

Leisure and Learning

Ocio y Aprendizaje

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ABSTRACT: The increase in life expectancy during the twentieth century, the improved quality of life and access to paid retirement creates a growing need for retirement activities. This paper presents a leisure and learning workshop aimed at older people. The transition from worker to retiree is one of the most important changes taking place in late adulthood and in the course of life. The overall objective of the workshop is to promote positive attitudes and personal development activities for the use of free time, social interactions and continuous, active and participatory learning. The World Health Organization principles on "active aging" and the theoretical sources, such as Psychology of Leisure and free time and Positive Psychology, are the grounds for this workshop. Thus, interesting challenges arise because people must learn, among other things, to successfully and significantly occupy their new free time. In this sense, leisure and learning allow us to think alternatives to actively develop these environments at this stage of life.

Keywords: Leisure; Learning; Workshop.

Introduction

The transition from worker to retiree is one of the most important changes taking place in late adulthood. At the same time, it legally and conventionally - from a social, structural and chronological perspective - marks the entry into a new phase: aging.

Although this stage is a loss of social and labor roles, from a positive perspective it is seen as an opportunity for the elderly's personal and/or social development, and for their participation in different types of activities.

Thus, interesting challenges arise because people must learn, among other things, to successfully and significantly occupy their new free time. In this sense, leisure and learning allow us to think alternatives to occupy those spaces at this stage of life.

This paper presents a proposal for a leisure and learning workshop aimed at older people. First, the concepts that serve as the theoretical grounding are developed; and then the outline of the proposal held in Mar del Plata is introduced.

The overall objective of the workshop is to promote positive attitudes and activities for personal and individual development in the use of free time, which gives participants tools to go through this stage of life satisfactorily.

These attitudes include the identification of needs and desires; the possibility of changing erroneous ideas or thoughts to guide them towards a more positive profile and adjusted to reality; the recognition of skills and motivations; the search for information on different activities and interests; and finally, the facilitation of the redefinition of the training-recreational-formative opportunities after retirement.

The design of the workshop proposes a participatory dynamic in which contents and modes are permanently coordinated with the participants, keeping the original objectives in mind.

The workshop is structured in four stages or moments: map of interests; planning of an indicative program; class methodology; final evaluation. These stages are introduced in the development of this chapter.

Retirement and current paradigms

The word retirement comes from the Latin *iubilare*, which means to express joy or happiness, or from the Hebrew *Law of Moses*, which established that after the age of 49 (seven times seven) - the *yobel* - a party should be held to engage in reflection, meditation and return to the essence of life, but always with joy and gladness.

The fiftieth year was dedicated to enjoy with happiness what had been achieved in previous years. From these origins, arise the different meanings the word retirement has today.

We usually use the term retirement in two different ways: one refers to a transition process, incidentally, from working life to a life without a paid work; while the other refers to the period of life extending from paid work onwards. In any case, the stage of retirement opens up interesting challenges or the possibility of a new job for people who personally have to learn to adapt to their free time in a satisfying and meaningful way (Bueno Martinez, & Buz Delgado, 2006).

So far, the impact and meanings related to retirement offer a complex and contradictory picture (Pastor, Villar, Boada Lopez, Varea, & Zaplana, 2003).

For many people, retirement brings negative consequences, as they find themselves in a situation of dependence or economic deprivation, losing their sense of social identity. For others it means the beginning of a stage of social fulfillment (PAHO, 1995).

As in other major life transitions, we must offer people opportunities to adequately prepare to face these changes ahead, so that the chances of successful adaptation are maximized in this new vital stage.

In this regard, the World Health Organization (WHO) promotes the idea of "active aging"; a concept that aims at promoting policies to keep people active for as long as possible.

Active aging is the process of optimizing opportunities for physical, social and mental well-being throughout life, in order to extend healthy life expectancy, productivity and quality of life in old age.

Some research shows that older adults have a sense of personal development and lower vital purpose than those of other ages (Ryff & Singer, 2002). Seniors can also feel they may be less useful to others (Rossi, & Triunfo, 2004). In particular, this workshop aims to motivate seniors not only to be more active, but also to find environments where they can keep a sense of self-continuity, held in recognition.

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Taking into account that societies also configure, enable and encourage elements and spaces for the use and enjoyment of the different times and ways of life, the current paradigms of aging allow us to set aside the health-disease readings on the elderly as the only point for intervention in order to shift to other perspectives and activities where to support our ideas. In this sense, positive psychology enables us to question the wide range of false assumptions about this vital stage.

Several works in this direction have shown that older adults can be happy, have sufficient social support resources, experience their sexuality, feel high levels of well-being, be satisfied with their lives and have multiple personal strengths, among other positive aspects (Arias, & Iacub, 2013).

Leisure and free time

The Latin word *otium* -leisure- opposes *negotium* -occupation- composed of *nec* and *otium*, that means "no occupation". This opposition is justified because the term referred to *negotium*, an unwanted situation in which one was bound to manual labor, whatever that was, and, therefore, was not free for other sublime activities requiring time for leisure. In ancient times, this opposition was made between daily activities, and self-knowledge and worldly knowledge.

Cicero (trans., 2002) stated that, freed from the need to work -thanks to the slaves and servants-, the wise men used their time to the study of nature. Aristotle used the Greek term *scholázein* (*released*) to enunciate this situation, which is translated into the Latin word *vacare*, hence our "vacation". Both the Greek and the Latin word significantly have the dual meaning of "being free from" and "to be released", making a difference between no leisure and leisure.

The Greek word *otium* (leisure) is translated into Latin as *schole* (school). In turn, the Romans transcribed the word *schola*, where "school" comes from, to refer to the result of leisure linked to the world of ideas.

