PROMOTION OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION THROUGH LEISURE

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ABSTRACT
The Leisure Club is an innovative, integrated leisure programme which provides opportunities for children to learn valuable leisure and social skills as well as a rich environment for research on social integration. Through the Club, children with disabilities learn to take part in leisure activities, removed from formal or therapeutic settings, and have an opportunity to develop appropriate social behaviours and social relations. At the same time, their non-disabled peers develop a knowledge of the needs, interests and feelings of people with disabilities. The Leisure Club aims to enhance social integration by heightening awareness of the common needs of the participants. The Club provides an effective social setting in which the different components of social integration can be studied. Several research projects have developed from the Club, including a co-operative, multidisciplinary and international project on social integration which aims to identify factors affecting the social integration of children with an intellectual disability. It is the first of a series of international projects on social integration which will provide a methodological framework for subsequent studies. Unique features of this study are its blending of qualitative and quantitative methods and a multi-

disciplinary approach. This presentation describes the Club and the unique features of the research project.

INTRODUCTION

Wide acceptance of the “Principle of Normalisation” has led to an affirmation of the equal rights of people with special needs, regardless of physical or mental condition, and that these rights should extend to the utilisation of community recreation programmes and involvement in leisure activities of the individual's own choice. Providing people with special needs with opportunities to interact with non-disabled people enhances their socialisation and thus their effective social integration (e.g. Giangreco & Putnam, 1991; Gow, 1984a; Gow, Calvez, Fitzgerald, Balla, Dixon, Reddycliff & Levi, 1993; Gow & Chow, 1990). The Leisure Club was developed on these principles.

The Leisure Club

The Leisure Club (LC) is an innovative, integrated leisure programme which provides children with opportunities to learn valuable leisure and social skills. The LC is a joint venture of the University of Western Sydney Macarthur and the NSW Department of School Education, Metropolitan South West Region and has a range of participants across many sectors of society.

The Leisure Club is intended to enhance the social and leisure skills of the participants as an initial step towards their being able to participate in everyday social activities appropriate for young people of their age (i.e. increasing their social integration). The ultimate goal is for the LC to become part of a National Centre for Inclusion at the University of Western Sydney in co-operation with the NSW Department of School Education. Research emanating from this Centre will contribute to knowledge and skills relating to: enhancement of quality of life of all people; inclusion of people with disabilities or "special needs"; and social integration.

The Leisure Club is often described as being potentially "all things to all people". It currently serves a number of different groups, including: children with and without special needs; siblings of children with special needs; adolescents and adults with special needs; volunteers (university students and Faculty, parents and grandparents); unemployed teachers and trainees; and researchers.

1. Young people from 3 - 20 years, both with and without special educational needs, are provided with an opportunity to develop leisure and social skills and to improve their self esteem through self direction and free choice, while enjoying leisure activities. The involvement of same-age peers without disability is a crucial component of the program and well supported in the literature (e.g. Guralnick & Groom, 1988). The programme provides opportunities for the enhancement of peer and social acceptance as
a key to community living. Society has the tendency to create labels relating to difference but what the Leisure Club attempts to foster is the opportunity to witness and experience the sameness that exists among young people. Fundamentally though, it is a "fun time" where children, disabled or not, can meet new friends and learn leisure skills in a relaxed atmosphere.

2. Siblings of participants with disabilities are able to interact with other children with and without disabilities. The Club is devising a special program for siblings whose needs have often been ignored in previous initiatives of this kind. This program provides opportunities for them to share experiences and break down negative stereotypes that may have developed in a family unit having a child with a disability.

3. Adolescents and adults are given the option of either participating in the programme with the younger participants, or becoming trainees and developing work skills (particularly in the area of hospitality). As more adolescents join the program, plans are being formulated for them to participate in their own leisure pursuits. One option presently being developed is participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Whichever option is selected by these older participants, every effort is made to ensure that they experience a balance between work and recreation; an opportunity to develop work and social skills; a meaningful reason for developing travelling and money management skills; interaction with non-disabled and disabled peers; and building networks or "circles of friends" leading to greater peer and social acceptance. They are encouraged to undertake leadership and supervision of people younger than themselves; this approach provides an experience that is often denied to people with an intellectual disability.

4. Volunteers can gain work skills or simply enjoy social interaction with participants. These volunteers include grandparents, unemployed youth and other students in educational and health sciences (e.g. occupational therapy) with the club providing a chance to socialise, develop skills and feel productive. In the case of the occupational therapy students, it provides opportunities to gain a better appreciation of the potential social role of participants and to better identify the potential of participants in terms of maximisation of occupational performance.

5. Parents are provided a respite from care of their children with special needs, secure in the knowledge that their children are being cared for by qualified special educators.

