**HUMANISM & RECREATION, PHYSICAL EDUCATION, AND COACHING**

The purpose of this “Show and Tell” is to outline some of the key ideas of the philosophy of humanism, and to relate these ideas to the practice of recreation, physical education, and coaching as it pertains to leadership. In this assignment we cannot describe humanism in its entirety, but we will focus on those humanistic principles that relate most closely to our course. For more detailed descriptions of humanism the reader is referred to the “References” section at the end of this essay.

**BRIEF OVERVIEW**

Humanism is both an old and a new philosophy. Some of its main principles can be traced back to Socrates’ and Plato’s beliefs regarding education and the individual (Buhler & Allen, 1972). In very broad terms humanism is a philosophy that concerns itself with human values, and stresses an individual’s dignity, worth, and capacity for self-actualization. Its goal is “full and healthy human living” (Buhler & Allen, p. 1), and the growth of the “fully-functioning” person. (Rogers, 1961)

Three keys ideas of humanism will be described in this essay. These ideas are:

* Respect for each human being;
* Becoming the pursuit of potential;
* The importance of the helping relationship.

We shall now discuss each of these in turn.

**RESPECT FOR EACH HUMAN BEING**

In humanistic philosophy people are valued over things. It is believed that each and every person has a right to dignity and full value. No one has a right to use another person purely for instrumental purposes. Each person is unique and worthy of respect. To respect a person means to treat them as you would want to be treated if your roles were reversed. To respect someone also means that you have a genuine concern for their growth and development.

Every person’s right to dignity and respect has implications for leadership. High quality recreation, physical education, and coaching programs maintain and enhance the dignity of participants. A basic respect for everyone involved is the cornerstone of quality. In fact, treating people with respect is more important than any skill learned or any event outcome. High quality leaders are humanists in the sense that they respect people. In fact, they are “high quality” leaders precisely because they respect people.

Public recreation, education, and coaching in North America is founded upon the idea that every person deserves to grow and develop, and that recreation, education, and coaching (i.e., via sport) is an excellent medium to help people grow. For example, from a recreation perspective, humanistic principles help to inform the idea of “recreation for all”, and thus the creation of community centres and public recreation programs. Everyone deserves to experience the benefits of recreation, no matter what their social class, gender, physical abilities, or the colour of their skin. The benefits of recreation are not only for those who can afford it. In a democratic society it is essential that all constituents have access to a basic level of recreation opportunities because the quality of the entire society is dependent upon the collective health and happiness of its people.

**BECOMING THE PURSUIT OF POTENTIAL**

Human growth and development are important values for humanism. There is a strong emphasis on the progressive evolution of each person. One of the foundational beliefs of humanism is that people are meant to grow, that people want to grow, that people ought to grow. Just as an acorn is meant to grow into a healthy oak tree, each human being is meant to grow into a unique and happy person. Abraham Maslow asserts that each human being possesses “the ‘will to health’, the urge to grow, the pressure of self-actualization, the quest for one’s identity” (1968, p. 193).

Every person possesses a unique combination of talents, interests and potentials. You grow by exploring your interests, developing your talents, and by actualizing your potentials.

The term “becoming” is used to refer to the pursuit of one’s potentials. It is the process of becoming the unique, expressive, fulfilled individual that you can be; that you were meant to be.

While humanists believe in the importance of being in the here and now, they also believe in the importance of future goals that you set for yourself. These personal goals are an integral part of your process of becoming because they represent the exploration and actualization of your potentials. These goals can have a significant impact upon your behaviour and can motivate you throughout your life. When you are becoming, you are challenging yourself, striving, and taking control of your own development as a person.

Humanistic psychologist Gordon Allport contends that:

*… mature striving is linked to long-range goals. Thus, the process of becoming is largely a matter of organizing transitory impulses into a pattern of striving and interest in which the element of self-awareness plays a large part. (1955, p. 29)*

Allport is saying that advanced forms of personal development are connected to the formation and pursuit of long-range goals. He is also saying that the process of becoming is initiated by an understanding of what we really want in life, and then this is organized into a series of progressive challenges that are informed by a high degree of self-awareness and reflection.

Personal leisure and recreation can also be seen as a form of becoming. As leisure philosopher Cyril Barrett says: “Leisure … is nothing more or less than the fulfillment of human potential” (in Winnifrith & Barrett, 1969, p. 2). Much of what you do in your recreation is motivated by long-range goals. Your recreation often involves the exploration of your interest, development of your talents, and the actualizing of your potentials. Organized recreation programs can also utilize the idea of becoming if they incorporate the participants’ goals into their program planning (e.g. fitness programs, preparing for marathons, etc.), or if skill development leads to the participant’s creating their own goals (e.g. after ski lessons, a backpacking skills course, etc.).

The highest quality recreation, physical education, and coaching programs are those which help participants to explore their own interests and develop towards their potentials.

**THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HELPING RELATIONSHIP**

Humanism is not only concerned with the growth and development of the individual, it is also concerned with how we treat each other. It is concerned with the relationships between humans.

