Creativity In The Classroom: Students "Picture" Serious Leisure

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Abstract

Stebbins (1982) coined the term 'serious leisure' to explain a phenomenon which differentiates one type of leisure from its non-serious, or casual, counterpart. Since Stebbins' conceptual statement was introduced, multiple studies have been conducted that reveal the seriousness with which many people approach their particular leisure pursuit. The purpose of this learning activity is to have students visually depict their perceptions of individuals engaged in serious leisure pursuits in order to reinforce the concept in an alternative learning environment. This activity is recommended for use in an undergraduate classroom setting. The positive outcomes include introduction to important leisure concepts, an opportunity for self-reflection and discussion about the value of serious and casual leisure, and include an excellent opportunity for use of creativity as a learning tool (Plucker, Beghetto & Dow, 2004), thereby providing an alternative means of expression of knowledge often overlooked in a traditional classroom setting.

KEYWORDS: serious leisure, creativity, multiple learning styles

Introduction

Serious leisure sounds like a contradiction; however, it has become an important leisure concept. Stebbins (1982) coined the term 'serious leisure' to explain a phenomenon which differentiates one type leisure from its non-serious, or casual, counterpart. Seriousness has traditionally been associated with work rather than with leisure. Since Stebbins' conceptual statement was introduced, multiple studies have been conducted which reveal the seriousness with which many people approach their particular leisure pursuit.

According to Stebbins (1999), six qualities have been identified which distinguish serious leisure from casual leisure. These include the need to persevere at one's leisure activity, having a career in that endeavor, a dependence on personal effort to be successful, a unique ethos surrounding the leisure activity, the tendency to personally identify with the leisure activity, and that the leisure pursuit conveys eight durable benefits. Perseverance includes persistence though such adversity as bad weather, embarrassment, anxiety, fright, fatigue or even injury. A leisure career refers to histories with turning points, such as stages of achievement or involvement. Personal effort includes any special knowledge, training or skill related to the leisure activity. A unique ethos refers to subcultures which develop related to special beliefs, norms, values and performance standards. Personal identification with a leisure pursuit includes speaking passionately about it with other people and introducing oneself to others in terms of that activity. The eight durable benefits include self-actualization, self-enrichment, recreation or renewal of self, feelings of accomplishment, enhancement of self-image, self-expression, social interaction and belongingness, lasting physical products of the activity, and self-gratification (Stebbins, 1999).

These six qualities have been shown to manifest themselves in four categories of serious leisurists: amateurs, hobbyists, career volunteers (Stebbins, 1999), and fandom (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002). Very simply, amateurs have professional counterparts with whom they have a special relationship. Hobbyists can be broken down into collectors, makers and tinkers, activity participants, and players. Career volunteers place altruism above other durable benefits. Fandom refers to development of a level of knowledge which leads to thrill when watching a specific event.

Research has been conducted on a wide variety of leisure pursuits to explore the dimensions of serious leisure and examine the settings and activities associated with it. For example, American Kennel Club activities (Baldwin, 1999), cultural tourism (Stebbins, 1996; Ravenscroft & van Westering, 2001), watching University of Florida football (Gibson et al, 2002), kayaking (Kane & Zink, 2004), history reenactment (Hunt, 2004), quilting (Stalp, 2006), museum volunteering (Orr, 2006), and dancing (Brown, 2007). All of these studies have found evidence to support the concept of serious leisure. The purpose of this learning activity is to have students visually depict their perceptions of individuals engaged in serious leisure pursuits in order to reinforce the concept in an alternative learning environment.

Description of Activity

Begin the activity with a lecture which details the concept of serious leisure, its six distinguishing qualities and four categories. Contrast this with the characteristics of casual leisure (Stebbins, 1997). Include examples that illustrate the wide variety of leisure pursuits in which people become serious.

Because this is likely to be the students' first exposure to the concept of serious leisure, it is useful to provide them with a handout that includes the six qualities which distinguish serious leisure from casual leisure, and four categories of serious leisurists with a very brief description of each. This speeds up the lecture, providing more time for the activity, and enables the students to focus on creatively expressing their new knowledge, rather than their note taking and recall abilities.

Divide the students into groups of five. Give each group a box of markers and a large sheet of paper (25" x 30") with one of the four categories of serious leisure already written in large letters across the top. Prepare these sheets in advance of the class in order to have a sufficient number of sheets, as well as at least one for each category of serious leisure and an equal (or nearly equal) number of each in classes large enough to require duplication. It is useful to number each sheet in order to facilitate the show and tell phase of this activity.

Instruct the students to work together in their groups to invent a serious leisurist who fits into the category at the top of their sheet. Ask them pick an activity for their serious leisurist, give her/him a name, and then draw a picture of her/him. Instruct them to incorporate all six categories which distinguish serious leisure from casual leisure into their drawing in some way. Suggest that this can be done through what their serious leisurist is wearing, objects they have on or near them, or by including a few words in a speech bubble to get their point across. Additionally, instruct the group to use a piece of notebook paper to list each of the six qualities which distinguish serious leisure from casual leisure and note after each one how it has been depicted in their drawing. This sheet can be attached to the back of their picture or handed in separately, and provides a handy note sheet for later study instead of the large drawing paper.

Once all students have finished their drawings and write-ups, have each group send two members to the front of the classroom to hold up their drawing and introduce the serious leisurist they have created by explaining how each of the six qualities of serious leisure have been depicted. In smaller classes, this can become interactive by asking students from other teams to explain what they see in the drawing at the front of the class. It is useful to call the groups up to the front in the order that the sheets were handed out to prevent the same category of serious leisure from being presented several times in a row.

Outcomes and Recommendations

This lecture and associated activity have a number of positive outcomes. First, the lecture introduces students to an important leisure concept. In a society where the value of leisure continues to be both questioned and pursued, serious leisure is

a concept which provides insight for behavior, as well as justification for continued support for a very important aspect of many people's lives. Second, the juxtaposition between serious and casual leisure can spark self-reflection and discussion about the value of each. Third, the activity provides an alternative learning environment to traditional lecture. Learning style theory proposes that people learn in cognitively different ways and require different settings to maximize their learning potential (Felder & Brent, 2005; Dunn, Beaudry & Klavas, 1989).

This activity is recommended for use in an undergraduate classroom setting. It works particularly well in large introductory classes in which group discussion is often limited, and equally well in smaller classes. The ideas are readily testable, as the instructor can request that students provide tangible examples in conjunction with the definition of serious leisure and its components. This material provides an excellent opportunity for use of creativity as a learning tool (Plucker, Beghetto & Dow, 2004), thereby providing an alternative means of expression of knowledge often overlooked in a traditional classroom setting.

Additionally, this activity allows for connections to be made with the concepts of leisure specialization (Scott & Shafer, 2001; Tsaur & Liang, 2008), social worlds (Scott & Godbey, 1992), and flow (Csikszentmihaly, 1991).

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