

4-H Recreation and Its Teaching Potential

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Many times in conducting youth programs, Extension professionals have often used recreation as a reward for acceptable behavior during the "educational" portion of the activity. Often this recreation time is the first to be eliminated if the length of the educational activity becomes excessive.

This author contends that the Extension educator must identify recreation as an important educational program by itself—Extension personnel must be concerned with integrating recreation, rather than placing it in a secondary position of importance. Finally, implications and recommendations for incorporating recreation into 4-H activities are discussed. How do they differ from your views of recreation and its place in youth programs?

Why must a few "recreational" activities be set aside from the "educational" phase of the 4-H meeting until someone announces, "Now it's time for recreation!"

This kind of attitude may lead young people, in adult life, to view recreation as only children's play—not as a valuable, educational use of their time.

That many recreational activities are appealing to the youth serviced by 4-H is attested to by almost every professional and volunteer 4-H worker. However, recreation is considered minor in its overall importance to 4-H by many of these same

people. Perhaps such an attitude is justified when the recreational phase of 4-H is limited to quiet games and contests, mixers, stretchers, and party activities.

Comprehensive Program

A comprehensive program of recreation encompasses much more. It includes not only social recreation, but also music, drama, arts and crafts, camp outings, and vigorous sport activities. Recreation embraces work and learning experiences that interest the participant and bring him satisfaction and refreshment. More importantly, a broad recreational

program develops within the participant an appreciation for using his leisure wisely. It teaches concepts and skills that enable him to be selective in his choices of leisure activities so that he might consciously increase the quality of his life.

The inclusion of such a comprehensive program of recreation in the 4-H program would alone strengthen the program. However, an equally important value of recreation to 4-H is its potential as a means for teaching other subject matter. As professionals involved in teaching and program planning, Extension personnel are constantly striving to motivate young people to great participation in 4-H.

Generally, this objective is met by developing programs of interest to young people involved. This is done by relying on self-motivation or by using methods and techniques in presenting educational materials that will motivate youth. Presenting subject matter through recreation is an ideal teaching method to create interest and self-motivation.

Concepts of Recreation and Leisure

What's Recreation?

Recreation is enjoyment . . .
education . . . satisfaction . . .
concentration . . . distraction . . .
therapy . . . work . . .

Recreation is participating in a pick-up basketball game . . .
cooking dinner over an open fire . . . reading a book . . . learning a craft . . . doing a job well . . .
vandalizing the local drug store . . . attending a meaningful religious service . . . cleaning the house . . .

Recreation takes many forms for different individuals and varies from time to time for an individual. It can't be defined as a specific kind or type of experience, but rather as the quality of any experience for a particular individual.¹

Can golf be classified as recreation if it gives the participant no pleasure, but leaves him frustrated and angry? Can a daily production-line task be classified as recreation if one gains pleasure and satisfaction from the work and association with his fellow workers? The answers to these questions depend on the reader's view of recreation.

My concept of recreation is based on the premise that any experience has recreational potential for someone at some given time. Any experience that brings satisfaction, pleasure, and/or refreshment to the individual may be called recreation. To accept this concept of recreation, one must recognize that behavior at a given time reflects the demand to satisfy personal and dominating needs. Although the basic needs of humans are quite similar, the interaction of those

needs and the means of satisfying them are many. This is clearly demonstrated in the diversity of human behavior.

Diverse Human Behavior

Accepting the diversity of human behavior is the basis for developing a sound, recreational program. A successful program must try to be as varied as the individuals who participate in it. To be worthwhile, for both the individual and society, it must seek to provide opportunities that give personal satisfaction.

The success of the program doesn't depend on the number of people who participate. It doesn't depend on the amount of physical activity. It does depend on the quality the program adds to the life of each participant. A recreational program isn't only an end, but also a means to an end. The end is quality of living, a more satisfying way of life.

What's Leisure?

Often, for adults and even older teens to accept a recreational program, they must first understand leisure, the time when most recreation occurs. The definitions of leisure are as varied as those given to recreation. However, I view leisure as a purely personal matter; only the individual can determine when he has it. Leisure is the freedom to choose the way to use time.

