

Leader Integration Competencies and Staff Training in Adventure Programs

Leo McAvoy
Jim Roehl
John Rynders

University of Minnesota

Purpose of Study

- Identify leadership competencies necessary for leaders in integrated outdoor adventure programs
- Measure effectiveness of a staff training addressing a primary leadership competency of these programs—“the ability to apply integration strategies to all levels of abilities and in varied situations”

Setting

- Wilderness Inquiry (WI) of Minneapolis, MN. Wilderness Inquiry is an adventure travel organization that offers a variety of integrated outdoor adventure programs for persons with and without disabilities
- The study focused on current staff of Wilderness Inquiry and on the approximately 30 new program staff that Wilderness Inquiry brings into the organization each summer

Study Design

- A literature review and 3 focus groups with Wilderness Inquiry staff generated a list of competencies needed for integrated outdoor program leaders
- A primary competence identified was: “the ability to apply integration strategies to all levels of abilities and in varied situations”
- A test was designed to measure the effectiveness of Wilderness Inquiry summer staff training on influencing the integration strategy knowledge of new staff..
- Test administered to new staff pre and post staff training, data analyzed and recommendations generated.

Methods

Establishing a set of leadership competencies for integrated trips

- Review of literature on outdoor leadership competencies
- Observation of Wilderness Inquiry (WI) leaders on an integrated trip
- 3 focus groups: Wilderness Inquiry upper level management staff, primary leaders, and participants.
- Expert panel of 5 members revised and validated preliminary set of competencies. Panel consisted of professionals with expertise in adventure program leadership, inclusion, special education and therapeutic recreation.
- Set of leadership competencies for integrated trips was created
- A primary competency was “the ability to apply integration strategies to all levels of abilities and in varied situations”

Measuring effectiveness of a staff training to influence leader knowledge of integration strategies

- 30 minute, 6-8 item short answer essay test designed to measure staff knowledge of integration strategies
- Test based on “7 Steps to Integration” developed by Lais, test validated by experts in integration and outdoor programs
- Test administered to WI new staff prior to and after 9 day staff training in 2000 (31 staff) and 2001 (28 staff)
- Test responses graded by two professors in outdoor education and special education.
- Test results analyzed by means, S.D., and one tailed t-test on paired data for each year.

7 Steps to Integration (Lais, 2001)

Respect each person’s dignity

- The key to integration, do not make assumptions about people, avoid condescending attitudes

Open lines of communication

- Encourage frank and honest discussion, ask opinions, encourage talking about expectations

Establish patterns for inclusive decision making

- Include people with disabilities in decisions, elevate people by making them part of decisions

Emphasize the value of effort and non-physical accomplishments

- Tendency in the outdoors to emphasize physical contribution—must recognize and encourage other types of contributions. Emphasize value of effort, positive attitudes, and making best of existing abilities

Focus of group challenges and activities

- Facilitate positive group dynamics, teamwork helps equalize everyone's participation, no one on the sidelines

Delineate and delegate tasks

- Break tasks into components that can be “fit” to a person's ability, delegate tasks that can be attained, avoid tokenism

Develop symbiotic relationships among participants

- Put people into dyads and triads that function together in a mutually beneficial relationship using different abilities to get the job done, check with both parties to insure the help offered is both needed and desired.

Results

Primary Integrated Program Leadership Competencies

Service Oriented Leadership

- Safety, judgment, service to participants

Ability to apply integration strategies to all levels of ability and in varied situations

- Assess participants-situations-tasks, role model integration

Awareness of and ability to alter the activity

- Adapt trip to participants, break down tasks and assign appropriately

Awareness of and ability to adapt to or alter the environment

- Match needs of environment with needs of participants, passion for wilderness and minimum impact

Awareness of and ability to use resources

- Awareness of variables and resources, knowledge of safety policies, transmit safety to participants

Integrated Program Leadership Competencies

Service oriented leadership

- strong work ethic
- developed sense of self awareness
- motivate/comfort/bribe/confront/encourage/reward participants
- developed sense of judgment
- selfless service to participants
- positive atmosphere/attitude
- able to receive and give feedback
- continued quest to improve skills and knowledge
- flexible leadership style (situational leadership)
- recognize safety issues
- detail oriented organizational skills
- ability to delegate to other trail staff
- predict actions of group/individual before they happen
- passion for opening people's eyes
- maintain charisma and control in face of adversity
- ability and willingness to accept responsibility for events of the

Ability to apply integration strategies to all levels of abilities and in varied situations