6. Trainee teachers and graduate unemployed teachers are provided an opportunity to develop teaching and interpersonal skills in a more relaxed environment than the classroom and to develop positive attitudes towards children with special needs. Trainees have often been heard to say with some amazement: "You know, they're just the same as all the other kids".
These experiences for both trainees and returning graduate teachers will hopefully allow them to better adapt and cope with the more integrated environment being implemented in the school system.

7. For researchers, the Leisure Club is a social laboratory for studies of social integration of young people with a range of disabilities. One such study will be discussed in this paper.

The LC has the potential for influencing attitudes and behaviour towards people with special needs in all sectors of the community. The Leisure Club concept (both current and prior initiatives, see Gow et al., 1985) has fulfilled important roles for the local community, University staff and students and allied health professionals and has served as a vehicle for community service by voluntary groups (e.g. Rotary, Lions and Apex). Its emphasis is on joint participation and encouragement of flexibility and independence. It is not highly structured, nor dominated by instructors; children are led through a cycle of activities, including craft, cooking and unstructured play using a variety of equipment. The leisure program is flexible and adaptable to cater for a diversity of individual needs. Its flexibility also ensures the age-appropriateness of the activities and aims to meet the needs of many different families. There is strong emphasis on non-competitive physical activities so that individuals' abilities and confidence can be enhanced. Eventually, it is hoped that these activities will lead participants to be integrated into regular activities such as sporting and other leisure clubs.

Other unique features of the Club include:

1. acceptance, or "inclusion" of all children;
2. emphasis on individual choice in terms of activities, time spent on activities and sequence of activities;
3. control of behaviour via: appeal to reason; use of group interactions; and the development of internal cognitive processes as opposed to the control of behaviours by external adult intervention; and
4. use of rewards and punishments that relate only to inclusion or exclusion from activities. The LC provides a positive, supportive and respectful atmosphere.

One assumption underlying the LC is that participation in leisure can provide the motivation for developing collateral skills, such as social interaction, mobility and independent living (through such activities as initiating conversations, taking turns etc.). Other collateral competencies which have been shown to be positively affected by involvement in the Club are personal characteristics such as self-concept, self-esteem and internal locus of control.

The LC was adapted from a similar project in the Illawarra Region which was designed and implemented by Gow, Balla and their colleagues to enhance social integration of children and youth with disabilities with non-disabled people (Gow, 1984 a & b; Gow & Balla, 1983 a & b; Gow, Balla &
Purvis, 1985a & b). After seven years of successful operation, and in support of other findings (e.g. Amary, 1975; Hunt, 1955; Maheady et al., 1984; Margalit et al., 1988; Possberg, 1978; Powell, 1983; Realon, Favell & Lowerre, 1990; Stubbins, 1977), the conclusion drawn from the Illawarra experience was that the participants with disabilities developed a leisure skills repertoire and enhanced their social adaptability, self-concept, internal locus of control and general quality of life. However, while social integration was fostered, it was recommended that further studies were needed to investigate factors for promoting and sustaining social skills as a necessary component of social integration. This was the catalyst for the development of the social integration research project conducted in association with the LC.

As noted earlier, the LC provides a social laboratory for this multi-disciplinary study of social integration. It promotes a process of socialisation and acquisition of social competencies as well as a context in which to work towards the enhancement of social integration. It offers a wide range of social situations; than otherwise would be identified at school or home. Thus, it provides an ideal setting for the study of social integration. By studying the interactions that take place at the LC, it is possible to explore the components of social integration, to describe how it works or fails, to examine the acquisition of social competencies and to study the effects of the social contexts and cultural values in which prior socialisation has taken place.

The study of social integration

Effective social integration of people with an intellectual disability has been recognised as one of the greatest social and educational challenges since the earliest studies in the 1960's (Dunn, 1968). It continues to be viewed as an area fraught with controversy and conflict between philosophical ideals and social and political constraints (Cole & Meyer, 1991; Gow et al., 1993). Members of the present research team, among others, believe that a united international effort is required to shed light on the complex factors involved in social integration. One of our major goals was the development of a methodological framework for the multi-disciplinary documentation of case studies of social integration for cultural comparisons. To this end, this study was compiled by researchers having research experiences in different cultural contexts (Australia, France, the USA, New Zealand and Hong Kong) to ensure transferability of the methodology and to validate comparative interpretations. We believe that a multi-disciplinary approach enables the breadth of vision required to fully understand complex problems such as social integration. This study has provided the framework for future field studies of social integration across different cultures.

