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Extracurricular activities and students' communication

Abstract: Extracurricular activities represent educational, preplanned actions which enable complete confirmation of students' personality as well as development of their communication skills and competencies; whilst they enable the teachers to expand their educational influence. The role of teachers in process of organization and realization of students' extracurricular activities is to create conditions within those voluntary activities which enable dominant engagement of students. Extracurricular activities should fulfill students' intellectual, emotional, social, cultural, informative and technical.

Keywords: extracurricular activities, teaching process, students' competencies, social education, partnership learning, student's free time.

Characteristics of extracurricular activities which separate them from teaching process, with reference to organization, are seen in the fact that they are not conducted in classes, but in separately formed groups. Programs of extracurricular activities provide students with an opportunity to spend their free time in a quality manner; therefore their main goal is to include as many students as possible, regardless their abilities.

More able students at the university are regularly required to do a substantial amount of homework, which considerably lengthens their effective working day. But

large numbers of students, and the majority of 'our' students, commonly do none. We are strongly of the opinion that all students would profit from undertaking some work for themselves outside what is done in lessons; we also think this work could, and for many of our students, especially, should, take more varied forms than what is conventionally recognized now as homework. A task to be undertaken might, for instance, be making an aircraft model, or finishing some project in the art or craft room begun in university time. It might be a chance to try some new skill or craft or, for those students who wished to learn touch-type on the computer, an opportunity for intensive practice which it may be difficult to provide inside the normal university timetable. It might consist in the group viewing and discussion of a film or television program. It might be the presentation of material before giving a talk in class, or gathering information for some group project in university: obtaining the information might involve writing letters or direct observation and note making, or visiting a museum, an art gallery. It could be working on the university magazine, or mapping the route of a coming university expedition.

In order to create positive working atmosphere inside the class, it is necessary to change communication between students and teachers, because creativity-based relationship between them require teacher to show readiness to allow one thing to lead to another, i. e. to be ready to accompany the student into an adventure. Teachers need to become closer to students, talk to them, listen to them, and accept students' suggestions and opinions. It is important to emphasize that extracurricular activities are, prior to all, the activities of students. Therefore it is them who should express their free and creative roles within mentioned activities. However, an important fact is that extracurricular activities are a part of systematized and organized educational university process, thus they can't be given to students' will only. In order to achieve better results in those activities, it is important that teachers adjust their work so that they create a direct communication which will encourage and stimulate students, in a creative manner, and at the same time will make a favorable working atmosphere in a certain group. During realization of extracurricular activities, a good teacher will respect students' individuality and will try to develop students' communicational potentials, in accordance with each students' competencies.

Most universities would agree with us in attaching importance to experiences offered outside the formal lesson program. Already a tremendous range and variety of activities can be found. They include clubs and societies dealing with all kinds of interests: photography, sport and games; music, including orchestras and choirs, drama and film making — the latter taking very ambitious forms in some universities. There are enthusiastic groups studying local history or a foreign language preparatory to a trip abroad.

Universities activities are not merely devices for keeping students off the street, although in some streets it may be very desirable that they should. There are many

positive reasons why extracurricular provision is important. For the individual students, it can mean the discovery of new interests. It is often a chance for the odd-man-out to come into his own, among the staff as well as the students, revealing an unsuspected talent; and for some of our students, especially, there may be a gain in confidence from being a member of a much smaller social and working group than is normally possible in class.

For the university as a whole, there is a strengthening effect, in bringing together students of different ages and abilities who may never work together in lessons; and in teachers getting to know their students in a different, more intimate companionship. The gulf which almost inevitably exists in class between teacher and taught, when the student is conscious of his lack of knowledge and skill in, say, English language, may be bridged when two enthusiasts indulge their hobby in the English Club. We quote from an account of a university visit made by some members of the British Council.

Extracurricular activities of students require both students and teachers to take active part in their realization. University which offers its students with various extracurricular activities can achieve additional influence, with the goal to make students' free time outside the university as quality as possible. Realization of extracurricular activities will surely be better and more successful if teachers develop democratic, voluntary, partnership and pedagogic stimulating communication.