As with many freedoms, the freedom to choose how to use time may be valued as a treasured gift. Or, it may be dreaded as a millstone around the neck. If the individual believes that participating in enjoyable, leisure activities is a waste of time, then leisure leads to mounting frustrations and tensions. A view of leisure as wasted time can only distract from the quality of living.

Therefore, it's the responsibility of those working in the fields of recreation and education to help people realize that leisure is opportunity for them to enrich their daily lives. Preparing youth to appreciate and use leisure wisely is part of this responsibility.

A positive attitude toward leisure allows the individual to take more time to fulfill his responsibilities. Realizing that many of his daily chores are performed only to fill the hours and not to add to his enjoyment of living, he can delete some tasks and use that time to have a second cup of coffee in the morning.

He can appreciate the beautiful scenery about him, take time to learn skills and create things he has only dreamed about. He'll have time to appreciate life and become the individual he would like to be. He'll be selective about the things he devotes his leisure to, so he'll

consciously increase the quality of his life.

That few adults exhibit a positive approach to leisure again points to the need to educate youth in the value of recreation and leisure.

Problems Facing Recreation Today

Conducting a successful recreation program depends on alleviating two major problems facing recreation today: (1) the lack of general acceptance of recreational pursuits as wise uses of leisure and (2) the lack of awareness of the many possibilities for filling leisure with refreshing, worthwhile activities.

Lack of Acceptance

With youth, teaching that wise uses of leisure are recreational activities is relatively simple. The problem arises when adults working with youth don't accept recreation as wise use of leisure. If a recreational program is to fulfill its ultimate purpose, it will provide activities that are satisfying for the participants. It will instill in them the need and desire to pursue recreational activities throughout their adult lives.

The program must reflect the importance of recreation, since recreation will definitely become more important as leisure increases with each generation.

The program must encompass activities, whether physical or mental, group or individual, that bring satisfaction to the participant. The program must provide a background for the young person to learn to wisely plan his leisure in adult life.

Lack of Awareness

The second problem facing recreation is lack of awareness of the many possibilities for filling leisure with refreshing and worthwhile activities. It's the problem most often cited by those working with 4-H recreational programs. However, if those working with the program have a positive attitude toward leisure and accept the broad concept of recreation, the next section of this article presents the solution to this problem for 4-H.

Recreation As a Program and Method

Probably no greater recreational program exists than the total 4-H program. Many opportunities are given to the members. A diversity of activities are available. Many experiences are designed to stimulate curiosity and learning. The 4-Her participates in the program because he wants to, because he enjoys it, because he gets personal satisfaction out of it.

By developing the proper atmosphere, any project, demon-

stration, or activity promoted by 4-H may be pursued as recreation. Further, learning is more apt to occur when information is presented in an interesting and enjoyable (recreational) way. As the content of a project, demonstration, or activity may be indicative of its "educational" potential, so may the method of presentation be indicative of its "recreational" potential.

Methods

A great deal of imagination isn't needed to present educational programs in a recreational manner. However, it does require time and effort by the leader, as is generally the case when departing from the lecture method.

You might spice up petroleum power, veterinary science, and other subject matter lessons with word games of matching important terms to definitions or functions. The photography project participant might look forward to practicing what he learns on a hiking or camping trip. Clothing participants might be involved in a craft to make a sewing box or a walk and outing to the local fabric shop or fashion show.

Great fun may be had by all in a personal appearance or health lesson in which boys apply make-up to girls. A wood-working class might enjoy a nail-driving or sawing contest, while an International Intrigue group

could certainly learn from games and dance originating in the countries being studied.

Teaching subject matter through drama, an example of a recreational method, is being used successfully in North Carolina. In creative dramatics, 4-Hers portray the parts of an automotive engine, a camera, and the digestive system. Using their imagination and basic information given them, they assume body positions and carry out movements to simulate the parts and their functions in relation to the other parts.

