

Providing Recreation Services for all Individuals

The Connection of Inclusive Practices to Commercial, Community, and Outdoor Recreation Students

Jennifer A. Piatt

Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Studies
Indiana University

Lisa J. Jorgensen

Department of Recreation, Park and Tourism Administration
California State University, Sacramento

Abstract

Individuals with disabilities currently represent the largest minority group in the United States, yet recreation undergraduate students often perceive this as a population they may or may not provide services to in their future careers. The activities presented in this paper, Inclusion Knowledge Audits (IKA), are developed to make the connection between inclusion (for all people) to the provision of leisure services in all recreation settings. Focusing on the cultural competencies needed to work with individuals with disabilities, IKAs have been designed as both in-class and out-of-class assignments where students are provided the opportunity to connect coursework on inclusion and disabilities to their specific area of interest (e.g., community, commercial, or outdoor recreation).

KEYWORDS: *Inclusion, individuals with disabilities, recreation services*

With approximately 54.4 million individuals currently living with a disability (18.7% of the general population) in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008), providing a core course that focuses on inclusion and disability awareness is essential for students' development of cultural competencies, particularly pertaining to the provision of equitable services for all people. Currently, 82 recreation academic programs in the United States are accredited by the Council on Accreditation (COA; National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), 2010), and required standards

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Jennifer A. Piatt, Ph.D., CTRS, Assistant Professor, Indiana University, School of Health, Physical Education, and Recreation, Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Studies, HPER Building 133, 1025 E. Seventh Street, Bloomington, IN 47405-7109, (812) 855-7819, jenpiatt@indiana.edu

pertaining to inclusion, disability awareness, and diversity continue to be addressed through the revised 2013 Council on Accreditation of Parks, Recreation, Tourism and Related Professionals (COAPRT) standard (NRPA). These accreditation standards further support the rationale for providing a core recreation course on inclusion and disability. However, conveying the importance of developing cultural competencies on inclusion and disabilities to students outside of the therapeutic recreation emphasis brings its own set of challenges.

One of the major obstacles in content delivery of inclusive recreation for people with disabilities is the “buy in” from students who are not pursuing a career in therapeutic recreation or specifically working with individuals with disabilities. Undergraduates focusing in other service delivery options (e.g., outdoor, commercial, and community recreation) may come to class with the notion that this core course is required for graduation and does not directly pertain to their careers. Understanding that this potential disconnect may occur for nontherapeutic recreation majors, it then becomes necessary to strategically design curriculum that introduces the topic of inclusive recreation and service delivery for people with disabilities as it applies to various recreation settings. This strategy embraces moving away from the traditional “Introduction to Therapeutic Recreation” as a delivery method to a broader context of identifying current trends and competencies as they directly relate to all recreation settings, and more importantly, to all recreation professionals.

Traditionally, when inclusion is introduced to undergraduate students, content usually focuses on inclusion as a physical placement (e.g., programs where persons with and without disabilities recreate together) (Modell & Imwold, 1998). Inclusion is then viewed as a form of programming designed specifically by the recreation professional where the main objective is to bring people with and without disabilities together for a specific recreation event. This may lead to the assumption that individuals are engaging in “inclusive recreation” only when people with and without disabilities are present at this specific program or event. As a result, this assumption may lead to the misconception that inclusive services merely pertain to professionals who deliver and advertise inclusive recreation programs, rather than within other leisure services.

The reformation of teaching a course so that it connects to all service providers distances itself from defining inclusion as a specific program, and rather, introduces inclusion as a philosophical concept that encompasses everything we do as professionals. Focusing on inclusion within a social context, where individuals value one another and share common experiences (Devine & Parr, 2008; Tripp, French & Sherrill, 1995), goes beyond the physical placement of the activity. Therefore, Inclusion Knowledge Audit (IKA) activities presented in this paper, should be explained as a philosophy contingent on varying factors including attitudes, an individual’s perception of his or her self-worth and value (DePauw, 1999; DePauw & Doll-Tepper, 2000), group acceptance, common experiences, and where an individual is encouraged to make independent leisure choices (Bullock, Mahon & Killingsworth, 2010; Dattilo, 2002; Devine, 2004). Inclusion framed in a social context then focuses on the leisure experience regardless of who is present.

