Abstract: Much research has aimed to improve the knowledge and skills of persons with an intellectual disability for better work and leisure activities, and, more recently, for retirement activities. Instruction typically works much better when it proceeds from an individual’s existing concepts but this principle has not been applied much to education of persons with an intellectual disability. Here it was applied to the concepts of work, leisure and retirement. Sixty adults with an intellectual disability were interviewed to determine their existing concepts of these and their work and leisure histories. Most had solid concepts of work and leisure, but with some gaps, particularly in notions of voluntary work and occupation’s status. Most had satisfactory work and leisure lives. Most had a relatively poor concept of retirement at best and had done little retirement planning. Results suggest some key targets for educational programs designed to improve knowledge in these domains. This general conceptual approach can be usefully applied to teaching other important concepts to persons with an intellectual disability.

Work, leisure, and retirement are fundamental aspects of life for everyone. How to prepare persons with an intellectual disability for the first two has been extensively researched. Concerns have been, for example, training work skills, ensuring and gauging work satisfaction, and, examining work history, models of supported employment and various other aspects (Revell, Kregel, Wehman, & Bond, 2000; Test, Carver, Ewers, Hadda, & Person, 2000). Similarly, because a good leisure life enhances well-being and life satisfaction (Caldwell & Gilbert, 1990; Heller, Miller, Hsieh, & Sterns, 2000), a concern has been better preparation for increased leisure and social activities. Some studies have looked at teaching specific cognitive or social skills (Mahon, 1994; Mahon & Bullock, 1992; O’Reilly & Lancioni, 2000). For instance, Jobling, Moni, and Nolan (2000) used videos and discussions to train seven young adults with Down syndrome to better understand emotions, relationships and friendships. Mactavish and Searle (1992) educated 13 older adults in choice and performance of physical activities. Studies have reported positive changes in attitudes, greater leisure awareness, more initiation of leisure activities with friends and increased self-determination from leisure education (Bedini, Bullock, & Driscoll, 1993; Stancliffe & Aber, 1997; Williams & Dattilo, 1997).

More recently, research has focused on preparation for retirement too. Organizations for persons with disabilities are planning for many more older and retired persons with an intellectual disability, who, like the rest of the population, are living longer and retiring younger (Janicki, 1990; Sutton & Factor, 1993). Indeed, eventually retirement years may exceed work years (Grossin, 1986). Suitable accommodation in retirement is a concern, over which many may have little choice (Ashman, Suttie, & Bramley, 1995). Many now are being housed in unsuitable aged care facilities, which have untrained staff (Bigby, 1992, 1998). Other concerns are the financial and leisure aspects of retirement, which many persons with a disability get little or no education for (e.g. Sutton, Sterns, & Schwartz Park, 1993). Bigby (1998) found that many
such retired were unhappy with their leisure activities, performance of which often was hindered by lack of trained staff and finance. A study by Buys and Rushworth (1997) of local community services found no specialized leisure programs for older adults with a disability. A few recent studies have implemented such education programs. Heller et al. (2000) designed and successfully taught a training program about later life planning issues. It taught how to make choices about current and potential residence, work options and ideas, health and well-being, use of leisure time and recreation, use of formal and informal supports, and how to set goals and make action plans. Mahon and Goatcher (1999) taught a “Personal Futures Planning” program, which indeed led to life-style changes and improved leisure and life satisfaction.

Education (about work or leisure or anything else) typically works best when it proceeds from an individual’s existing knowledge base. Existing knowledge, organized as concepts, is used to make sense of the world and to behave adaptively. Existing concepts filter input (such as instruction) and may block out any perceived anomalous input (Howard, 1987). The terms concept and category are defined in many ways and here are defined as follows. A category is a set of things in the world, such as dogs, fruits and multinational corporations. A concept is an individual’s knowledge about a given category. For example, a person’s concept of dog may include knowledge that dogs are four footed mammals, often are household pets, bark, and so on. Categories have boundaries, which may be in different places for different individuals (McCloskey & Glucksberg, 1978). For example, many persons may not include tomatoes and dates in the category of fruits, while biologists do. A word is a label for a concept or a category. A given concept may have many aspects, including knowledge of connections to other concepts and emotions toward instances (see Howard, 1995). Therefore, different individual’s concepts may differ enormously and may develop over time. For example, a biologist or a dog breeder typically has a much richer concept of dog than will most pet owners. Concepts have many uses; making sense of the world, making inferences, and learning new knowledge, and instruction usefully is organized around them (Howard, 1987). Teaching participants useful concepts in a relevant domain and how to apply them allows them to deal better with the world.