According to Aristotle, theoretical knowledge does not respond to any vital need but it is the foundation of philosophy, as a search and love for knowledge.

Leisure and free time, like retirement, are ambivalent concepts. On the one hand, they are desirable during the working life, and on the other, they represent feared situations before retirement. This duality is understood from a social discourse that values productivity linked to paid work over other forms of use of time.

The question then is what happens when retirement enables the use of that time. "I have free time and I do not know what to do with it", this assertion is constantly heard among friends, at the office, at meetings. It is important to learn how to use our free time, how to value it and distinguish what kind of paralysis or choices it triggers.

Leisure management becomes an important aspect of human life, whether it is due to retirement or the gradual reduction of job hours/week days. A relevant precedent in this research is Berne's (1964) studies. In the mid-60's, the University of Illinois begins to apply the fundamental concepts of psychology to the study of leisure. John Neulinger can be considered the father of the Psychology of Leisure, since in 1974 he published his well-known book *Psychology of Leisure* (Neulinger, 1974).

From the psychoanalysis, Winnicott (1972) raises the question in relation to leisure and free time. He states the existence of an intermediate zone located between subjective and objective experience, linked to playfulness in both the child and the adult. Inner reality and outer life contribute to such experiences.

The development of this potential space is the bases for the individual's ability to enjoy his/her free time in a creative way. Rediscovering this important childhood space is an opportunity offered to us in retirement since at this time there is a decline in the demands from the adult world such as work, the fulfillment of obligations, that is to say, the need to do things out of duty, not for pleasure. However, the rigidity of our mental structures can be an obstacle to rediscover this potential space (Winnicott, 1972).

The increase in life expectancy during the twentieth century and the improved quality of life and access to paid retirement creates a growing need for retirement activities. In this context, a set of proposals arise from different sources - state, social, educational - institutions engaged in activities for the elderly - trying to respond to a growing demand from retirees or people in retirement transition. In turn, the need arises for a deeper understanding of this human group, their characteristics, their expectations, their needs and their potential.

Intervention

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the workshop "Leisure and Learning" takes place in three stages. Next, we will describe the particular contents of one of the workshops as an example.

Stage 1: Representation of free time and leisure map of interests and aptitudes.

The initial questions of the course were:

- What ideas do you associate with free time and leisure?
- What ideas do you associate with learning?

These questions serve to inquire about the emotional and evaluative burden of both concepts, associated prejudices and images they invoke. After reconceptualizing these terms, identifying prejudices and negative ideas, seeking its roots and its positive sense, we try to understand and identify the interests and skills of the participants.

The premise of the workshop is to facilitate learning for the participants with meaningful topics and in order to do so we need time. Therefore, each course is unique in the topics dealt with and interests addressed. In this regard, here are a few questions that would help as a guideline:

- What do you like doing and learning?
- What things do you like reading?
- What things are easier to do for you?
- What programs do you like watching on TV?
- What do you consider yourself good at?
- If you could start a career degree, which one would you choose?
- What things do you like doing in your spare time?
- What things give you the most satisfaction?
- What do you expect from this workshop?
- What interests and knowledge are "unfinished business" for you?

Stage 2: Work program

As mentioned above, each program has a unique content, making it easier for students to repeat the same workshop whenever they want to. The program is flexible and broad in the sense that it can be changed during the course of the workshops. If there was a new triggering subject that had not been considered at the beginning in the map of interests, it would be included anyway.

The program deals with two central topics:

- Thoughts flexibility: leisure.

In this case, the person may value his/her time, in which the development of activities that combine problem solving, competition and recreation converge. Here we use dilemmas, lateral thinking problems, trivia, among others.

- The complexity in thinking: continuous learning.

The strategy is to familiarize the participants with some bibliography, films, and art materials to introduce them to scientific research and technological or artistic productions. Reflecting on these contents aims to make the thought of the elderly more complex. In each workshop, a subject to be work on is chosen.

Stage 3: Class methodology

We organize work in different times:

- Introduction of the topics by the teachers.
- Distribution of reading material and group work. At this stage, questions about lexical, conceptual doubts, authors, are answered.
- Exhibition of materials from the workshop participants.
- Final synthesis of the subject. Formulation of new questions to search at home.

Stage 4: Final evaluation

- What did we learn today?
- What questions do we get?

- What will we bring to the next meeting?

Next, we will develop a workshop from the first quarter of 2015, "Grand parenting and its dilemmas".

Initially, we propose some definitions and approaches to grand parenting. The materials distributed were psychological, sociological and anthropological texts about this condition. From the material read different opinions were stated on the function of grandparents in the family and society.

Participants shared their experiences and memories on their grandparents or grandchildren. When summing up, a chart that summed up the functions that characterized the grandparents in our culture and in the family was built. The questions that arose at this time referred to the forms of the grand parenting in other cultures and other historical periods. Internet and bibliographical sources were agreed upon.

Conclusions

The goals outlined in the workshop –which were to accompany people in their retirement stage, direct them towards the use of free time and the appreciation of leisure and the development of personal potential - were positively assessed.

Participants' demand and instructors' commitment to the task are relevant indicators of the workshop's success, which has been carried out for five years so far.

The flexibility of its design has enabled us to adapt its format on demand. As to the theoretical foundation, the axes of flexibility and complexity of thought in adulthood and old age give us as a result participants' interaction and their continuous, active and participatory learning.

In view of the above, the need arises to create spaces where the retirees have the opportunity to develop their potential in activities, which they find both recreational and educational. From our experience, we believe that the active participation of older adults in the design of these spaces is essential.

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