

---

# **Developing Therapeutic Recreation Students' Ability to 'Think Like An Evaluator'**

## *Classroom Inquiry as a Lesson Study Project*

**Patricia Ardivino**

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse  
2050 Health Science Center  
La Crosse, WI

**Robin Yaffe Tschumper**

**Susan 'BOON' Murray**

**Nancy Navar**

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this project was to conduct the classroom action research known as lesson study. Four instructors in a therapeutic recreation program who were guided by a campus-wide Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) initiative conducted the lesson study. The goal of this lesson study was to understand how to cultivate students' ability to 'think like an evaluator' when designing and implementing therapeutic recreation programs. While students were largely successful in meeting the lesson goals, they expressed naive understanding of the process of program evaluation. Results showed that more rehearsal and exposure to different methods of data collection was needed in order to match the best method of measurement to a program activity. Team members realized that learning opportunities need to be created to apply program evaluation skills beyond this course.

**KEYWORDS:** Lesson study, evaluation, therapeutic recreation

This college lesson study project was part of a campus-wide Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) initiative. The lesson study was designed in order for faculty to discover how to improve student learning through a distinctive process called lesson study. Lesson study focuses on a single lesson as a unit of analysis that instructors have jointly developed taught, observed, analyzed and revised (Mettetal, 2001). For this project, the unit of analysis was a specific lesson on program evaluation.

### **Course Description and Lesson Context**

*Program Design in Therapeutic Recreation* is a three-credit upper-division core course that is required for undergraduate students majoring in therapeutic recreation. The course is offered every semester twice a week for 14 weeks in 85-minute class sessions. As a course assignment, students design a specific therapeutic recreation program that uses recreational activity as either a treatment or recreation participation program for a target population and is based on the “Leisure Ability Model” (Stumbo & Peterson, 2008). Students also learn the systematic therapeutic recreation process of assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation (APIE) applied to participants, programs, and services.

Previously, faculty targeted the therapeutic recreation areas of assessment and documentation for improvement. It was natural to turn to evaluation in the APIE process for a closer look at how students learn evaluation strategies. All team members agreed on the importance and timeliness of scrutinizing the learning of evaluation skills. They were also aware of the professional literature citing a concern for systematic and standardized approaches in education and practice in demonstrating therapeutic outcomes of clients and programs (Kinney, W. B., Witman, J. P. Sable, J. R., & Kinney, J. S., 2001).

Learning goals for students with this lesson study project were: 1) to demonstrate knowledge of common evaluation instruments used in therapeutic recreation; 2) to demonstrate the ability to use the “Post Session Analysis Form” to evaluate a specific therapeutic recreation program session; 3) to demonstrate the ability to choose a specific type of evaluation instrument after directly observing a recreation program; 4) to write six evaluation questions appropriate for an individual specific program plan; and 5) to analyze a program using the results from the Post Session Report Form.

The instructional design involved reading comprehension of a course textbook chapter on program evaluation (Stumbo & Peterson, 2008), actual program observation with written performance measurement worksheets followed by group discussion, application through completion of evaluation worksheets, and a chapter quiz. It also involved reading Chapter 3: Instrument Development—The Hammers and Saws (<http://www.nationalservicerresources.org/node/17456>, Retrieved 2/3/10), and completing a worksheet that required choosing a relevant instrument for data collection from Project STAR, an online guide to program evaluation for service organizations

The methods used to give students more authentic evaluation experiences were: 1) an observation of an actual recreation program during the Spring semester; 2) an observation of a videotaped aerobic exercise recreation program during the Fall semester; and 3) the application of data collection strategies as an evaluation component to a specific program plan each student had designed for a previous course assignment.