Determining someone’s existing concepts about some domain can yield surprising results and may lead to better educational efforts. For example, analyzing any curriculum in the light of participants’ existing concepts may show that it is too complex to teach at a particular stage. The students may need much more knowledge to understand and use it. Consider teaching high school students about the French Revolution. To fully understand the event, a great deal of background knowledge is needed which most may not have, such as concepts of monarchy, the divine right of kings, social structure of an agricultural society, consent of the governed and so on. In science education, the need to adapt instruction to a wide range of possible student concepts and “misconceptions” now is widely recognized. For example, Nussbaum (1979) looked at children’s concepts of the Earth as a cosmic body, showing changing concepts with age, to which instruction should be tailored. An initial concept was an infinite plain, then later a flat disc and then the round Earth being something in the sky to which astronauts travel (also see Vosniadou & Brewer, 1992). Teaching why the Earth has seasons, for example, would be futile unless students were first taught the appropriate concept, which they then could use to understand the instruction.

Relatively little research has applied this principle to the education of persons with an intellectual disability, though studies have examined some of their existing concepts, often in a Piagetian framework. One general view is that their concepts hold less information and their categories have narrower boundaries, partly because they tend to be poor at a variety of knowledge acquisition skills and abilities which may help learn concepts (e.g. mental imagery; see Courbois, 1996). For example, Woodward (1961) used Piagetian tasks to look at number concepts held by some persons with a disability, with an average age of 19 years old. She concluded that most were performing at no more than the concrete operational level. Silverstein and Auger (1964) looked at acquisition of number terms. Lif-
shitz (2000) looked at the concepts of age and aging held by several persons of different ages, finding that many had impoverished concepts, and ones based on physical characteristics of people. Also, old age was seen as threatening. McEvoy (1989) looked at the concept of death held by several persons, finding that they understood the finality of death but had a poor understanding of the aging process and the life cycle. Studies by Carolyn Mervis and her colleagues (Hupp & Mervis, 1982; Mervis, 1990; Mervis & Bertrand, 1995; Romski, Sevčík, Robinson, Mervis, & Bertrand, 1996) have examined aspects of acquisition of terms and categories and conceptual development in persons with an intellectual disability.

To our knowledge, this educational principle has not been applied to the very useful concepts of work, leisure and retirement in persons with an intellectual disability. Holding sound concepts of these should allow persons to behave more adaptively in the relevant domains but these concepts are quite complex. For example, work has such aspects as attitudes toward work, knowledge of occupation’s status, the countless tacit rules involved in finding and holding a job, the satisfactions and penalties that work entails, the differences between paid and voluntary work, and so on. Leisure has many facets, such as attitudes toward it, its importance as a restorer of well-being, the many possible leisure activities, and so on. Retirement is a very complex concept with many aspects (Heller et al., 2000). What concepts do persons with a disability actually hold of these and therefore what sense do they make of instruction in these areas? Do they need to be taught more useful concepts? Little actually is known. For example, Edwards (1995) queried whether persons with an intellectual disability understand and hold a work ethic, though some research has suggested that they enjoy work and have much work satisfaction.

Determining their existing concepts is of intrinsic interest and will give a much better focus for instruction. Knowledge gaps can be identified and education efforts much better targeted and evaluated.

In the present study, we interviewed 60 persons with an intellectually disability in Australia to determine their concepts of work, leisure and retirement. In addition, we asked a variety of questions about their current and former work and leisure activities. Most research on the latter topic is from the United States, and it is interesting to compare their findings with those of an Australian sample.

