

Classroom Learning Activities

Using Individual and Group Processes to Enhance an Understanding of Leisure and the Quality of Life

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In leisure studies, we often refer to leisure and the quality of life. Too often, we mention leisure and the quality of life in the same breath, thus implying that there is full understanding regarding the connection between these two concepts. Any lengthy discussion about the quality of life, however, will quickly leave discussants with the knowledge that there are many ways to define what is meant by the phrase.

Many have attempted to clarify what is meant by quality of life. From the literature I have reviewed over the years, quality of life has been categorized as social indicators, psychological components, and contemporary views of what people value or believe is important

More recent discussions about the quality of life combine social-psychological and contemporary values as factors. For example, Driver (1999) noted that the quality of life choices are those associated with exercising, good nutrition, stress management, avoidance of drugs abuse, and other choices related to personal health and well-being community appeal.

Description of the Learning Activity

Purpose

The Leisure and the Quality of Life Exercise is a teaching tool that can be used in the classroom. The purpose of the exercise is to enable students to explore factors that make up the quality of life and to consider the role that leisure plays in enhancing one's life. The exercise requires independent thinking, decision-making in small groups, and large group discussion. As such, it encourages students to share their thinking with others and to listen to the divergent opinions of others during the decision-making process. Though the exercise is primarily completed during class time, this will depend upon class size and class time available. The independent thinking portion can be student-paced and also done as a homework assignment. The small group and large group portions will take approximately 50 minutes and should be done with the instructor present.

Procedure

After the purpose is given, students should be told the following background information to the exercise. This exercise was adapted from materials that emerged from a conference that was held for 150 delegates from all over North America. They convened to explore the concepts of leisure and the quality of life. They represented education, parks and recreation, health, physical education, environmental and urban planning, design and development, camping and outdoor education, arts and culture, youth and gerontology services, engineering, architecture, systems analysis, medicine, psychiatry, industrial design, social group work, economics, resource management, mathematics, theology, sociology, geography, college and university students, professors and administrators, researchers and consultants, business, industry, labor, government and community development. The diversity of the group was viewed as one of the essential strengths to their discussions and findings. Their mission was to make judgments concerning the contribution of leisure to various components of the quality of life. In doing so, they agreed that the following factors make up the quality of life: self-respect, achievement, health, affection, freedom, involvement, challenge, security, comfort, status, novelty, and dominance. If you avoid giving students the date that this conference took place, you can later discuss their 21st Century perceptions with those of the experts (Staley & Miller, 1972).

1. Briefly introduce the exercise by giving your students the background information. Give each a copy of the ranking sheet, Quality of Life Factors Assignment-Individual Ratings, (see postscript), and read the directions aloud. Respond to any questions they may have. Allow students at least twenty minutes of class time to complete their rankings. Monitor their progress, giving more or less time as necessary, to complete their ratings. Ask them to work independently ranking each item in order as the instructions explain and according to their opinion as an expert.

2. After independent ranking is completed, form small groups of five or six students each. Encourage students to share their perceptions and reasoning with one another. Encourage listening. Remind them to stay focused on (a) leisure and the quality of life in general, and (b) individual opinions, rankings, thoughts, and feelings.

3. Show the students the Scoring Key. The Scoring Key shows how the experts rated the quality of life factors most furnished by leisure activities. Facilitate a discussion about your students' rankings and the experts' rankings.

This next part of the exercise is designed to enable students to practice Decision-Making by Consensus. Give your students the Quality of Life Factors Assignment-Group Tally Sheet (see postscript). Ask the students to now work in their groups to rank the items. The exercise directions remain the same but group members now must agree with each ranking. Students are assigned a number 1 through 6. Each will list their ranking and the rankings of each other in one of the columns in the Individual Predictions section. Give your students these guidelines for reaching consensus:

1. Avoid arguing blindly for your own opinions. Present your position as clearly and logically as possible, but listen to other members' reactions and consider them carefully before you press your point.
2. Avoid changing your mind only to reach agreement and avoid conflict.
3. Avoid conflict-reducing procedures such as majority vote, tossing a coin, averaging, or bargaining.
4. Seek out differences of opinion. Try to involve everyone in the decision process. Disagreements can improve the group's decision because they present a wide range of information and opinions, thereby creating a better chance for the group to hit upon more adequate solutions.
5. Do not assume that someone must win and someone must lose when discussion reaches a stalemate. Instead, look for the most acceptable alternative for all members.
6. Discuss underlying assumptions, listen carefully to one another, and encourage the participation of all members (Johnson & Johnson, 1987).

Once consensus has been reached, students should place their group ranking into a group prediction column. Once this has been accomplished, scores can be examined for evidence of synergy. Synergy is a concept related to the whole being greater than the parts. Synergy can be realized through decision-making by consensus when the decisions of the group are deemed better than any one individual in the group.

To see if groups experienced synergy, individual and group scores need to be computed for comparison. To do this, tally both the absolute difference between the individual's ranking and the group's ranking, and the expert's ranking for each Quality of Life factor. For example, if someone ranked challenge as 8th and the group ranked it as 7th, the person scores two points and the group scores one point. The total score, the sum of the scores for each factor, should be computed for each individual and the group as a whole. When comparing, the lowest score is considered best and synergy will be realized if the score of the group is lower than any one individual's score in the group.

If synergy is not realized, it is very likely due to the fact that almost 30 years of time separate the students from the experts. The rankings determined in 1972 (Table 1) may or may not "hold up" among students today. This reality should not be seen as a reason to avoid using the exercise. Rather, experience using the exercise has suggested that several key factors still hold up and that those that do not, are still viable factors. In addition, our understanding of leisure and the quality of life is broadened when new factors are added.

TABLE 1
Experts Scoring Key

1 st Freedom	5 th Achievement	9 th Comfort & Novelty (tie)
2 nd Health	6 th Challenge	10 th Comfort & Novelty (tie)
3 rd Affection	7 th Self-Respect	11 th Status
4 th Involvement	8 th Security	12 th Dominance

Outcomes of the Learning Activity and Recommendations for Use

This Quality of Life exercise has been a productive tool in a variety of classes taken by majors and non-majors. One primary reason why it works so well is that it begins with student thought and opinion about personally based constructs. That is, students can relate to what makes up the quality of life for them and what their leisure looks and feels like; it is their truth. Taking this known entity (their own truth) into a group discussion where others share their opinions encourages dialogue because, in a sense, everybody is right.

The exercise has also been used in program theory classes to facilitate students in formulating program objectives. And because the exercise demonstrates how group synergy can influence program policy and direction, it has been effective in stimulating discussion regarding the individual's impact upon group decisions during administration and supervision courses. The exercise has also provided a useful context for exploring the link between the quality of life and the benefits approach to leisure.

Using this exercise with non-majors has also been beneficial. It has been used in general education and elective courses. It has been my experience students who are thinking seriously about leisure for the first time, find that quality of life factors make sense. As we proceed in completing the exercise, they begin to see how leisure plays a key role in quality of life factors. Through discussion, these students see how important concepts such as freedom and choice are and how they are realized in leisure in ways that contribute positively to peoples' lives, satisfaction, and happiness.

References

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Authors Note: The author received an Innovative Teaching Award for this exercise by the Society of Park and Recreation Educators at the Teaching Institute held in Salt Lake City, 2001. Portions of this paper originally appeared in the 1988 issue of *Programming Trends in Therapeutic Recreation*, 9(2), pp. 25-28. For a copy of the rating sheet and the scoring sheet, contact, Eugene, OR 97403-5230, gcarpent@oregon.uoregon.edu