We share with many teachers a strong belief that extracurricular activities are not merely extras, in the sense of being pleasant but marginal to the main business of learning, although in terms of healthy pleasure and fun alone they would be important. Perhaps in the general sphere of social education, nothing could be more valuable to students growing up, than to learn how really to listen to each other, to argue robustly but with reason and good humor, and to tolerate differences of outlook without personal ill-feeling. Opportunities for experiences of this sort occur particularly easily through informal discussion in university clubs and societies. Some activities can provide direct extensions and illumination of what goes on in the classrooms; and for our students, particularly, by generating a new impulse to learning, they may actually result in an improvement in basic attainments. The student who plans and writes their own script, and shoots, processes and edits their own film in a university club, are bringing into play applied skills in English, Computer Science, Art and Journalism, as well as exercising their perceptions and judgment. The process of educating students about communication needs to be composed of mostly partnership learning. The way in which realization of extracurricular activities students become more active, free, equal and responsible participants; they develop creative ways of thinking and show more self-initiative. Students then start to think independently, ask questions, give answers, create etc., because they learn in the atmosphere of understanding and support, without fear or anxiety to discuss and develop their competencies; as well as no fear to develop partnership and equality based relationships with their teachers.

A start might be made by requiring all students in their final two years of university to stay on for one or two 'extra' sessions a week, for any activity of their choice, and the choice could be very wide. They could be encouraged to stay on at other times to do their homework, to work for themselves, or to take part in additional clubs or societies or in occasional general sessions which brought several groups together socially. If the habit grew, and a pattern were established of a generally longer university day, then there would be opportunity for greater flexibility in the planning of the 'day' and the university timetable as a whole.

A decisive factor in any scheme would be staffing. Under the present system, many universities have been extraordinarily lucky in the generous voluntary service of the teachers in out-of-university hours. But, as our examples have shown, by no means all universities are as fortunately placed, and extracurricular activities sometimes founder altogether for lack of people to lead them. We acknowledge the real difficulties which the universities face, but we do not regard the difficulties as insuperable. In our opinion, and we believe in the opinion of the large majority of teachers, these activities represent a proper part of the teacher's professional responsibilities in the education of their students.

It is clear that the total number of staff needed for one kind of educational activity or another would be greater. But there might be room in the educational scene to draw far more on the special knowledge or skills of persons outside the university. Just as we should see some advantages, in bringing into the formal university program people with particular talents and experience — social workers, people from commerce and from industry — to contribute from time to time to courses for students, so we think that in extracurricular program there might be even more room for enlisting individuals with special interests. If a group of students wants to take up learn English language, music, tradition and culture, persons other than qualified teachers may be well capable of instructing and inspiring the group. We might be able to supplement our valuable short-supply teachers with other activity-leaders, and at the same time effect a helpful interchange between the universities and the general community.

In every educational work, particularly in extracurricular activities, it is very necessary to awaken creative and innovative abilities of students, rather than just formally transfer knowledge to them. Creative role in every man's life is very important; therefore it is a duty of every teacher to organize their educational work in a manner to mostly encourage their students to be creative and innovative, as well as to take part in development of students' abilities.

We do not regard any of the suggestions we have made as essentially setting up rivalries between university activities and those of other organizations for young people. In our own survey, rather more than half of all the students belonged to no club or society of any kind, whether university-based or organized by an outside body. Without

advocating mere gregariousness as itself a virtue, it is safe to say that the total provision for organized activities for young people of this age group could with advantage be increased. Secondly, although a measure of overlapping between what a good university can provide and what a good youth club can provide is no disadvantage, in the main, the contributions of the two will be complementary rather than identical. Many young people, at different stages of growth, feel the need for support by belonging to groups of different kinds at different times. In addition to all the range of out-of-university activities which a good university can offer, there is probably always a need for contacts of a different kind for some students — particularly those who have not felt themselves successful at the university.