Method

Participants

The University of New South Wales Ethics Committee placed severe restrictions on recruitment of participants. However, we were able to recruit a large sample of sixty persons with an intellectual disability from two main sources. Fourteen (who had Down Syndrome) were recruited through the local Down Syndrome Association via a newsletter ad. The rest were recruited through Sunnyfield Association, an organization that provides sheltered workshop employment for the intellectually disabled, where many worked. Criteria for employment at Sunnyfield include an IQ score of 70 or below and significant support needs, as determined by Centerlink, the Australian governmental human resources organization. The level of mental impairment of all was in the lower mild to upper moderate range, but specific IQ scores were not available. There were 35 females and 25 males and all lived in the greater Sydney area. Their median age was 36, with a range from 19 to 71. All but seven were born in Australia. Their educational levels were as follows: 22 had attended school up until the ages of 12 to age 17, 22 until age 18, eight until age 19-22, and eight could not recall. Most had attended a special school or special education unit at a public school. Many were living in the community.

Apparatus

Twenty-one pictures depicting people engaged in various work and leisure activities were used in a sorting task and a three-section questionnaire was developed about work, leisure, and retirement to tap knowledge of the basic concepts of each. These included what made an activity an example of a work activity, the work ethic, occupational status, volunteer work, and money management, as well as the type of work participants had done and
whether they would prefer another type. Questions in the leisure section ask participants to identify leisure activities and what made them leisure activities and asked what leisure activities they currently participated in and any additional ones they would like to participate in. The retirement section contains questions on their attitude towards retirement and how they pictured their life when retired. Copies of the questionnaire are available from the second author.

Procedure

Consent of each participant (and carer if needed) was obtained. Each participant was interviewed individually or with a carer in one session at either a work site or at home. The same interviewer interviewed all 60 participants. Seven were interviewed with a carer, and the rest alone. The interview took approximately one hour and the participant could stop it at any time. At the end, the participant was asked if he or she would like to learn more about any subject raised.

The interviewer first asked for details of age, education, and place of birth. Then the participant was shown two signs, one labeled “Work” and the other “Play”, and was given 21 pictures and was asked to put each into its appropriate category (e.g., a work or a leisure activity). Ability to accurately categorize examples is a good index of holding appropriate concepts. Then the interviewer asked set questions from the questionnaire in a fixed order.

Results

Responses differed little between interviewees interviewed alone or with a carer. The carer’s most common role was to prompt the interviewee’s memory when he or she could not respond. For example, if initially unable to name a retiree, the carer might name one (e.g., “What about Uncle Bob?”) and then the interviewee would fill in details.

Work

Most participants turned out to have a solid knowledge of the concepts of work and leisure, but with some gaps. Most readily sorted the 21 pictures into appropriate categories, with mean number of errors being 3.67 and the range being one to six. When asked to give examples of two work activities, 45 were able to do so, the most common answer (24 participants) was “refurbishing stereo headphones” (a main work activity for the place many worked at), followed by packing (11), kitchen hand work (11) and office work (7). The top four choices for work activities were all jobs at Sunnyfield, and on many occasions, the participant would list jobs he or she either did or had done. Most also could state what made these activities instances of work. The most popular response was that they were all activities that they would do at the workplace (19), the second was that they were jobs (10), and two said because they involved a boss. Eleven could not answer the question. When asked to name activities portrayed in the pictures (work or leisure) that a person was paid for performing, 57 answered the work activities, one answered the leisure ones and two could not respond. Most could name specific jobs that paid wages. The most common responses were packing headphones (16 participants), packing (17), office work (18), kitchen hand/server (16), sales clerk (13), bus driver (17), doctor/nurse (12), and cook (10).

Understanding of volunteer work was much more limited. They were given a definition of volunteer work and asked if they knew anyone who had done such work and to say more about that individual. Most gave only very vague responses here. Only 27 had done volunteer work, 32 said that they had never done it, and one could not answer. Of those who had, six said “food delivery for the elderly”, two said “helping out at a local charity”, three said “committee work”, three said “organizing sports programs for the disabled”, and two cited “fund raising for Sunnyfield Homes”.

Most participants (55) apparently had little or no notion of job prestige or status. This is hard to gauge but was attempted by offering six occupation names (doctor, cleaner, gardener, secretary, plumber, teacher) and asking which the participant (and then a friend or relative) would be “proudest” and “least proud” to have. Only two were judged to have some notion of status by citing more prestigious jobs, while three showed a partial understanding. Most chose jobs they were most fa-
familiar with or actual occupations that they or
a friend or relative held.

