Strengths-Based Therapeutic Recreation

A Research Think Tank

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Overview of the Think Tank Session

- Overview of the Approaches (15 min.)
- Overview of the Think Tank Process (5 min.)
- Group Brainstorming (30 min.)
- Summing Up and Next Steps (10 min.)
Overview of the Approaches

• The Strengths Approach in TR

• The Ecological Approach in TR

• Models to Help Frame Practice (see handout)

• A Focus on the Psychological/Emotional Domain

• A Focus on the Spiritual Domain
What is the strengths approach?

**Deficit Approach**
- Focus is on problems and weaknesses; strengths are just tools to help fix the person
- Participant is viewed as a problem needing to be fixed
- A framework and vocabulary is developed to describe problems
- Understanding problems may or may not lead to solutions for a person, but will lead to greater understanding of the problem
- Focus is narrower, and mostly on remediation of deficits in the person

**Strengths Approach**
- Focus is on internal and external strengths as avenues to a high quality of life
- Participant is viewed as potential waiting to be developed
- A framework and vocabulary is developed to describe strengths
- Understanding strengths leads to understanding solutions and creative ways to improve a person’s life
- Focus is on the whole person in the context of his or her life
Principles of the Strengths Approach

• Difficulties (illness, disability, addiction, etc.) are also sources of opportunity and challenge
• Collaboration (not expert domination) with participants
• Every environment is full of resources
• Context matters
• Hopefulness matters
• Strengths can be nurtured (thus, must be assessed, planned, focused on, and evaluated)
• Every individual, group, family, and community has strengths
• We do not know the upper limits of a participant’s capacity to grow, change, and achieve – never assume we do!
What is the Ecological Approach?

- Views the person in their environment
- Interdependent system – we are inter-reliant with each other and with our environments
- The whole is greater than the sum of individual elements or people, due to the interaction and energy of relationships
- The whole includes not only people and their physical environment, but their policies, cultures, and norms
- Focus on helping individuals build strengths and communities and systems build strengths
- Extends our scope of practice, intersection of recreation, health, and human service systems
The Ecological Approach

- Micro: participant and his or her immediate circle of support

- Meso: the relationships and the community in which the participant lives

- Exo: the systematic policies, practices and external networks

- Macro: the larger culture and norms of the participant’s context

- Natural environment: natural environment in which all is situated

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Forest, 2009)
Domains of Human and Community Flourishing

• Psychological/Emotional
• Cognitive
• Social
• Physical
• Spiritual
Remember!

Leisure is infused into all of these domains!
Focus on Psychological Resources

• Internal assets associated with emotion regulation and mental states and processes (e.g., feelings, beliefs, perceptions, attitudes, motivation)
Then, one day, she decided to design a life she loved.

You've got every right to a beautiful life.

Often it's the deepest pain which empowers you to grow into your highest self.

Karen Salaensohn
notasaloon.com

Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be.

Abraham Lincoln
16th U.S. President
(1809-1865)

"Being happy doesn't mean that everything is perfect. It means that you've decided to look beyond the imperfections."

Unknown

Happiness is a way of travel, not a destination.

"It is not how much we have, but how much we enjoy, that makes happiness."

- Charles Spurgeon

Happiness is a habit, cultivate it.

(Elbert Hubbard)

IMAGINATION AND FICTION MAKE UP MORE THAN THREE-QUARTERS OF OUR REAL LIFE.

Simone Weil

happiness will never come to those who fail to appreciate what they already have.

And I simply decided to be happy again.
Psychological Resources that Contribute to Well-Being

- Positive emotion
- Full and mindful engagement in life (being fully present, flow)
- Cultivation and expression of one’s strengths and capacities (competence/signature strengths)
  - Plus relatedness, but we will include that under Social Resources
  - Plus meaning, but we will include that under Spiritual Resources
  
  *Martin Seligman, 2013*

- Self-awareness/self-acceptance/self-compassion
- Self-determination

*Ryan, Curren, & Deci, 2013; Ryff, 2013*
What does Spirituality mean?

- Having strong, coherent beliefs about the higher purpose and meaning of life
  
  1. Incorporates – yet transcends – one’s biological, social, psychological, political and cultural aspects
  
  2. Reflects our desire to find meaning and purpose beyond our own concerns
  
  3. Joins us with the greater complexities of life
  
  4. Inspires reverence

(Lyobomirsky, 2008; Saleebey, 2006; Seligman, 2002)

“I live my life hopefully, in harmony with my values and beliefs.”
How does Spirituality contribute to well-being? What does the research say?

