Understanding Recession & the Impact on Leisure Experiences: Evidence of Student Learning

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Purpose of the Study
To provide evidence of student learning as they successfully progressed through a "bottleneck" identified in an introductory Foundations of Recreation and Leisure course utilizing the Decoding the Disciplines model (Middendorf & Pace, 2004)

Introduction
Economic Impact on Leisure Consumption
- When economies grow, people's standard of living rises. In order to grow, a society must produce more than it needs.
- When people have discretionary income and resources, leisure itself becomes an industry which further develops economies.

Leisure Consumption: Vacations, movies, dining, sporting events - Entertainment - 5% of household annual income
- Dining out - 5% of household annual income

HERP R-160: Foundations of Recreation and Leisure
- General education course
- An introduction to the field of recreation and leisure from the viewpoint of the individual as a consumer and of societal agencies as providers of leisure services. Includes philosophy, history, theory, and survey of public and private leisure-service organizations.

Research Questions
- Is it possible for students to make personal applications while seeing the large picture in leisure consumption?
- Can students recognize the affects of the recession on leisure consumption and the economy as a result of implementing the Decoding the Disciplines model?

Decoding the Disciplines
Bottleneck
- Concept of getting stuck in learning
- Bottleneck identified in HERP R160: Transfer of facts and concepts to real life application related to leisure consumption and economic impact

Step 1: Identify bottleneck
- The difficulty students have when transferring facts and concepts to real life application related to leisure consumption and economic impact

Step 2: What do specialists do to get past the bottleneck?
- Relate national events and their impact on the profession as a whole to personal perspective, teaching, and research

Step 3: Model operations for students
- Diet Metaphor
- Step 4: Give students an opportunity to practice and get feedback
- Stoplight Exercise - Green, Yellow, Red (levels of go, caution, catastrophe related to leisure spending)
- Case Study

Step 5: Motivate students and address the affective side of learning
- Discussion and written reflection

Step 6: Evidence that students mastered operations by the end of the process
- Pre-Test/Post-test
- One-page reflection paper

Step 7: Share findings with others
- University-level - Spotlight on Innovation poster session - Indiana University
- National level - Submission to Scholar: A Journal of Leisure Studies & Recreation Education

Collecting Evidence-Based Results
Pre-Test/Post-Test
1. In 3-5 sentences discuss how you think the economy influences leisure behavior.
2. How has the recession affected your leisure spending (if at all)?
3. How do you think the economy (specifically the recession) will affect your future leisure spending (if at all)?

Reflection Paper
Write a one-page reflection on your perspective of leisure spending and economic consumption as a result of this lesson. You may find it helpful to address levels of economy (or which ones pertain to you) including favorable, cautious, or catastrophic.

Results
- 90 student reflection papers were analyzed using Thematic Analysis

Responses were coded, generating six themes:

Travel
- Differences in travel destinations (or lack of) related to overall state of economy and personal position
- "we stopped going on vacation five years ago"
- "we didn't go on vacation because hotel and airline prices were higher than they have ever been"

Spending
- Personal spending habits related to leisure
- "my leisure spending tends to spike when I have money in the bank"
- "spending money on things I don't need is out of the question"
- "rather than go to the movies and buy popcorn and candy, I will"
- "I learned a lot in this lesson and I did a lot of self-reflection of how much I spend on the few leisure activities I like to do (shopping, movies, and dinner)."

Perspective of leisure
- New perspective of leisure as a result of lecture and activities
- "my perspective of leisure has changed since I started taking advantage of free activities"
- "before this lesson, I had not thought about cash free leisure"

Family
- Transition of parental financial support to independent living and economic status of family unit
- "since recent events have led to my father not working anymore, every dollar has a new meaning"
- "the recession has personally affected my family and I. We stopped going on vacation five years ago"

Employment
- Current employment status (and family's employment status) related to leisure spending and awareness of positions in the field
- "I picked up a second job so I could go to more concerts"
- "I am now more aware of the numerous job opportunities"

Caution
- Caution exercised with personal spending related to periods of time
- "I will be more cautious in the summer" to save my money for the school year when I cannot work as much"

Conclusion
The results of this study affirm the successful implementation of the Decoding the Disciplines framework in an introductory Foundations of Recreation and Leisure course. Students described personal attitude changes toward leisure consumption and economic impact as a result of the lesson utilizing the Decoding the Disciplines model. Six themes emerged from 90 reflection papers including travel, spending, perspective of leisure, family, employment, and caution. Further, students were able to make personal connections to a broad social issue.

Limitations
The results of this study are not generalizable. The qualitative nature of the study resulted in rich descriptions of student-reported connections in learning. This lesson was theoretical in nature, therefore richer data and deeper learning experiences could result from connecting students to actual activities related to spending habits as they experience them.

Future Implications
Instructors within the field of recreation and leisure can use this model in improving critical thinking and deeper learning in the classroom. The model allows for both quantitative and qualitative collection of evidence of student learning. Application of the model has the potential to not only improve teaching, but also help guide students in connecting leisure and life-related concepts.

Key References