

Extracurricular Activities

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ABSTRACT

Extracurricular activities are found at all levels of our school system. They include but are not limited to activities such as debate, athletics, music, drama, school publications, student council, school clubs, contests, and various social events. This multitude of experiences forms a third curriculum – paralleling the required and elective curricula. In this paper, I discuss the role of extracurricular activities in relation to the overall goals of education and the functions of extracurricular activities.

***Keywords:* afterschool activities, athletics, co-curricular activities, extracurricular activities, goals of education, non-classroom activities, school activities, school clubs, the third curriculum**

Extracurricular activities are found at all levels of our school system, especially in secondary schools (Foster, 2008). The terms *extracurricular activities*, *co-curricular activities*, and *non-classroom activities* have all been used interchangeably to mean experiences and activities such as debate, athletics, music, drama, school publications, student council, school clubs, contests, and various social events (Emmer, 2010a,b,c,d,e,f). This multitude of experiences forms a third curriculum—paralleling the required and the elective curriculums, and are well integrated into the daily school program (Barbieri, 2009). Generally, extracurricular activities are voluntary, are approved and sponsored by school officials, and carry no academic credit toward graduation (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008). Following, I discuss extracurricular activities in relation to the overall goals of education followed by an examination of the functions of extracurricular activities.

Goals of Education

Extracurricular activities, by whatever name they are called, are an essential, vital, and extensive part of education in America. The development of skill in working in

groups, the cultivation of hobbies and interests, the production of yearbooks, newspapers, and plays, and participation in interscholastic athletics and intramural sports present many opportunities to students for discovering and developing talents that approximate life in the adult community (Larson, 2006).

The lineage of worthy use of leisure time as a valid part of the goals of education is the foundation on which the student activities program in American schools is built. Although the goals of secondary education had been variously stated for many years, one of the first concerted efforts to define the curriculum of secondary schools resulted in the Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education in 1918 (Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education). The seven cardinal principles have had a major impact on shaping the goals of education for more than nine decades (Foster, 2008).

The importance of these objectives was a redefinition of the curriculum to include all activities that influence the way others think, feel, believe, and act. Social events, athletics, clubs, and all the many leisure activities become a part of the values and virtues of the objectives of American education and of democratic life.

Functions of Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities serve the same goals and functions as the required and elective courses in the curriculum. However, they provide experiences that are not included in the formal courses of study. They permit students to apply knowledge acquired in formal courses and to acquire concepts of democratic life. When managed properly, the extracurricular activities program allows for a well-rounded, balanced program by (1) reinforcing learning, (2) supplementing the required and elective curriculum (formal courses of study), (3) integrating knowledge, and (4) carrying out the objectives of democratic life (Barbieri, 2009; Hill, 2008; Jones, 2011).

Reinforcing Learning

One function of extracurricular activities is to reinforce the required course of studies. The activity is used to enrich and extend the work in the classroom. Clubs associated with a subject-matter discipline have considerable reinforcement value. The Spanish Club may be used as an example of reinforcing learning. The Spanish Club extends the time students spend working on the Spanish language. During the course of club activities, specific linguistic learnings are reviewed or extended. The names of articles of clothing, of food, and of eating utensils are used in a natural setting. Thus, the mastery of the Spanish language is enriched, which is precisely the objective of the Spanish course.

Supplementing Coursework

Another function of extracurricular activities is to supplement the required and elective courses of study. This function supplements the curriculum with experiences which are not possible in regular classroom settings. Thus, such activities as school

dances, student council, chess, publications, and sports add opportunities to the total learning experience as well as worthwhile leisure-time activities to the total learning process. These nonsubject-related activities add to and enrich even the most innovative programs of required and elective courses.

Integrating Knowledge

An important objective of the total learning process is the integration of knowledge. Extracurricular activities are said to be integrative in nature because they tie together many areas of knowledge and experience. They don't provide abstract and isolated pieces of learning, but rather synthesize many aspects of real-life situations. For example, the school committee commissioned to select a site for the prom must consider such factors as size of the establishment, distance from the school, reputation of the facility, language in the contract, decor, and cost to the student. In the same way, the purchase of a home involves many of the same human, artistic, legal, and economic factors. Through the student activities program, the student learns to deal with many important aspects of a problem.

Democratization

The extracurricular activities program is effective because it carries out in a specially vital way the objectives of present-day democratic life. Generally, American schools devote a part of the required curriculum to the study of the development, structure, and problems of American democracy. The actual living of a democratic life is seriously restricted within the confines of the formal classroom setting. A rich program of student activities can remove such barriers and provide for individual and group interaction in a natural environment.

The extracurricular activities program offers students an opportunity to participate in administration through the student council, teacher-advisory groups, and organized activities. The student council provides opportunities for administrative experience through planning, organizing, initiating, and controlling many aspects of school life. Through teacher-advisory groups an advisory unit is created—the source from which activities flow, and where, through guidance, proper relationships are established between and among the teacher and the students somewhat analogous to a family, team, or department in an organization. Through the clubs, athletics, and intramural sports that emanate from subject-matter disciplines, students develop teamwork and cooperation—ideals of competitiveness in a democratic society (Jones, 2011; Barbieri, 2009).

Conclusion

Extracurricular activities are an essential and vital part of education in America. They have become well integrated into daily life of the school. Social activities, athletics, and all the many leisure activities have become a part of the values and virtues not only of American education, but of democratic life. The extracurricular activities program

allows for a well-rounded, balanced and expansion of the curriculum by reinforcing learning, supplementing the required and elective curriculum, integrating knowledge, and carrying out the objectives of democratic life.

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