Most had some notion that some jobs re-
quired more study than others to perform and
could give examples of such jobs. Fifty-one
answered that some jobs did require more
study, while five answered no and four did not
know. The jobs they listed that required much
more study included physician (24), office
worker (8), teacher (6), computer related jobs
(3), lawyer (3), writer (2) and trades person
(4). Related to this question was whether par-
ticipants would like to perform a different job
than their current one. Twenty-nine replied
“yes,” 25 said “no,” five had no answer and one
said “sometimes.” Of the new jobs desired, five
cited office work, three packaging, three store
work, two kindergarten teaching, two electrical
work, three gardening, one kitchen hand
work and one headphones work. When asked
if more training was required for these new
pursuits, 21 replied “yes,” six said “no,” and
the rest had no reply. Types of additional
training needed were TAFE (post-secondary
vocational training in Australia), courses (3)
and on-the-job training (7).

Most could state various reasons for work-
ing. They were asked whether one of several
factors was a reason for working. Fifty-six said
work satisfaction was a reason that people
worked, 57 that money was, 58 that social
contacts were, and 59 “to feel competent” (to
do a good job). However, participants showed
relatively poor money management knowl-
dge and skills. When asked where would they
get money if they did not work, 11 did not
know, 23 specified the bank, 12 a pension,
four parents, two savings in the bank, three
from staff members of Sunnyfield, one from
an inheritance, two from the dole, and one
from nowhere. When further questions were
asked on banking, only seven demonstrated
much understanding of the banking system,
while 18 demonstrated a partial understand-
ing (that their pay from work went into the
bank), and 35 showed no apparent under-
standing.

Work attitudes on the whole were very pos-
tive. Most stated a liking for work, were
judged to have a strong work ethic and under-
stood the necessity for people in a society to
work. Forty-two could not state anything bad
about having a job. Of the 18 that could, the
following were listed; problems getting along
with co-workers (17), not enough pay (1),
trouble concentrating on work (1), did not
like doing a particular job (4), got bored (2),
got hurt (2), and one commented cryptically
“only if safe”. This may be related to a recent
accident at Sunnyfield in which two people on
the job were injured. When asked what was
good about having a job, only four did not
know. The rest gave multiple reasons which
included; getting paid (28), friends (29), sat-
sisfaction (6), they enjoy/like their job (25),
like their supervisors (8), enjoy learning new
things (3), to please the customer (2), and
completing work (3).

Several questions gauged aspects of the
work ethic. When asked if everyone should
have a job, 53 replied “yes,” three “no” and
four did not know. When asked if it was good
or bad to call in sick to work when healthy and
then go to the beach, participants overwhelm-
ingsly felt it was bad. Fifty-five felt this was bad
to do once a week and 56 felt it was bad to do
even once a month. When asked about a per-
son who could work but refused to do so, 47
replied that it was bad; because the person was
lazy (6 responses), you would get fired (6),
one would not be taking the opportunity to
work (1), you should not get the dole (1), and
you would get no pay (1). When queried how
they would feel if they did not have a job, only
one replied that he would be happy. Most
responses were negative, including feeling
bad (7), bored (5), sad (14), upset (6), de-
pressed (4), would miss work (2), not have
enough money (1), feel lonely/ guilty/ terri-
ble (3), and that there would not be enough
headphones for the plane passengers (1). Fi-
nally when asked what would happen if every-
one in a society stopped working, most re-
sponses were negative (53), while one was
ambiguous and six did not know. Examples of
responses were “could not live,” “chaos,” and
“could not go to doctor.”

Staff at Sunnyfield were not interviewed ex-
plicitly but some did anecdotally confirm their
strong work ethic and enjoyment of work. The
participants rarely take sick leave and come to
work even when ill, and may even have to be
sent home.

Some questions asked about their personal
work histories. All but two were in or had been
in the work force. All but four currently were
working; 37 full time, and 19 part-time, four being retired. The two most common first jobs each had held were packaging (10) and refurbishing headphones (10). This work mainly was done in a sheltered workshop, where another six did unspecified work, five were kitchen hands, three worked in a supermarket, three did office work, and four worked in trades. Their current jobs also show the highest number in working with the head phones (20) and packaging (21). Seven currently did office work, three stocked shelves, three were kitchen helpers and one made light fittings.