Four faculty members in the therapeutic recreation program formed a lesson study team. All four team members are Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialists (CTRSs) with extensive program design and administration experience in addition to their academic careers. In order to develop an instructional design for facilitation of the lesson, the team followed the lesson study steps to develop goals, plan a lesson, teach and observe the lesson, analyze the evidence, and revise the lesson. Arrangements were made to teach the lesson during a spring semester, convene to make recommendations to modify the lesson, and teach the lesson again during a fall semester. Because of scheduling constraints, two different team members were assigned as course instructors. Both lessons were taught in the 12<sup>th</sup> week of the course. Students from both semesters and team members agreed to participate via the lesson study project informed consent template.

### Conclusion

Students were engaged in the material and generally prepared with written homework. They were talkative and collaborative in dynamic class discussions and observations, and forthcoming in their reactions as to what was learned and what was still unclear at the end of the lesson. For example, students in the spring course responded in the follow ways to “What was the most important thing learned in the lesson?”:

“I realized today that there are many appropriate and useful methods for evaluating programs. Everyone has their own opinion on an activity even if they all participated in the activity at the same time. The nice thing is that no one is wrong but instead the focus should be on how we can make the activity even better.”

They expressed the following in response to “What is still confusing about evaluation?”:

“My direct observation of the Summer Picnic was not as thorough as it could have been.”

“I would love to have one complete list of all the evaluation methods. I feel when I read through the chapter there were methods I did not catch that others [students] mentioned.”

Although the majority of students had meaningful program experiences prior to this course, their view of evaluation is limited. Perhaps more time is needed to convince them of the value of evaluation. In real-world programming, evaluation may be neglected or clumsy. For example, there may be some reflection by the staff or volunteers, but clients, participants, or parents are rarely asked to evaluate programs unless participant satisfaction is systematically gathered. Busy recreation programmers may easily overlook evaluation, but the results of a well-constructed and implemented evaluation can promote a program and increase resources.

From an instructors’ point of view, the objectives of the lesson adequately covered the lesson content. Performance measures gave evidence that students benefited from the use of a variety of teaching methods (readings, worksheets, observation, class discussion, comparison, and a quiz to accomplish the lesson objectives). Materials were

adequate, and the STAR Project online user’s toolkit was especially helpful and engaging. Instructors were reminded by team observers to maintain the good habit of waiting for responses to germinate. Students needed the time to slow down to think before they responded, and they did.

As noted by Bill Cerbin, Carnegie Teaching Scholar and Director of Lesson Study at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, “Lesson study is easy to do ... but hard to master” (personal communication, Spring, 2005). Team members were aware of how important it was to facilitate the lesson correctly and worked hard to make concrete contributions that would streamline the lesson plan into a viable working module. They felt that the process was exciting but were mindful that time for review, reflection, and discussion was limited. Revisions to the lesson were incorporated but care was taken to allow the lessons to be customized for each instructor. This team process of give and take needed to be intentional so that students were presented with a seamless lesson. This lesson study provided an opportunity to synthesize basic and advanced program evaluation information under the luxury of peer guidance.

## References

- Corporation for National and Community Service. *User’s guide to evaluation for national service programs. Chapter three: Instrument Development-The hammers and saws*. Retrieved 2/3/10 from [http://nationalserviceresources.org/files/legacy/filemanager/download/Evaluation/users\\_guide/chap3.pdf](http://nationalserviceresources.org/files/legacy/filemanager/download/Evaluation/users_guide/chap3.pdf)
- Kinney, W. B., Witman, J. P. Sable, J. R., & Kinney, J. S. (2001). *Curricular standardization in therapeutic recreation: Professional and university implications*. In N. Stumbo (Ed.), *Professional issues in therapeutic recreation: On competence and outcomes* (pp. 87-104). Champaign, IL: Sagamore.
- Mettetal, G. (2001). The what, why, and how of classroom action research. *Journal of Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 2(1), 6-13.
- Stumbo, N. J., & Peterson, C. A. (2008). *Therapeutic recreation program design: Principles and procedures* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). San Francisco, CA: Benjamin-Cummings.
- UWL Lesson Study Project: <http://uwlax.edu/sotl/lsp>