Theoretical underpinnings
In the present study, social integration was considered from the perspective of the children making sense of their environment and being able to find their own ways to act with others in social settings. Social integration implies an effective interactive process in which each person's actions involve the existence of other people, and are oriented by a set of admitted rules. For the individual, it is therefore the capacity to locate oneself in a social and cultural environment. The construction of meaning from interactions is the core of social integration. This construction is strongly related to the process of socialisation which the individual experiences. Every child comes to the LC with his/her own story. That story is constructed from a prior socialisation that takes place in the family and in the educational setting, and that involves other people with whom the child interacts. In discovering the world during socialisation, the child learns to make sense of his/her environment. In this cross-disciplinary project, the different facets of effective and on-going socialisation are investigated in order to understand how children are able to make sense of their environment, and find their own way through the different situations, roles and values which they experience in the community.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study were:

1. to identify specific situations, in the context of the LC, in which social integration of the target subjects takes place with non-disabled people;
2. to identify methods (teaching, organisational or management strategies) used in the LC which promote the social integration of the target children;
3. to identify any changes in self concept, locus of control and quality of life after six months of participation in the LC; and
4. to recommend strategies for enhancing social integration in the contexts of school, home and the community.

This study is still in progress, aimed for completion in December 1993. In the following section of the paper, the basic design of the methodology is described, unique features highlighted, and findings to date reported (details of the study can be found in Gow, Calvez, Fitzgerald, Balla, Dixon, Reddcliff & Levi, 1993 - on the qualitative component of the study; Gow, Calvez & Levi, 1992; and are available from the authors on request).

METHODOLOGY

The study had two levels of investigation. The first involved all of the LC participants and examined the effects of involvement in the Club on the
development of collateral competencies. The second focused on a sub-group of participants in order to develop in-depth case studies of their social integration. These case studies were used to describe and analyse social integration.

Subjects
Subjects were in the age range of 5 to 20 years. There were two samples. Sample 1 consisted of 45 participants of the LC. Sample 2 consisted of a sub-group of 6 children with an intellectual disability from Sample 1.

Measures
The project utilised an innovative combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Sample 1: Quantitative measures of associated or collateral competencies
Collateral competencies which have been found to be related to enhanced social integration are: quality of life; social adaptability; self concept; and locus of control (see Gow, 1984a; Gow & Choi, 1990; Marsh & Johnston, 1993). To measure these outcome variables, a test battery was developed. To assess quality of life, an instrument called the "Quality of Life Scale" developed by Cummins (1992) was used. Adaptive Behaviour was measured by the AAMD Adaptive Behaviour Scale for Children (1975), self concept by the Self Description Questionnaire (SDQ) instruments (Marsh, 1988, 1990a & b) and locus of control by the Harter & Pike Scale of Perceived Competence and Social Acceptance (1980). Social interaction was assessed by the Sociality Scale (Viney & Westbrook, 1979; Westbrook & Viney, 1977) which is designed to assess the extent to which a person is currently experiencing satisfying interpersonal relationships. These measures were taken of Sample 1 at the beginning of the study and six months later to examine effects of the Club. All of these measures were administered verbally.

Sample 2: Qualitative case studies
In-depth case studies were developed for each subject from Sample 2. In these case studies, an attempt was made to reconstruct the story of the child's socialisation, its context and values. To obtain this information, we used semi-structured interviews with any people having regular contact with the child concerned ("significant others") and with the child himself/herself, wherever possible. Informants were asked to tell the story of the child (what they knew of the child and of his or her social network, social activities in which they participated, how they interacted and controlled his or her behaviour with others, etc). While explaining the situations, the interviewees were led to develop their justifications for the socialisation of the child, that is, the cultural references in which attitudes towards the child take place and the ultimate beliefs upon which they rest.

Information from different informants was cross-referenced. The objective
was to understand how, in their families, at school, as well as in other surroundings, they are subject to pressures to be socialised according to a specific status that restrains them in the development of their social competencies.

Each individual is situated in a network of social relations. The analysis of their social network and socialisation in their life context has several facets:

1. the study of their different interactions with peers and adults (nature of the network, contents of interactions);

2. the control of these interactions by adults as part of a specific socialisation process (with whom they are allowed to interact? What they are allowed to do and not to do?); and

3. the restrictions in learning and socialisation, and their justifications (how the different kinds of knowledge, coming from psychology, medicine, family and school, are called upon and manipulated by informants to establish and to justify a specific socialisation).

Observations
At a second level, the activities at the Leisure Club, and the kind of social relations which are produced were analysed. This second approach depended on the observations of interactions, and the measurement of acquisition of competencies developed at the Leisure Club.

Subjects in sample 2 were observed individually for three half-hour periods during six club sessions over a period of six months. Different activities (e.g. gymnastics, craft, afternoon tea) were sampled. Instances of social integration and the contexts in which they took place were recorded. Video-taped records of selected sessions were kept and are being analysed because, with the anticipated lack of homogeneity of the study group and the complexity of the interactions to be observed, it is useful to conduct individual analyses of social integration.