We ought not to close this article reference to an extracurricular development which a great deal of our evidence confirms is specially significant for our students. That is, the experience of living away from home for a short period, in a fairly small and intimate group, and in a novel environment. This is variously achieved through university journeys and expeditions, camps, or residential sources of different types, lasting, generally, anything from a weekend to a month.

These residential courses (and we use this term here to refer to all residentially based activities) take many forms. Other courses are based on field studies, others again may aim at introducing young people to new recreational interests — in art or music or drama, as well as in sport. And the shorter courses often take the form of conferences, dealing with a range of subjects and interests most likely to be of value to young people just before they leave university, including preparation for the transition to work. Variety is to be welcomed. Not all students' needs or interests are the same, and there would be nothing at all to be gained from uniformity.

Most, however, of these undertakings have important features in common. By introducing students to fresh surroundings, and helping them to acquire new knowledge or try their hand at new skills, they provide a general educational stimulus. Many students, including some who were far from successful in normal university work, seem to come back with a new zest for everything they do.

There is little doubt that many students benefit from these experiences in their personal and social development. This is partly the direct result of living continuously in a small community: the less able and the more different students under these circumstances are encouraged and even obliged to play a more significant part than may normally be possible in the much larger community of the whole university. And in residential, even more than in other out-of-university activities, students and teachers enjoy a closer companionship. For the students who come from difficult home backgrounds and live in socially deprived neighborhoods, these can be opportunities of special help.

Through extracurricular activities students can activate their creative potencies which they have not been able to fulfill and expose in the other life segments; and to

develop all of their communication skills and competencies. Participation in extracurricular activities helps students to discover and cherish their talents, character and competency development, however a freedom to choose along with motivational mechanism to define the choice make the foundation of it all.

Students' free time and their extracurricular activities within the university share one characteristic — a voluntary participation. Providing rich and various compositions of extracurricular activities, it is possible to have an additional educational influence at university, with a goal to make sure that students spend their free time, away from university obligations, as quality as possible, without violent communication. During the realization of extracurricular activities it is important to help students develop and cherish the sense of quality communication. Every conversation that lacks quality is imposed, endangering, insincere and is avoided.

Teachers should strive to conduct a conversation whilst paying to the collocutor, and at the end such conversation can be linked to a voluntary communication.

Partnership communication is actually a partnership within the communication, which means that students are involved in making decisions about how and where the extracurricular activities are to be realized, and what will they contain; nevertheless final decision is always on the teachers, since they are professionals. Development of tolerance and mutual consideration of students is a key path to establish successful partnership communication. The goal of pedagogic stimulating communication is not only to pass a certain message on to students, during the process of realization of extracurricular activities, but to make that information motivate students to get active. Every type of communication, whether it is personal, two-way, democratic, verbal, not verbal, direct etc., can be pedagogic and stimulating if it's realized in a proper manner. During the realization of extracurricular activities, this communication results in better relationship between students and teachers. It requires skills of both speaking and listening, in order to accomplish mutual understanding.

How should any extra time be used? First, to incorporate into the total educational program many of those activities which are now called 'extracurricular'. The latter word occurs in our terms of reference, and we use it here for want of a better; but our whole article is that the experiences offered by these activities should form an integral part of any liberal educational program, and that a curriculum conceived only in terms of formal lessons is unduly restricted. We think heads of universities should have the time and resources at their disposal to be able to plan the program as a whole, with activities inside and outside the classroom as complementary parts.

Secondly, some of the time might be used for what is really a special form of out-of-classroom activity, 'homework'. The term may be a misnomer for what we have in mind, but again we use it for want of a better. Perhaps some more appropriate name may be found if the concept of what is involved begins to change.

From all this we conclude that extracurricular activities ought to be recognized as an integral part of the total educational program, and secured where necessary by administrative provision. Several things follow: first, the university program needs to be envisaged as a whole, with ‘curricular’ and ‘extracurricular’ activities planned as complementary parts. Secondly, the regular university day should be conceived as extending beyond the eight-till-four limits. Thirdly, and most crucial, the implication must be recognized in assessing the total staffing needs of university.

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