Role playing is also effective in dealing with and stimulating discussion of youth problems such as drugs, discrimination, and study habits. Used with technical subject matter or human relations problems, role playing gets the participant involved in the issue so he can relate it to his own frame of reference. When information becomes a part of the individual's experience or environment, either in reality or role playing, he retains it more easily than by traditional methods.² This method also provides a medium through which the participant can use his energies in a creative manner.

Recreational teaching methods are only one way recreation strengthens the 4-H program. Also, 4-H must try to present the same diversity of opportunities for learning and satisfaction in the "recreational" phase of the

program as in the present the "educational" phase. In fact, the two phases shouldn't be separated. Rather, together they should comprise the total 4-H program.

Vocationally oriented subject matter should be taught by 4-H, but, the program should also expand to include learning designed to prepare the participant to fill his leisure in a socially acceptable and personally satisfying way. Projects such as bird watching, boating, bowling, chess, fishing, guitar playing, and painting should receive just as much emphasis as clothing and entomology.

Some Program Problems

The age range served by 4-H compounds the problem of conducting a sound recreational program. It's difficult to plan a single activity that will appeal to all the young people between the ages of 9-19 or even ages 9-14—more often the range within a specific club membership. The answer is to have a variety of activities 4-Hers can choose from. Even a choice of one or two activities is an improvement since the experience of being able to choose may satisfy a need for some and give them a greater satisfaction in participating.

Providing for more than one recreational activity at a time at a meeting is often difficult, if not impossible due to limited space. So, the few min-

utes of recreation at each meeting should be modified or discontinued.

As a modification, an activity can be conducted for those wishing to participate. Other members can be encouraged to use the time to plan recreational-educational events to be held at some other non-meeting time or simply to socialize informally.

Even more strongly suggested is the elimination of the "recreational period" at each meeting. Instead, plan three or four meetings a year (assuming a monthly meeting schedule) that are entirely devoted to recreational activities. This type of meeting doesn't preclude attaining educational objectives. Ideally, the "educational" program at a club meeting should be presented in a "recreational" manner so that the members receive enjoyment from their learning and don't feel a need to be "entertained" for a period of time to make the meeting attractive.

Special Events Programming

In addition to club and project programs, groups are encouraged to plan special events of interest apart from regular meetings. Special interest groups offer an excellent opportunity to conduct activities that are recreational *and* educational, and, at the same time, are interesting and worthwhile to the young people. In planning special rec-

reational events and programs, the participants should have a voice in the activities selected. In even a diversified program, seldom will one event draw total membership participation.

An event should be designed for a specific age group, but publicized to all—and all those who find the content interesting should be permitted to participate. On a rotational basis, depending on the ages of the local 4-H membership, different events should be planned for the various age groups. Suggested age divisions are 9-11, 12-14, and 15-19, or groupings that coincide with the local school divisions.

If the events are well designed, they'll appeal primarily to the age group for whom they are planned. Ultimately, although not simultaneously, more young people should be involved and each who is involved will have a more satisfying experience.

Conclusion

The 4-H program offers almost unlimited resources for development of a successful and worthwhile recreational program for all youth. It is a versatile program that encompasses the broad concept of the field of recreation. Through its organization, 4-H can educate young people in the wise use of leisure. Equally important, with freedom to se-

lect the most effective methods, 4-H can present almost any subject matter in any manner that motivates youth participation.

The 4-H program needs to accept the challenge to provide both educational and recreational experiences for young people. These experiences must contribute to their total growth into responsible adults who recognize the importance of putting quality into living.

As an educational program for youth, 4-H has accepted responsibility to educate the total individual as exemplified by its four H's: head, heart, hands, and health. To successfully implement these programs, 4-H must also realize the ever-increasing importance of recreation and leisure in the lives of those it serves. With this realization will come a program that purposefully integrates recreation into the educational program or places equal emphasis on two phases of the program: Education and Recreation.

Footnotes

1. Herbert Brantley and H. Douglas Sessoms, *Recreation: Issues and Perspectives* (Columbia, South Carolina: Wing Publications, Inc., 1969), p. 2.
2. Jean McCamy, "Feeling Comes First," *Dramatics Magazine* (December, 1971), pp. 18-19.