

Planning for Play

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In this article Hazel F. Gabbard, specialist for Extended School Services in the U. S. Office of Education, deals with two aspects of what is conceived to be a program of desirable living and learning for children—provision of time for play and planning for (what we so glibly term) “out-of-school” hours. In her account of what two communities are doing, Miss Gabbard indicates how all communities may move forward in providing for more adequate learning experiences for children and youth.

WHAT DO TWENTY MILLION children between six and fourteen years of age do in their out-of-school hours—in the afternoons, on Saturdays, and all day in summer? How many of these children live in crowded homes or neighborhoods where little or no space is provided? What constructive play experiences are they having in learning to get along with other children? Are schools—and communities—aware of the needs of these children who, because of circumstances over which they have no control, are often deprived of a normal childhood? These are questions which concern every school and community of the nation.

Leisure Time Bears Varied Fruit

Guidance in the use of leisure time has long been recognized as one of the major purposes of education. The boys and girls in our elementary schools comprise one-third of the population. Their leisure time occupies forty to fifty percent of their waking hours. This large block of time may bring either tragedy or blessings to the nation depending on how it is spent.

Leisure spent wholly in idle amusement may deteriorate mental efficiency

and impair health. Leisure spent in self-improvement, in developing special talents, and in satisfying worthwhile interests will enrich life and bring new powers of enjoyment. Promotion of recreation and leisure-time activities for children and youth is, for these reasons, assuming new importance as the responsibility of the schools and of the community.

Play for All Youngsters

Play, as the child's normal avenue for learning, is receiving wider acceptance as a method in modern educational practice. Under the stern Puritan doctrines, which have so markedly influenced American education, play was frowned upon and formal techniques supplanted the play method of learning about the world.

For very young children, play, as a way of life, has been supported by research. Findings have been applied in the educational methods used by nursery schools and kindergartens. Beyond these years children have usually not had opportunities for self-expression, and formal education has taken its place in the long hours of the older elementary school child.

Fortunately there are more schools which are asking: "What is a good environment for children's learning?" More educators concede that older children need similar materials and space as planned for kindergarten children. More children are allowed the motion their bodies require, the outlets for muscles in running, jumping, building; and the natural play activities to open up the many avenues of information.

Play, an Avenue for Learning

Through play experiences the child's education goes forward. For example, the intense interest today's children have in airplanes helps them to accumulate data which is often beyond their years. They study minutely a toy plane with which they play. They discover inaccuracies in pictures. They analyze photographs of real planes. They imitate the sound of motors, learn to identify planes by silhouettes. Gathering and using information is a part of play and is needed to round out the experience satisfactorily.

Play activities are widely used in the modern school because they motivate the learning process. They arouse and sustain the child's interest, stimulate his imagination, induce wholehearted concentration, and yield direct satisfactions to the child. The modern school program is built on the basic needs of children and the understanding that he acquires knowledge about himself and others, as well as his environment, through play experiences.

Not only is the point of view changing as to how children learn, but also barriers are being lifted so education can go on within and without the school's walls. Many forward-looking

school systems are now providing programs for both children and youth after school, on Saturdays, and during the summer months. The magnet which draws children to these extended school services is a broad educational and recreational program consisting of a wide range of program offerings.

Recreation's Place in a Six-Day Program

In the public schools of a mid-western community where nearly one-third of the school population attends school voluntarily six days a week, a recreation program is conducted and financed as an integral part of the school program. There are quite definite and specific purposes around which the service is organized:

- ▶ Development of physical fitness through expanded opportunities for participation in vigorous sports and games
- ▶ Supervised recreational care for children of working mothers
- ▶ Enrichment of life through the provision of opportunities for every child to make the most satisfying use possible of his leisure
- ▶ Growth and development of the creative ability of the child through such forms of expression as music, drama, and crafts
- ▶ Provision of a program of activities sufficiently broad and of such nature as to provide many of the basic satisfactions that children must have to be emotionally stable, mentally adaptable, and socially effective
- ▶ Development of a sense of achievement and individual worth by providing numerous and varied opportunities for the attainment of success in recreational activities and bestowing the recognition which such success merits

- Development of such qualities as co-operation, courtesy, respect for authority, fair play, respect for the rights of others, and willingness to accept responsibility as one of a social group.

Commenting on these objectives, the director of the program says, "It is not enough to provide activities for youth without regard to what happens to them while they are participating. We cannot afford to evaluate our programs on the basis of numbers taking part. We must be concerned with the quality of recreational experience and its effect upon the behavior of those who experience it.

"No attempt is made to standardize the programs in the various centers. They grow out of the needs of children and represent the interests and character of the different neighborhoods from which the children come. The recreation leader for these programs is chosen carefully, to assure guidance and leadership in keeping with the philosophy underlying the objectives."

A Community Uses What It Has

In an east coast community, parent and school staff, recognizing the facilities which the schools had to offer, asked that these facilities be utilized during the summer months for the children. A day camp program was put into operation, using school buildings which were located in neighborhoods which offered no parks, swimming pools, or even limited recreational facilities. These areas were found to be neighborhoods in which both parents, in many cases, were employed and children were left with too much leisure and little guidance and supervision.