- ability to develop relationships with and influence participants
- ability to role model integration
- open-mindedness to other's thoughts, abilities, and beliefs
 - compassion
 - empathy
 - sense of humor
 - treat people equally
- enjoy being with group/meeting new people
- ability to inspire confidence and "follower-ship" amongst participants
- ability to adapt participants and staff
- awareness/knowledge of specific disabilities
- ability to role model integration
- ability to assess participants and staff
- **Awareness of and ability to alter the activity**

trip

Awareness of and ability to adapt to or alter the environment

- meet the needs of the activity with need of group
- passion for wilderness
- familiarity of route and travel location

Awareness of and ability to adapt to use resources

- knowledge of safety policies
- ability to transmit safety to the participants
- knowledge of and ability to creatively adapt traditional and adaptive gear

- recognize skills of other leaders and group members
- knowledge of basic WI systems
- awareness of variables/resources available
- proficiency in basic wilderness activities
- adapt trip to participants

Sample of Test Questions

Question 1: As a leader on a canoe trip with 12 participants, you have just encountered a 1/4 mile portage. The portage has a few protruding rocks and a short stretch of downhill. Your group consists of John who has a visual impairment, Sarah who is prone to seizures, Mary who has full use of her upper body and uses a wheelchair, and Larry who gets tired easily and has some difficulty walking on uneven terrain. The rest of the group has no apparent disabilities. How do you get the whole group across the portage?

Elements of Correct Response for Question 1:

- Facilitate highest and best involvement level of each participant
- Ask people what they would like to do, determine strengths based on observation of group
- Be less interested in speed/efficiency and more interested in having full participation by everyone
- Preserve dignity of person with disabilities
- Promote teamwork, everyone contributing and making it a positive experience
- Approach the task from a perspective of many small tasks, everyone can accomplish at least some tasks
- Subtly put people in pairs or trios with complementary (symbiotic) conditions and abilities

Sample of Test Questions

Question 2: Beth, one of your adult participants on a kayak touring trip, does not have control of her bowel movements. But, she has been approved for this trip. She is able to manage her disability in her everyday life at home but she is concerned about how others are going to react to her disability on the trip. Part of your route involves a 3 hour crossing. Describe in detail 3 ways you will decrease Beth's fears of being alienated from the group.

Elements of Correct Response for Question 2:

- The greatest risk for Beth is that her dignity will be compromised
- Talk with her, ask for her wishes and concerns and recommendations
- Beth must know that she can trust you as the leader and that you respect her condition and wishes
- Consider changing the trip route to accommodate her condition
- Provide plenty of time prior to the crossing for all participants to go to bathroom, and for Beth to evacuate her bowels
- Have Beth paddle with a staff member in case of problems during crossing, would she want to wear a diaper
- If make crossing provide rest stop afterwards for Beth to clean up if needed, avoid singling her out
- Ask Beth if she wants to speak to the group about her condition

Results of Training

Overall Results

- Integration strategies are specific techniques that have been developed through field application, they do not necessarily come naturally to outdoor leaders
- Integration strategies can be taught to outdoor leaders, training can influence leader knowledge of these strategies
- Wilderness Inquiry staff training was effective in significantly increasing new staff knowledge of integration strategies

Year 1

- 31 new staff, tested on first morning of staff training, participated in 9 day training which included a 3 day field component, and then tested again at end of 9 days.
- 8 question test, each question possible score of 0-6, responses evaluated by 2 professors in outdoor education and special education. Scores of two evaluators within 2 points of each other on 94% of questions.
- Difference in pre to post scores was significant at .0005 level.
- Of possible total score of 48, the mean on the pre-test was 23.48 (SD 7.86) and mean on post-test was 34.94 (SD 6.73).
- On pre-test lowest and highest scores were 7 and 43, on post-test 23 and 47.

Year 2

- 28 new staff, tested on first morning of staff training, participated in 9 day training which included a 3 day field component, and the tested again at end of 9 days.
- 6 question test, each question possible score of 0-6, responses evaluated by 2 professors in outdoor education and special education. Scores of two evaluators within 2 points of each other on 90% of questions.
- Difference in pre to post scores was significant at .0001 level.
- Of possible total score of 36, the mean on the pre-test was 22.14(SD 5.64) and mean on post-test was 26.86 (SD5.51).
- On pre-test lowest and highest scores were 5 and 35, on post-test 14 and 35.

Recommendations

- The set of leader competencies generated can assist other programs in recruiting, developing and evaluating leaders in integrated programs.
- Integration strategies should be part of staff training for a wide variety of outdoor adventure programs since inclusion is becoming the norm.
- Staff training for integration strategies should be purposeful and focus specifically on strategies leaders can use for anticipated circumstances.
- Staff training for integration should include presentation of the strategies along with practice in how to apply the strategies.
- Experiential opportunities to apply integration strategies in staff training should include discussion of scenarios, role modeling, and role playing in the field working with persons with disabilities.
- A next step in researching this topic would be to not only do a pre and post test before and after staff training, but to also follow-up with testing of the leaders after time spent in the field working integrated trips.