Carl Rogers describes the type of relationship that encourages people to grow. He uses the term “the helping relationship” to describe the type of attitude and communication that characterizes a human connection that involves one person who genuinely wants to help another person grow. Rogers says:

*If I can provide a certain type of relationship, the other person will discover within himself the capacity to use that relationship for growth, and change and personal development will occur (1961, p. 33).*

Providing this type of relationship helps to build trust, self-confidence, and an increased sense of responsibility on the part of the person being helped. There are three key characteristics in an effective helping relationship: **1.** Genuineness, **2.** Unconditional positive regard, and **3.** Empathy.

**Genuineness**

Being genuine means being authentic; being aware of your feelings and expressing them clearly, being yourself. It means being “transparent” so that people can see the connection between your words and your actions. When you are genuine you are real, and when you are real you can be trusted. With this sense of trust, people can then begin to also trust themselves. As Rogers says “It is only by providing the genuine reality which is in me, that the other person can successfully seek for the reality in him” (p. 33).

**Unconditional positive regard**

Unconditional positive regard means accepting a person as someone of inherent worth and dignity. It means giving them a basic level of respect simply because they are a human being. This doesn’t mean you have to accept all of their behaviours, but it does mean that you will always treat them as a human being. A key to this is separating a person from his behaviour – you may not approve of the behaviour, but you will always value for the person. This allows you helping relationship to have a basic level of consistency that is characterized by a strong element of emotional safety. It is in this style of relationship that people will feel that there is “permission” to grow.

**Empathy**

Empathy is the ability to see things from the other person’s perspective. It is also the willingness to seek to understand the other person – to see the situation as it appears to her. This doesn’t mean that you have to agree with her perspective, it just means that you have to be willing to make the effort to understand where she is coming from. When people feel that they have been understood, they are more likely to engage in a genuine dialogue and more open to new ideas and perspectives.

At its core, leisure is concerned with how we treat each other. Caring and helping are integral to the concepts of leisure and recreation. Leisure philosopher Charles Brightbill contends that:

*Leisure is the time for cultivating the art of human relations, and sound human relations rest solidly upon the concern of one individual for the well-being of the other (1966, p. 120).*

There are important implications for a humanistic approach to recreation, physical education, and coaching leadership. It can be seen that leadership is a form of “the helping relationship” in that the leader is there to help the participant learn and grow in some way. Generally speaking, leadership is most effective when it is characterized by genuineness, unconditional positive regard, and empathy. Within a helping relationship (which could be between the leader and one person or an entire group) there tends to be more “buy in” from the participants, more creativity, more acceptance of diversity, more positive risk-taking, more responsibility and respect among the group members, and a greater willingness to learn and grow.

**SUMMARY & WRAP-UP**

The philosophy of humanism has had an important impact upon the theory and practice of leisure and recreation, physical education, and coaching leadership. It has been a driving force in advocating access for every person. In fact, the popularity of humanism (in its modern form) directly influenced the creation of many of the recreation-community centres in British Columbia, and the push to make all those centres accessible to all.

High quality recreation, physical education, and coaching experiences and programs ensure that there is a high level of respect for everyone involved. These programs also encourage people to explore and pursue their unique potentials by engaging in skill development and playing a role in motivating participants to design long-term personal goals and progressive challenges for themselves, and thus to take a bigger role in directing their own development. And finally, high quality leadership is a form of the “helping relationship” which is characterized by a leader being genuine and transparent, having unconditional positive regard for the participants, and having empathy; that is, striving to see things from the participants’ perspective. The principles of humanism are alive and well in high quality recreation and leisure, physical education, and coaching.

**REFERENCES**

**NOTE:** These references are incomplete as they do not contain the publisher and location information as they were provided by Steve Musson from Langara College.

Allport, G.W. (1995) *Becoming : Basic Considerations for a Psychology of Personality*.

Barrett, C. (1989) “The Concept of Leisure : Idea and Ideal” in Winnifrith & Barrett, *The Philosophy of Leisure*.

Brightbill, C. (1966) *Educating for Leisure-Centered Living*.

Buhler, C. & Allen, M. (1972) *Introduction to Humanistic Psychology*.

Maslow, A. (1968) *Toward a Psychology of Being* (2nd edition).

Rogers, C. (1961) *On Becoming a Person*.

**STUDY QUESTIONS – TO BE COMPLETED ONLY BY THE STUDENTS NOT SUBMITTING THE BLOG ASSIGNMENT**

Describe a PE teacher, coach, or recreation leader that you’ve had who displayed humanism. Be sure to identify which humanism qualities he/she represented. Answers should be at least 10 sentences.

**BLOG ASSIGNMENT – TO BE COMPLETED ONLY BY THE STUDENTS WHO HAVE SIGNED UP FOR THIS SHOW AND TELL TOPIC**

**Now it is your turn to describe one related vignette to support the theory of ‘humanism’. Your task is to go out and interview a leader engaging in recreation, physical education, and/or coaching and determine whether that person was following the principles of humanism. Be sure to include ‘Personal Communication’ citations to integrate your interviewee’s answers into your submission. Also highlight those elements of humanism this leader displayed. Refer to the ‘Show & Tell Marking Rubric’ found on Blackboard for assignment specifics.**