Also, how can curricula establish what should or should not be taught? Efficacy of different elements of leisure education needs to be determined. Research using leisure education as an intervention with different popu-

lations and in different settings needs to be conducted in well-designed, controlled, and sophisticated studies to prove that it is worthwhile and to identify what is outdated or inappropriate. Philosophically, leisure education should initiate positive change in clients, however, in a time of accountability and cost-effectiveness, until efficacy can be determined, what we do in leisure education is moot.

A specific area of concern within professional preparation deals with the identification of different assessment techniques. As noted, practitioners used the identified assessment tools considerably less than those about which the educators taught. Many practitioners seemed to create their own or use none. This suggests several problems. Beside the eternal problem of lack of good assessment instruments in therapeutic recreation, college curricula should consider providing information not only in the types of instruments available but also on how to determine the validity and reliability of these instruments. Additionally, many practitioners seem to develop their own tools. Perhaps, then, some consideration needs to be given to design and use of measuring instruments. More knowledge in psychometric concepts and techniques can help the practitioners in choosing and using effective and appropriate instrumentation.

Leisure education is an area of intervention that can have a positive impact on the quality of life of individuals with disabilities. It is one area of therapeutic recreation that specifically addresses the carryover needs of individuals with disabilities as they leave a treatment facility and attempt to integrate back into their respective communities and lifestyles. In some ways it can provide the link that allows the individual to enter his/her community with a sense of preparedness with regard to leisure and how to attain it.

Serious attention needs to be given to the development of leisure education both

in higher education and in practical settings. The identification of appropriate content for professional preparation, as well as establishment of efficacy in practical settings is paramount. The status of leisure education determined by this paper shows that the need exists and that better preparation of practitioners is needed. More intense study and investigation is warranted, however, before leisure education can begin to realize its full potential.

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