Data analysis
Qualitative
The qualitative case studies referred to the information collected in the interviews, the observations and all other available information. The case studies were analysed by an approach developed by the consultant, Calvez, based on the theoretical perspective of Douglas (1977; 1982; 1990). This approach has been used previously by Calvez in an analysis of social integration of people with an intellectual disability in Brittany (1990a & b).

The analysis of interviews explored and analysed the limitations and possibilities of interactions of the children from their own perspectives and from the perspectives of the other interviewees. From the children's
perspectives, we considered their individual definitions of situations to understand how their behaviour is oriented towards others. We also considered the expectations of others, including the rules consistent with the nature of the social activity.

At a second level of analysis, comparisons were made within and between case studies in relation to specific contexts. It was expected that these comparisons would help identify the effects of the specific contexts on the development of social competencies.

Quantitative
The analysis of the quantitative data collected from the battery of tests suggested the use of multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) techniques appropriate to the longitudinal repeated measures design used. An exciting component of this research project is that any change identified is able to be better interpreted in terms of the in depth case studies undertaken, thereby potentially allowing a response to the question of "social significance" of any statistically significant findings.

REFLECTIONS

Social Integration Project

The project is innovative, international and included a qualitative/quantitative fusion which led to interesting insights into socialisation.

Some of the issues/themes which emerged from the analysis are:

1. control of experiences of the child with others; lack of opportunities for the development of independence; perpetual child syndrome;
2. justifications/rationalisations for restrictions of family and child activity - "we can't do this because...";
3. denial of opportunities to learn social rules because of a lack of experiences/opportunities afforded to regular children of a similar age; and
4. use of the medical model whereby the child is "sick" and needing "extra protection and care".

In terms of the socialisation that takes place in the school and community, the project has highlighted the need for promotion of social interaction in less structured settings than is typically the case in contemporary schooling. One such setting is the Leisure Club.

The Leisure Club

The Leisure Club has been greatly beneficial to all involved. Student teachers have benefitted from being able to observe students with
disabilities functioning in an unsegregated environment; class teachers of participants in the Club have been surprised to observe the ease with which their students integrate socially in such a setting. For parents of participants with disabilities, there has been a sense of relief that in this setting their child is "just one of the kids".

Much can be said both about the value of individual activities and particular approaches to working with young people in the leisure setting. Activities which are open-ended and which allow young people to choose their own direction rather than follow specific directions appear to be much more likely to develop collateral competencies such as internal locus of control.

Gymnastics has been found by some participants to be too structured because of safety requirements and restrictions in the possibility of experimentation. However, this activity has been shown to enhance the self concept and internal locus of control of participants, especially when they master new skills.

Group games such as treasure hunts, earth ball games etc., provide opportunities to learn to conform and co-operate in a setting which is minimally structured. However, it is clear that some participants, particularly those in the older age group, need to be able to withdraw from activities such as these and choose to participate in other appropriate leisure activities which they may initiate themselves.

Adaptive behaviour is given ample opportunity to develop in the LC setting because of the wide variety of appealing activities and the number of co-ordinators, parents, grandparents, students, siblings and peers available for the young people to interact with.

Although flexible programming is necessary, given the diversity of young people who attend the LC, there is also a need to include activities which promote co-operation and collaboration rather than just encouraging proximal interactions. For example, the playing of a game may involve turn taking and is therefore co-operative. The building of a "marble works" tower involves collaboration because unless everyone works together the structure cannot be built. On the other hand, some activities may not promote interaction and integration. For instance, painting may involve two children in the same activity but what each one does has no effect on the other.

Activities need to be chronological-age appropriate, not mental-age appropriate. Teenagers need to have activities available which appeal specifically to this age-group or they may withdraw from the activity and many of the potential benefits of the LC may not be reaped. It has been noted that, with this age group in particular, lack of interest in the
activities leads to the participants becoming passive, non-involved and can result in them reverting to stereotypic (hand flapping, face grimacing) and self-stimulatory behaviours which in the past have hampered their acceptance by peers in normalised social settings.

Particular personalities of co-ordinators and others working with the young people have also been seen to make a difference to the extent to which adaptive behaviour and internal locus of control are fostered. In some cases, co-ordinators and volunteers direct the young people far more than is necessary for the student to achieve the aim they desire. The skills which the project seeks to foster are served best in situations where co-ordinators support participants so that they are able to achieve what they set out to do and where independence and decision-making is encouraged.

In cases where integration is still only proximal, suggested innovations are the pairing of regular/disabled dyads for one activity/week so that the level of acceptance and interaction moves beyond tolerance of physical proximity. A further suggestion which is being implemented is greater use of older adolescents in the trainee role, a goal which is soon to be realised through Job Support.

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