

BASICS OF LEISURE EDUCATION

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Abstract: Practitioners and researchers from various fields such as health, justice, education, recreation indicate that many people who could benefit from leisure or recreation do not have it because they do not have elementary leisure literacy. Leisure literacy is related to the knowledge, skills and confidence in the right way to organize and use leisure. Such knowledge and skills can be acquired through leisure education. The term leisure education itself is a combination of two terms leisure and education. Both terms carry extensive definitions. Education on the one hand can be life-long, intentional, with a specific goal to achieve the development of the personal qualities of individuals, etc. Leisure on the other hand is associated with free time, freedom of choice, creativity, pleasure, enjoyment, happiness. The activities that individuals have in leisure time and the experience they gain by their nature can be intellectual, social, physical, artistic or spiritual. When the term education is associated with another term, it usually refers to a specific subject of study, for example, the terms art education, music education, etc., but this is not the case with leisure education. It could even be argued that the terms that make up the coinage leisure education are in contradiction with each other. For example, while leisure associates with freedom, relaxation, unstructured activities, etc., education associates with learning and structured activities. Leisure is a part of human life, just like education. Education is a human right, just like the right to leisure, the right to work, to health care, etc. No one has the right to take these rights away from individuals regardless of their gender, age, race, nationality, religious affiliation, health status, possible disability, economic status, etc. Leisure encompasses a significant part of human life. Hence, how leisure time is spent and whether it will contribute to improving the lives of individuals should not be left to chance or the momentary inspiration of individuals. On the contrary, individuals should have the right to acquire skills and knowledge in an organized and systematic manner that will help them in the organization and use of leisure time. Hence, leisure education refers to the need to study and impart knowledge and experiences on how to spend leisure time. In this text, we will focus on the basic characteristics of leisure education, its institutionalization, goals and connection with the quality of life.

Keywords: education, leisure time, leisure education

1. BASIC NOTES ON LEISURE EDUCATION

As Howe (1989: 207) writes, leisure education is a process through which individuals go through in order to become self-aware, autonomous and independent in planning, organizing and implementing their leisure activities. Leisure education encompasses leisure awareness (awareness of the benefits and interests associated with leisure), activity skills (traditional and non-traditional), social skills (self-presentation), leisure resources (local and national) (Collins, Callahan 2023; Stumbo and Peterson 2009). Leisure education is a lifelong learning process that involves the development of leisure attitudes, values, knowledge, abilities and resources (Baker et. al. 2021; World Leisure 1998). Leisure education is a process in which individuals discover the benefits of leisure and develop the necessary skills in the pursuit of a lifestyle that makes the most of leisure time. In this sense, leisure education helps individuals to develop the knowledge, behaviour, values and beliefs necessary to spend their leisure time wisely (Hawkins 1997: 121; Manite 2022). Specifically, leisure education is based on the premise that it enables individuals to acquire knowledge, skills and abilities that will promote them for the better. That is, through leisure education they will learn how recreation can enrich their lives and contribute to their well-being. Leisure education is part of the developmental process and the socialization of individuals. A particularly important contribution to the increase in interest in this topic in the 1970s was made by Brightbill and Mobley (1977), who argued that as we move towards a leisure society, we should pay more and more attention to leisure education, because in this way individuals will learn how to better organize their leisure time. During leisure education, students:

- Explore their relationship to leisure
- Develop a positive relationship to leisure engagement
- Understand the impact that leisure can have on them, their family, the community in which they live, and society as a whole
- Develop skills for successful practice of leisure activities
- Participate in a variety of leisure activities in order to evaluate them (Kunstler and Daly 2010: 165).

According to Shivers (2000: 17) the functions of leisure education are: to enrich the lives of individuals, to embrace their personality, to inform individuals about a multitude of points of view, to enable individuals to acquire skills and to help individuals choose the leisure activities in which they would like to be involved.

2. INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE NEED FOR LEISURE EDUCATION

The need for leisure education in the educational community in the USA was first noted in 1918. Then, on the one hand, the Education Association of the USA established its well-known Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education, in which among the seven goals of education is included the worthy use of leisure, after which in the statements of many educational agencies in the USA and other countries leisure education is part of the educational goals and policies (Sivan, Ruskin 2000: 2). For example, the Department of the Interior Bureau of Education in the same 1918, confirmed that leisure should be used for recreation of the body, mind, spirit, as well as for the enrichment and advancement of the personality of individuals. In the light of the reduction of working hours, the necessity of proper use of leisure time was perceived (Sivan, Stebbins 2011: 28). Hence, many authors are beginning to advocate the view that schools have a responsibility to provide their students with programs in which they will develop their recreational skills and thus adhere to one of the key principles of education, worthy use of leisure (Tapps et. al. 2022). There are many strategies that should enable schools to fulfill their role of educating on leisure. These strategies include incorporating leisure content into different subjects, out of class expressive experience. But the introduction of leisure education in the United States was hampered by the influence of the “back to basics” movement, which emphasizes the need to stick to standard, basic subjects in which students’ knowledge should be assessed in a standardized way. However, generally speaking, educational reforms in the recent period are based on the slogan "whole person development", which is compatible with life-wide and life-long learning, which aligns the foundations of leisure education in schools (Sivan, Ruskin 2000:40).

The Convention on the Human Rights of the Child, in Article 31, states that children have the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts. This convention calls on governments to respect and promote the rights of children to participate in cultural and artistic life and to create conditions and opportunities for children’s cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities (Sivan, Ruskin 2000: 4).

Today, for example, in the curricula of primary and secondary schools, there are opportunities within the existing subjects to acquire knowledge and create experiences in the fields of music, art, dance, crafts, drama. There are also sections dedicated to deepening knowledge in the fields of science, mathematics, etc. For a long time, activities in the field of leisure education, which went beyond what is provided for in the curricula of existing subjects, were ignored. However, recently, a trend has been observed in which school administrations are trying to include more and more recreational activities (Shivers 2000: 16).