Unlimited Activity Possibilities

The summer program involved co-operative planning on the part of parents, teachers, principals, and administrative staff from the beginning. A meeting was called to explore the need and to discuss the desirability of the schools offering a vacation program for children. The Board of Education was requested to grant funds for a summer day camp program. Brief sketches from the program report suggest the varied and worthwhile learning experiences which the summer camp centers provided:

- At Camp #22 a playground was planned, constructed, maintained, and enjoyed by the children and the community. A dump adjoining the camp was cleared. Several tons of cement donated by the Board of Education was leveled for a smooth surface. Flower boxes were made and filled to decorate the plot. A shower and sand box were given by the Board of Education.
- Camp newspapers at two centers proved a successful medium for creative writing and served to build a feeling of solidarity among the members of the centers.
- Trips were an outstanding feature of the summer activities. Each center moved abroad in the community as interest and facility dictated. Among the places visited were the zoo, art center, a splash party at the "Y," straw ride to a farm, a boat trip, a weiner roast, and an overnight camp at the director's farm.
- Children love to pretend! A room, a box of costumes, a group of undisturbed children resulted in some fine dramatic plays in the Little

Theater. These productions were often planned and staged by the children without parts to be learned or formal rehearsals.

- The children made equipment such as blocks, drums, dolls, a trip book, sketch book, badges to wear on trips for identification, camp signs, toys, stage properties, hobby horses, and airplane models.

Benefits Shared by All

Individuals with special interests in the arts, dramatics, dancing, music, gymnasium, library, and crafts divided their days among the centers. Parents and others in the community with special interests shared responsibilities with the groups at varying hours throughout the day. The leaders proved to their satisfaction that the environment influences the quality of learning. In each center every effort was made to make the program so attractive, so pleasant, and so appealing as to be irresistible to children.

Wherever one looked there was something to admire, something which gave pleasure to look at, to touch, or just absorb. Schoolrooms with their arbitrary furniture and proportions weren't always easy to handle, but they could be modified. School furniture was removed or stacked away in a corner. Bright sofa cushions and benches appeared. Lovely flower arrangements and colorful ornaments were used. Wall hangings covered blackboards. Toys and books were accessible. Informality, aesthetic appeals, a variety of materials, and homelike living predominated.

Teachers, children, parents, and community benefited from the summer school camp. Children grew as socialized

members of a mixed society. Adults matured in their knowledge of how to live and work with children effectively. The whole community profited in the understanding relationships which this environment fostered.

No Monopoly on Opportunity

What these communities are doing is also within the reach of every community. The cost of operating a recreational program for children during out-of-school hours is not as great as might be expected. Often the school with its equipment, rooms, and grounds remains idle too large a proportion of time.

In the summer months the building requires no heat, and children can assume their share in keeping the school in order. During the winter the building will be heated during most of the day. For the additional hour or more in the afternoon, some extra expense will be involved for the longer day, or the longer week if a Saturday program is offered. However, when the cost is measured in terms of the effects of such a program on improving the living of children and the community, there can be no question as to the values of such an investment in children.

Special Leadership Qualities Required

Finally, it should be said that a school recreational program will stand or fall on the quality of leadership provided. Paid leaders are essential to give stability to the program. If the program is to function on a sound education base, skillful teachers who like and understand children must be found to guide children's activities in each center. Those experienced in operating out-of-school programs for children say they

have found it necessary to select mature persons as leaders, who have a zest for living and who possess ingenuity and resourcefulness in developing a program.

New Emphasis in Teacher Education

As schools move toward the establishment of a year-round program for children, teacher education programs will need to be re-examined and reshaped in the light of the type of recreational services which schools offer. Few teacher education institutions now give students the background and experiences which teachers need to work with children in a leisure-time program. More attention should be directed to helping a teacher know about the play

interests of the older child, and how the child probes his world for answers to his questions. He should also have experience in working with parents so that he can accept them as partners in the educative process both at home and at school.

Finally, the teacher should be acquainted with the community agencies, know what resources are available, and how they can be utilized in a recreational program. Libraries, museums, churches, and youth organizations are concerned and interested in the constructive use of leisure time. Their services and those of the schools should be coordinated to strengthen and enrich the programs for children in each community.

Some Guides to Healthful School Living

FRED V. HEIN

In our concern for providing desirable environments for children we cannot overlook aspects that make the environment a healthful one in which to live. Fred V. Hein, consultant in Health and Fitness, Bureau of Health Education of the American Medical Association, Chicago, points out that both physical aspects and classroom practices affect the total health of children.

THE GROWTH and development of boys and girls is conditioned by the kind of school they attend as well as every other aspect of their environment. Good physical surroundings, wholesome teacher personalities, and understanding administration can, together,

create a school situation that is safe and healthful for living and learning.

Determiners of the Learning Climate

Suitable equipment, adequate lighting and heating, proper ventilation, and attractive and restful surroundings not

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