Leisure

As mentioned above, most had a solid concept of leisure and its importance in human welfare. Most participants could readily categorize the leisure activities depicted in the pictures. Almost all could name two further leisure activities. All but three mentioned sports activities (bowling and swimming being the most common), ten mentioned watching television and videos, six going to movies, six dancing, five craft work, five shopping, five listening to or playing music and two travel.

Most understood the value of leisure as a restorer from work stresses. When asked what it would be like if the participant had to work all the time, 45 said it would be bad, five said it would be good, two were indifferent and four did not know. For those who said it would be bad, 13 said they would be tired, eight said it would be bad/terrible, five said it would be stressful, three boring, five sad, one that their friends would not like it, one that he would go crazy, and one said that he likes his time off.

Leisure was important to them and most reported satisfactory and varied leisure lives, with median reported time spent on leisure being 20 hours per week with a range of 7 to 36 hours. Participants reported taking part in a wide range of leisure activities. Table 1 presents the main current activities cited, sports of various kinds being the most popular. When asked if their leisure activities involved others, 58 answered yes, while one said just

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>In High School</th>
<th>Presently</th>
<th>When Retired</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swimming</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cricket</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bowling</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other sports</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watching TV/Videos</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Going to movies</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to music</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out with friends</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clubs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out to eat</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBQs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>Crafts</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer games</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
her and one had no answer. When questioned who the others were, 50 answered family, 49 friends, two a partner/husband, four staff, and one her pet cat. When asked who chose their leisure activities, most participants (55) answered “themselves,” three said “others,” and two did not know.

When queried what additional leisure activities they would like to participate in, only 24 gave additional ones. These additional activities included playing tennis, additional travel, and horseback riding. When asked if there was anything stopping them from taking part in additional leisure, they cited lack of transport (4), money (3), cannot do alone (3), lack of time (4), a physical impairment (2), no equipment (2), lack of training (2), no ability (1), no information (1), and have not organized it (2).

Participants were asked how their leisure activities had changed since high school. Table 1 shows that the typical pattern was a lot of sports in high school with relatively little television viewing but then a shift to more social activities, such as doing things with friends, watching television and movies, and going to clubs.

Retirement

As mentioned, four already had retired. Of the others, most had only a relatively poor concept of retirement and the need to prepare for it. Eight had little or no knowledge, which made some follow-up questions about retirement moot. Most could name someone who had retired but were confused about typical ages at which people retire. Twenty-three did not know and 26 said “in the 50s and 60s.”

As to why people retire, many reasons were given; “got old, aging” (16), “the person wanted to” (8), “due to law” (5), “got sick or hurt” (9), “because they could not cope” (1), and “because they were tired/exhausted” (6). Ten gave very idiosyncratic reasons; “to get married”, “young people are more computer competent,” “to travel”, “lose job”, “people change.” The rest did not know. Most could list some leisure activities of the people they knew who were retired. For instance, nine cited gardening and housework, ten travel, and seven shopping.

Some questions asked about their own possible retirement. Many did not seem to understand that they would eventually retire and how that would be funded. Only 34 said that there will come a time when they stop working and retire, 15 said “no”, one said “it was a possibility”, and six could not answer. When asked in how many years they thought they would retire, 34 did not know.

Many had relatively little understanding of how they would fund their retirement, or the necessity to fund it. Participants were asked if they needed to save money over their working life for retirement and 46 responded “yes,” seven “no,” and seven did not have an answer. They were asked if the bank will keep giving them all the money they wanted even if they had not saved it and many said yes. Only a few realized that money in a bank account could run out eventually. When asked how they would pay their bills when retired, 25 could not answer at all. Eleven said “the bank”, nine said “a pension”, four said “parents”, two said “inheritance”, three said “savings”, three said “Sunnyfield Staff”, two said “a job”, two said “investments”, one said “petty cash”, and one said that he would tear up bills! Clearly, financial aspects of retirement are not well understood.

Many had only a vague idea of what leisure activities they would do when retired. When asked about leisure activities they thought they would participate in, some cited (Table 1) somewhat different activities from their current ones. Some unusual ones were (with one participant in each); buying a car, buying a farm and getting married. Of the four participants already retired, travel was a favored leisure activity. One had just been to Melbourne, and talk of his trip permeated his entire interview. Their other retirement activities were more sedentary, including television/movie viewing, reading, retirement clubs, bush walking, and shopping.