3. GOALS OF LEISURE EDUCATION

The goals of leisure education can be individual and social. Human life is complex, consisting of many activities, and the goals that individuals set for themselves in one area can hardly be completely separated and influence the goals that individuals set for themselves in other areas of their lives. Individual goals are related to individuals better understanding themselves, their abilities, talents, interests, the role of leisure in their lives, acting in accordance with such understanding and making changes in the way they use leisure time (Sivan, Stebbins 2011: 31). Some authors indicate that leisure education increases the feeling that individuals have control over their own lives and the competence to do so (Danillo, Mirphy 1991), while others insist that through leisure education individuals acquire the skill to independently and autonomously manage their own lives (Devine, Anderson 2023; Bullock, Howe 1991).

In addition to achieving individual goals, leisure education can also help achieve social goals, that is, community goals, and thus contribute to its development. A community can be defined as a geographical location where individuals with different interests live, who have an affinity to establish mutual interaction and in that process crystallize interests that are different from the personal interests of specific individuals. Such an interest could be the well-being of the community. Warren (1996: 9) on his part defines a community as a social unit and system that performs the most important functions that are relevant to a locality: production, socialization, social control, social participation and mutual support. Community development refers to the mutual interactions of individuals who are its integral part and formal and informal socialization and education in that process (Sivan, Ruskin 2000: 1). Since life is complex and involves many aspects, including the free time of individuals living in a particular community, leisure education can certainly help to improve the quality of life in a particular community. For example, one of the social goals of leisure can be to create an environment that will allow people to use leisure in a creative and satisfying way. Leisure can also help individuals understand the relationship between lifestyle and society. Leisure

can also help in the integration of society, the inclusion of individuals in social groups, in networks of friends, in institutions, in social life. In that sense, leisure can contribute to building a harmonious society (Sivan, Stebbins 2011: 31). In other words, leisure activities can contribute to increasing individuals' sense of belonging to society, as well as their interest in participating in social activities and tolerance in interacting with others. Hence, civil associations should show interest in increasing the knowledge and skills of individuals, in the quality of organizing and spending their free time, which will strengthen their ties with society or direct them in a separate social sphere. Therefore, educational centers, youth clubs and movements, sports, cultural clubs and nature protection associations could organize leisure education (Sivan, Ruskin 2000: 2; Baker et. al. 2021). When studying the social goals that are achieved with leisure education, among other things, a better integration of certain groups into social life and an increase in the quality of their life is achieved. This certainly applies to groups with special needs (Long, Robertson 2020). All individuals, regardless of the conditions in which they live, have the right to develop their potential. This certainly applies to people with special needs. Hence, leisure education is implemented in community recreation centers, supervised living arrangements, adult programs, rehabilitation centers, long-term-care faculties (Hawkins A. 1997: 121). For certain groups of individuals with specific diseases, leisure education can help in achieving different goals.

Table 1: Goals that leisure education achieves for people with specific diseases

Disease	Goals
Life changing injury (spinal cord injury, heart disease, amputation)	Understanding the importance of recreation in maintaining health
	Increasing knowledge about the resources necessary for participation in recreation
	Acquiring skills for using the infrastructure for participating in recreation
Developmental disabilities	Increasing the range of recreational opportunities
	Adaptation of recreational activities
	Improving recreational activities
Individuals in treatment for substance abuse	Identifying problems with participation in leisure activities
	Increasing the ability to choose healthy alternatives in leisure activities
	Development of social connections

Source: Kunstler, Daly (2010: 166)

4. LEISURE EDUCATION AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Many people associate leisure time, how it is organized and what experiences are gained in it with the quality of life. Among the first authors who showed the connection between leisure education and quality of life are Mundy, Odum (1979) according to whom leisure education is a developmental process that aims to enrich the quality of life of individuals. The quality of one's life can be assessed according to two criteria: objective and subjective. Objective criteria for assessing the quality of life refer to the social, economic, political, health aspects of life, environment, as well as external factors that influence one's life. The subjective criterion for assessing the quality of life focuses on the opinion of individuals about the relationships they build with family, friends, school that affect the quality of their life. People who are satisfied with the experiences they have with their leisure usually have a high opinion of the quality of their own life, that is, they stand high according to the subjective criterion for assessing the quality of life. Conversely, people who feel stressed, bored, lack of creativity, alienation usually show dissatisfaction with the quality of their own lives. In order to reach a level of physical, mental and social well-being, individuals or groups first need to identify their aspirations, satisfy their needs and have satisfactory interaction with the environment (Sivan, Ruskin 2000: 1). To achieve this, that is, to be satisfied with the experiences of their leisure time, they need to possess certain knowledge and skills that they can acquire through leisure education (Sivan, Stebbins 2011: 29). Therefore, the ultimate goal of leisure education is to raise the quality of life of individuals.

Several studies indicate that leisure education has a positive impact on the quality of life of individuals in various aspects. For example, a study by Searle, Mahon, Iso-Ahola, Sdrolias and van Dyck (1995) showed that leisure education helps to improve the independence and psychological well-being of older people. Just as a study by the same authors Searle, Mahon, Iso-Ahola, Sdrolias and van Dyck (1998) showed that leisure education has a long-term impact on the lives of individuals, as it showed that the impact is not limited to the organization of leisure time, but also to other areas of human life. However, it should be borne in mind that, although leisure education can help

with subjective criteria for assessing quality of life, it has limited impact when it comes to objective criteria in terms of how much it can help with the quality of housing, access to health services, increasing income, etc.

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