Learning Activity Overview

Inclusion Knowledge Audits are constructed in such a way that each student, regardless of his or her previous experience working with individuals with disabilities, can directly apply definitions, terms, theories, and cultural competences learned to a variety of practical experiences. Inclusion Knowledge Audits can be assigned as either an in-class group activity or an independent out-of-class assignment. Importantly, when students are asked to complete an IKA with other peers from class, students are grouped by their area of interest, with the intent to facilitate student learning by bringing a variety of experiences and different views into the discussion. Finally, IKAs are graded according to thoughtful application of content presented, including applying course readings and class lectures and relating the information gained back to their specific area of study. Typically, within a 16-week semester, approximately four to six IKAs are assigned and may be altered or modified based on a student's knowledge base of working with individuals with disabilities. For shorter courses, for example; eight week sessions or a summer school course, a maximum of four IKAs should be assigned. The following are three examples of different IKAs that have been designed sequentially to allow for a gradual and consistent learning of inclusion as a philosophical concept. The first IKA presented was developed by the authors. The second and third IKAs have been modified from chapter learning activities in Smith, Austin, Kennedy, Lee, and Hutchinson (2005).

Since attitudes and stigmas about individuals with disabilities often present significant barriers to recreation participation (Smith et. al, 2005), the first IKA is designed for students to complete a "self-assessment" of personal thoughts, attitudes, and biases about individuals with disabilities. For this IKA, students are asked to watch the video *I'm Tyler* (www.imtyler.com) that creates incongruence between perceptions of abilities. In this video, a high school age boy without a disability introduces himself and shares his various interests and accomplishments, including completing an Eagle Scout project, playing in the high school band, participating in the drama club, and practicing karate. The boy finishes this narrative by declaring he is not the real Tyler and the real Tyler, a teen with cerebral palsy, appears on the screen and proceeds to share his story and reasons for creating this video to demonstrate what adolescents with disabilities can do by focusing on their abilities instead of limitations. Students answer questions regarding their reaction to the video as an independent self-analysis either on a web-based discussion board, or during a class discussion. Some of the reflective questions for this IKA include: (a) describe the personal biases and attitudes toward individuals with disabilities you were aware of after watching the video (b) how might these attitudes and/or biases impact the way you (as a recreation professional) deliver leisure experiences to your customer (both with and without a disability)?

The second IKA in the sequence focuses on evaluating recreation services and encompasses two components. First, students are asked to examine current practice in relationship to inclusion by completing an accessibility survey on a recreation agency. The survey includes an assessment of physical access relating to the American with Disabilities Act and Architectural Barriers Act Accessibility Guidelines (United States Access Board, 2010), as well as other components of accessibility. In particular, and in a view of inclusion as a philosophical concept, students evaluate cultural competence

toward inclusion and individuals with disabilities by identifying staff attitudes and sensitivity training as well as policies and marketing materials to determine if inclusive practices within their assigned recreation agency go beyond simply fulfilling ADA requirements. This component also includes an appraisal of accessibility statements on printed materials and how accessible the agency's website is to individuals with disabilities. Second, after completing of the accessibility survey, students provide four strengths and four areas of improvement for the agency to move toward inclusion.

For the final IKA in this sequence, students critically connect course content to practice by adapting a specific recreation service to meet the needs of an individual with a disability. Students work collaboratively in small groups to complete an activity analysis on a case study. Students are presented with a scenario in each case study where an individual with a disability is seeking out a recreation service (settings might include individuals camping at a national park, attending a conference, participating in a youth sports league, traveling on a cruise ship, or staying at a hotel). As a group, students complete the scenario by identifying and describing a) the type of disability, b) contraindications professionals within this agency need to be aware of for this individual, c) adaptations that need to occur to make the service or program available for the participant, and d) legislation, and/or public policy that might be violated. Each student group presents the case study with solutions and recommendations on how to make the service/program a better experience both for the consumer and the agency.

Although in class discussion occurs after each one of the IKAs, one class session at the end of the semester is designated for an overall debriefing of the IKA assignments. There are various ways to complete this debriefing, including an informal class discussion, formal reflection papers, or group presentations. It is important that when debriefing the IKA students share their interpretations of the assignments and open up a dialogue about providing inclusive services for consumers in a variety of recreation settings. Furthermore, these assignments should instill cultural competencies framed around service delivery and individuals with disabilities.

