

“A Textured Life”: Learning About the Lives of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

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Introduction

One of the basic learning objectives for the course “Introduction to Therapeutic Recreation” at Clemson University is to enhance students’ understanding of the lives and experiences of people with disabilities. Therefore, for several years students enrolled in “Introduction to Therapeutic Recreation” have been required to read “A Textured Life: Empowerment and adults with developmental disabilities” by Pedlar, Haworth, Hutchinson, Taylor, and Dunn (1999). This book chronicles the factors affecting the lives of community-dwelling adults with developmental disabilities. The impact of the social service delivery system, living environment, staff members, friends and family members are all highlighted.

Although the material in the “Textured Life” book is highly informative, students have struggled with the rigor of the writing and the concepts presented. Typically two class periods are reserved for the discussion of the seven chapters in “A Textured Life,” with the first four chapters discussed during the first class period and the last three discussed during the second class period. During spring 2003 the second class period was used to introduce a game that allowed students to work with the concepts presented in the text. In this paper the “Textured Life Game” will be described, including its evaluation and the plans for future development.

Learning Activity

Students were divided into small groups of four to five. During the first part of the game, students selected a colored piece of 8 1/2" by 11" paper and folded it to create four quadrants. With markers each student used words and pictures to fill in the quadrants with information on the following: (1) values, (2) relationships, (3) dreams/aspirations, and (4) meaningful activities (see Table 1). These four life domains were selected based on issues addressed in “A Textured Life” as well as those addressed by Galambos in “Planning...to have a life: Individualized planning for quality of life” (1998). Following completion of this portion of the game, each member of the group shared information about their values, relationships, aspirations, and activities with the other group members.

The second part of the game hypothetically placed each member in a group home. They were told that they shared a room with an assigned roommate, no longer had a car

or attended school or had a job. Depending on the role of the die, players' opportunities for work and friendship were influenced, aspirations lost or honored, etc (see Table 2). Each player had a form on which they recorded the factors influencing their lives. Further, each student wrote an individual response to the following question: "What happened to your life? In what ways were you constrained? How did the events that transpired over the course of one week effect your activity involvement? Day to day happiness? Life satisfaction?" Following completion of the game, the students in each small group discussed the events that effected their day to day experiences and life satisfaction. A general classroom discussion was then undertaken to discuss linkages between the game and the assigned reading.

Evaluation of the Learning Activity

Students were asked to evaluate the game. Using a five-point scale (1=not at all, 5= very much) students were asked to assess how effective the game was in helping them work with the concepts presented in the text. A mean score of 4.13 (SD=1.3, N=15) indicated that the students rated the game as an effective learning tool. Narrative comments indicated support for the game as a learning tool, as well as suggested that the game now be designed using a game board format ("The game helps to better understand limitations and choices people actually have!", "I think maybe making it into an actual board game.", "I thought it was a good way [to] get a small idea of what it would be like to be in a group home.").

Future Directions & Recommendations

Based on the evaluation, the second part of the game is being revised using a board game format. Further, a broad range of potential experiences are being incorporated into the game format, thereby increasing the number of concepts from the book that students will draw on as they play the game. Following this revision the game will be tested again in "Introduction to Therapeutic Recreation."

The Textured Life Game has applicability beyond its use in "Introduction to Therapeutic Recreation." A new undergraduate course at Clemson University, entitled "Diverse Populations in Parks, Recreation, and Tourism Management," was recently developed. All of the undergraduate students in the department will be required to enroll in the Diversity course, providing them with an awareness of the leisure patterns of diverse populations, including individuals with developmental disabilities. The Textured Life Game presented in this paper may also an important learning tool for all park and recreation students (in emphasis areas such as Community Leisure Services, Natural Resources, Sport Management, Travel and Tourism) who are striving to understand the unique experiences of constituents with developmental disabilities.

TABLE 1

Textured Life Game: Part 1

INSTRUCTIONS: You have been given a piece of construction paper. Please fold it in half and then in half one more time! When you unfold the paper you should have four equal quadrants. Please fill the quadrants with the following:

WHAT ARE YOUR VALUES? What is important to you – do you care about how you look, pleasing others, pleasing yourself? Is it important to help others? Have a lot of friends? How important is family to you? Do you value solitude and being alone or an abundance of social interactions? Do you basically trust people or distrust them? *Mark one quadrant “Values.” Use words and/or pictures to represent 4 personal values.*

RELATIONSHIPS. Who are the important people in your life? Are they family members? Friends? Co-workers? Peers? People who you have met through school or work? To what extent are they part of your life? Do you see and/or talk with them on a daily basis? Weekly basis? *Mark one quadrant “Relationships.” Use words and/or pictures to represent 4 to 6 individuals who are important in your life.*

DREAMS/HOPES. Dare to dream. What is your vision for the future? Describe how you would like your life to be in a year, five years, ten years. *Mark one quadrant “Dreams.” Use words/pictures to represent 2 to 4 aspirations you have for the future.*

MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES. What are the important, meaningful activities in your life? In particular, think about recreation and leisure pursuits that provide meaning. What is it about these pursuits that is meaningful? *Mark one quadrant “Meaningful Activities.” Use words/pictures to represent 6 to 8 meaningful activities in your life.*

TABLE 2

Textured Life Game: Part 2

Your task is to hypothetically place yourself as a main character in Pedlar's text. You currently reside in a group home and share a room with an 'assigned' roommate. You and your teammates will play a game that simulates your life over the course of one week. What will happen over the next seven days? Will you move into an apartment of your choosing? Will staff encourage you to reach for your dreams? Will you have opportunities to engage in meaningful activities with family and friends?

The person whose birthday is closest to today's date may start the game; subsequently you will pass the die clockwise. If you roll a:

	First time you roll the #	Second time you roll the #	Third time you roll the #
1	Remain in group home	Congratulations! You may select a roommate! Who will it be?	Congratulations! You may move into an independent apartment with assistance from staff as needed!
2	Congratulations! You get to pick a person from your small group to invite out to dinner.	Congratulations! You get to pick a person from your small group to invite over to dinner.	Congratulations! A person from your small group has asked you over to dinner.
3	Congratulations! One of the folks from your relationship quadrant has asked you to go to a movie.	Bummer...one of the folks from your relationship quadrant has ended the relationship. Cross off that person.	Congratulations! One of the folks from your relationship quadrant has invited you to take a day trip.
4	Bummer....staff tell you that your aspirations and dreams are unrealistic. Cross one off.	Congratulations! Staff are taking <u>one action</u> to make one of your aspirations become a reality! Place a star next to the selected aspiration.	Bummer....staff tell you that your aspirations and dreams are unrealistic. Cross one off.
5	Congratulations! You may attend the sheltered workshop three afternoons this week.	Congratulations! The Community Recreation Center has agreed to have you volunteer at the front desk two mornings each week.	Bummer....the Community Recreation Center has decided that they have enough help at the front desk. You no longer have volunteer work two mornings each week.
6	Congratulations! You may participate in one of your meaningful activities (by yourself).	Bummer...your afternoon plan to participate in a meaningful activity with a friend has been cancelled.	Congratulations! You may participate in one of your meaningful activities (by yourself).

References

Galambos, D. (1998). *Planning...to have a life: Individualized planning for quality of life*. Oakville, Ontario, Canada: Sheridan College Learning Materials Service.

Pedlar, A., Haworth, L., Hutchinson, P., Taylor, A., & Dunn, P. (1999). *A textured life: Empowerment and adults with developmental disabilities*. Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.