Attitudes toward retirement were mixed. When asked how they pictured their life when they retired, only half did so positively, 20 had a negative response, one seemed ambivalent and the rest had no answer. Of the positive group, 20 felt it as “good/happy,” while ten felt it was just “OK.” Some of the negative responses included “being sad”, “having little money”, “would be unemployed”, “would be
bored”, “would miss friends from work”, and “would need more money”.

When asked if they specifically wanted further information about retirement, 43 said they did, to help prepare them for retirement. But 14 said no and three had no answer.

Finally, when asked if they would like to learn anything more about the topics in the questionnaire, 23 said no, 19 cited retirement as one (compared to 43 above), seven said work, six said leisure, and two said banking.

Discussion

The main findings may be summarized as follows. Most participants had a sound knowledge of work and leisure and a strong work ethic. They understood the need for a balance between work and leisure, and that the latter is a restorer of mental well being. Most were quite happy with their current work and leisure activities and did not particularly want to know more about these things. However, there were some gaps in their knowledge. Most had little understanding of voluntary work and occupational status. Knowledge of and the need to prepare for retirement were far more limited, and many indicated that they wished to learn more about it. Knowledge of money and banking in general also was generally poor, though only two stated that they wished to learn more about it. Knowledge of money and banking in general also was generally poor, though only two stated that they wished to learn more about it. These results give an intriguing and novel insight into how persons with an intellectual disability view these important domains.

The study has some limitations. Though the sample was much larger than in most previous studies, which often have fewer than ten participants, most participants worked for one organization. This might bias some results, especially toward leisure. The Sunnyfield organization is particularly adept at providing leisure and work activities and at aiding access to services, such as providing a bus to various activities. However, 14 were recruited through an ad and there were no obvious differences in key findings between these groups. That sample of 14 is larger than that of most studies in this area. Also, some participants were interviewed with a carer, though this seemed to make little difference. In addition, we did not address the difficult question of how participants came to hold the specific concepts that they do. Clearly they have gone through different experiences, as we all have, which can alter the information contained in a concept. For instance, sharing a house with a retired person should create a richer concept of retirement. However, that question is very complex and is not terribly relevant to the main purpose of improving educational efforts. The key focus is on what participants know and how to use that as a basis for improving educational efforts. Also, for the same reason, we did not look at these concepts in persons without a disability. These would likely be much richer, but it is not relevant to the key concern of the present study.

The finding that participants enjoy their work mirrors that of some other studies (Jiranek & Kirby, 1990). Test et al. (2000) found consistent satisfaction with supported employment and their specific job. Also, participants get much satisfaction from work and mostly do not want more prestigious jobs. This may also be helped by their lack of understanding of job status, which can make people in relatively unprestigious jobs dissatisfied. As mentioned, Edwards (1995), doubted whether persons with an intellectual disability have a work ethic, but this study shows that they do.

It is interesting that participants value their jobs and have a strong work ethic, yet appreciate and understand the value of leisure. They tended to choose their own leisure activities and participated in them with others much of the time. Friends and family play a major role in their leisure lives. These findings about leisure activities contrast with results of other studies (Bigby, 1992, 1998). For instance, Mahon (1994) in an American study found that many persons with a disability were socially isolated and in need of community involvement. A possible reason for the difference might be the younger median age in the present study and that Sunnyfield Homes organizes many leisure activities for many participants. Sunnyfield Homes was founded by parents of persons with disabilities and also some participants still lived with their parents. Most also were working in paid employment. In addition, Australia has extensive welfare services, including ample funding for much leisure (Moyle & Gibson, 1997).

The finding of poor knowledge of retire-
ment also is consistent with previous studies. Retirement, in many cases, had not been thought about. The concept of age and their own aging was difficult for participants (Lifshitz, 2000), and many apparently did not really view themselves as growing older and eventually retiring. This concept should be a major focus for educational efforts. Money management is another target.

Finally, the results show the value of using a conceptual approach to education and assessing what participants know about a domain and how they view the world. Results suggest that less educational effort needs to be directed at work and leisure matters with these participants, but a lot is needed on retirement and money management matters. In addition, teaching important concepts which persons with an intellectual disability can use to better deal with some domain (such as leisure) is very useful (Howard, 1987). This general approach might be applied to other important practical concepts, such as civics, aspects of social behavior, sexuality, health and so on.

References


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