Intended Outcomes

The outcomes of the IKAs are for students to: (a) develop awareness of one's own attitudes toward all individuals regardless of abilities and/or background and how this can affect the provision of recreation for all individuals; (b) increase one's potential to provide leisure services to all individuals by assessing individual needs, conducting activity analysis, following guidelines for program design, individualized accommodation, and methods of resource development; and (c) increase awareness of current issues and trends (including legislation) and how this impacts the delivery of services for individuals with disabilities.

Recommendations for Use by Others

Based on prior implementation, IKA activities appear to work best with undergraduate students who will be employed in the recreation industry, regardless of prior experience working with individuals with disabilities. One of the strengths of the IKAs is that each assignment can be adapted and modified depending on the needs

of the students each semester. When students have little experience with individuals with disabilities, more time and discussion can be focused on basic concepts and theories. A more experienced group of students might explore and discuss additional complex topics and theories within the IKA. Although the IKA has been framed around recreation services and individuals with disabilities, it can also be implemented in classes that address additional populations that are not widely represented in the leisure industry. Ultimately, the flexibility of these assignments allows the instructor to revise the assignments every semester so that students are allowed to build on their prior knowledge base.

Inclusion knowledge audits are not intended to be stand alone assignments, but rather be implemented as supportive practical assignments used to connect lecture, readings, exams, and service learning activities. Developed to bring individual opinions into the class, the IKAs reinforce experiences gained during the service learning assignment where students work directly with individuals with disabilities in a recreation setting. The IKAs have also been shown to strengthen the connection between course content and practice. Building on one another, IKAs provide students from all leisure service delivery systems a connection to the importance of supporting and promoting inclusive recreation services.

References

- Bullock, C. C., Mahon, M. J., & Killingsworth, C. L. (2010). *Introduction to recreation services for people with disabilities: A person-centered approach* (3rd ed.). Champaign, IL: Sagamore.
- Dattilo, J. (2002). *Inclusive leisure services: Responding to the rights of people with disabilities* (2nd ed.). State College, PA: Venture.
- DePauw, K. P. (1999). Social-cultural context of disability: Implications for professional preparation and scientific inquiry. Paper presented at the American Academy of Kinesiology and Physical Education, Callaway Gardens, GA.
- DePauw, K. P., & Doll-Temper, G. (2000). Toward progressive inclusion and acceptance: Myth or reality? The inclusion debate and bandwagon discourse. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 17, 135-143.
- Devine, M. A. (2004). From connector to distancer: The role of inclusive leisure contexts in determining social acceptance for people with disabilities. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 35(2), 137-159.
- Devine, M. A., & Parr, M. G. (2008). "Come on in, but not too far": Social capital in an inclusive leisure setting. *Leisure Sciences*, 30, 391-408.
- I'm Tyler Video. (Video file). Retrieved from <http://www.imtyler.org/>.
- Modell, S. J., & Imwald, C. H. (1998). Parental attitudes towards inclusive recreation and leisure: A qualitative analysis. *Parks & Recreation*, 33(5), 88-93.
- National Recreation and Park Association. (2010). Accredited Academic Programs. Retrieved on January 15, 2011 from <http://www.nrpa.org/Content.aspx?id=1112>
- Smith, R. W., Austin, D. R., Kennedy, D. W., Lee, Y., & Hutchison, P. (2005). *Inclusive and special recreation: Opportunities for persons with disabilities* (5th ed.). New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

- Tripp, A., French, R., & Sherrill, C. (1995). Contact theory and attitudes of children in physical education programs toward peers with disabilities. *Adapted Physical Activity Quarterly*, 12, 323-332.
- United States Access Board. (2010). Americans with disability act and the architectural barriers act accessibility guidelines. Retrieved on May 5, 2011 from <http://www.access-board.gov/ada/>.
- U.S. Census Bureau. (2008). Americans with Disabilities 2005: Household Economic Studies. Retrieved on February 1, 2011 from <http://www.census.gov/prod/2008pubs/p70-117.pdf>.