- Aesthetic environments and access to nature strengthen spiritual well-being
- Belonging to a faith community or regularly practicing a form of spirituality promotes many benefits:
  - Have a sense of purpose
  - Live a healthy lifestyle
  - Enjoy a consistent social network
  - Cope effectively
  - Derive meaning from both ordinary and traumatic events

(Lyobomirsky, 2008)
Overview of the Think Tank Process

• **Purpose:**
  
  • To brainstorm research questions and ideas that can frame a research agenda in the strengths-based approach
  
  • To provide the first steps in a future Delphi study to develop a national research agenda in strengths-based TR practice
  
  • To foster thinking about evidence-based practice
Overview of the Think Tank Process

• What we will do for the next 30 minutes:

• Choose one of five domains spread around the room:
  1. Psychological/emotional
  2. Cognitive
  3. Social
  4. Physical
  5. Spiritual

• Move to that area (bring your chair if you need it!)
Overview of the Think Tank Process

• Choose a moderator, a recorder, and a spokesperson for your group
  - **Moderator role:** keep the discussion focused and allow even participation
  - **Recorder role:** take detailed notes of the discussion
  - **Spokesperson role:** share your group’s main ideas in the wrap up at the end of the session

• Have the moderator read the instruction sheet to the group and share example research questions

• Begin brainstorming research ideas and research questions that you feel are important to the strengths approach in that domain
Overview of the Think Tank Process

• You will have 30 minutes to brainstorm

• Feel free to float to other domains/groups at any time
Overarching Question

• From the strengths-based ecological approach, what research ideas or research questions should we be asking in therapeutic recreation?

• Start your brainstorming with environmental interventions

• Continue to remind each other about the strengths approach as you frame your ideas and questions
Summary and Large Group Discussion

• Each group share the main research ideas and questions they generated in their domain
Next Steps

• Recorders – give your notes to the facilitators!

• Ideas/questions will be combined and organized, then shared back to the group via an online discussion board.

• Anyone can continue to contribute to the brainstorming over the next six months

• Please fill out the Participant Description Sheet on your table

• Link to the Online Discussion Board is on your handout (link and QR Code provided)
Next Steps

• Delphi study to determine priority areas for research in strengths-based therapeutic recreation practice

• Final results of the Delphi study will be disseminated to researchers and practitioners via the research journals, newsletters, listservs, and other venues, as well as shared with therapeutic recreation groups (e.g., ATRA, CTRA, Midwest Symposium, Inclusion & Accessibility Network/NRPA, state associations or chapters)

• The results of this session, the online discussion board and Delphi study will be used to begin to develop a profession-wide strategy or plan for pursuing research in the efficacy of strengths-based therapeutic recreation practice
Final Thoughts? Questions?
Figure 4.3: Flourishing through Leisure Model: An Ecological Extension of the Leisure and Well-Being Model

Facilitation of leisure skills and knowledge:
- Savoring leisure
- Interests, preferences
- Authentic leisure
- Talents, abilities
- Leisure gratifications
- Skills and competencies
- Mindful leisure
- Virtuous leisure

Facilitation of leisure environments:
- Real choices for leisure
- Typical lifestyle rhythms
- Social support
- Inclusive environments
  - Physical accessibility
  - Administrative inclusivity
  - Programming inclusivity

Enhancing the Leisure Experience

Outcomes the Participant Experiences

Developing Strengths and Resources

What the Therapeutic Recreation Specialist Does

Participant's goals, dreams, and aspirations

Well-Being

Environmental resources and personal strengths that cultivate growth, adaptation, and inclusion

A Flourishing Life
Figure 1. Components of the Leisure and Well-Being Model

Components of TR Service Delivery

Enhancing Leisure Experience

• Savoring Leisure
• Authentic Leisure
• Leisure Gratifications
• Mindful Leisure
• Virtuous Leisure

Developing Resources

Psychological Resources
• Capacity for Happiness
• Emotion Regulation
• Self-awareness/Self-acceptance/Self-congruence
• Autonomy/Self-Determination/Goal Directedness
• Competence
• Optimism/Hope/Positive Illusions
• Sense of Meaning

Social Resources
• Communication Skills
• Interpersonal Skills
• Reciprocal Relationship Skills
• Social Confidence

Cognitive Resources
• Ability to Attend
• Concentration
• Following Directions
• Problem Solving

Physical Resources
• Physical Health
• Physical Fitness

Environmental Resources
• Social Connectedness & Social Networks
• Community Engagement/Empowerment

Well-Being: A state of successful, satisfying, and productive engagement with one’s life and the realization of one’s full physical, cognitive, and social-emotional potential

Positive affect, emotion, and experience

Cultivation and expression of one’s full potential

Proximal and Medial Goals

Distal Goals
Strengths-Based Therapeutic Recreation Research Think Tank

Resources List


Use this QR Code to go to the website for additional resources for this session and a link to the Discussion Board for ongoing input into brainstorming research ideas and questions for a strengths approach to TR practice.

Website address is: http://colfax.cortland.edu/nysirrc/links-articles-interest.html