Philosophy on Program Planning

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Through my roles as a college adviser and a graduate assistant, I gained ample experience in program planning. Although I have some experience in program planning, I learned that having a framework for program planning is essential as a student affairs professional. After reflecting on my program experiences and personal beliefs on educational programming, I am able to create a philosophy on program planning which will serve as a guide for future programming as a student affairs professional.

In my philosophy, I will provide my insight on the purpose of education, the nature of knowledge, my beliefs about the learner, and my role as a program planner. As a program planner, I consider myself taking a progressive and humanist approach as suggested by White and Brockett (as cited in Zinn, 1990). Throughout my philosophy, I will provide examples of my humanistic and progressive philosophies from my past and current programming roles. While this philosophy reflects my current thoughts on program planning, I believe that I will continue to learn and grow as a program planner, therefore, my philosophy may evolve over time or change depending on the particular program.

Purpose of Education

In order to have an effective framework on program planning, it is essential to define my purpose of education. Caffarella and Daffron (2013) mention five primary purposes of education and training programs in their book. The purposes of education that aligned with my philosophy on program planning are assisting students in responding to practical programs and issues of adult life as well as encouraging continuous growth and development of individuals (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). As a progressive and humanistic planner, I prefer to take a “problem-solving approach to learning” and “place emphasis on personal growth and self-direction in the learning
process” (as cited in Zinn, 1990, p. 46). I want to educate program participants by challenging them to think while guiding them through practical experiences.

During my time as a college adviser, I was responsible for planning financial aid and scholarship information programs. When planning the events, my goal was to educate students and their families on financial literacy before they received their financial aid packages. My hope was that once students received their financial award, they would be prepared to take action and navigate any financial challenges that may occur. In my current role as the graduate assistant for the Office of Student Leadership and Engagement (OSLE), I supervisor the two programming coordinator interns. As a team, we are responsible for planning small-scale campus programs for students. Although I am new to the position, I plan to enhance growth and development for my two student interns by challenging and supporting them through the program planning process.

**Nature of Knowledge**

I believe that participants come to a program with varying amounts of knowledge, whether it is a lot or a little, with hopes to learn more information. As a humanistic program planner, I believe that knowledge occurs through self-realization during a program. When hosting programs, it is important for students to learn through interactive activities in hopes that the knowledge will click and stick after they have completed the activity. By giving participants practical examples, they will walk away knowing how to perform a task or utilize a practical concept with confidence.

Resuming the example of financial aid nights that I hosted, the students and parents who attended the event had an idea about financial aid but wanted to gain a clearer understanding of college financial aid. The attendees were motivated and eager to learn more information about financial aid and scholarships during the program. During that financial aid night, not only did I
have speakers talk about scholarships and the application process, but I also had participants complete practice activities on what to do when they received their financial award. If the families had questions or challenges throughout the practice session, I would guide them through their issue rather than give them a direct solution. Once the students and participants actually witnessed and experienced what it would be like to receive their award, they were able to put the knowledge and skills they learned from the main program into practical use.

In addition to self-directed knowledge through activities, I also believe that knowledge is acquired through problem-solving as a group. As I move into my role as a student affairs professional, I plan to continue encouraging students to acquire knowledge through self-realization but I will also encourage students to consider alternative solutions and outcomes. I do believe in lecturing to educate students, but lecture should be minimal if possible. I want students to be engaged in the learning process whether that involves interactive activities or group discussion during an educational program.

During orientation week this year, OSLE had to plan educational programs on social justice and community engagement for the first-year students. Instead of lecturing the students for two hours, we organized the event to have a 30-minute lecture session, then have students break into small groups to role play different scenarios. After having students act out the different roles, we held discussions about the scenarios and challenged students to think of all possible outcomes from the scenario. I believe that the method we used during orientation is very effective when it comes to knowledge development. Students learn the materials in a brief session and apply the knowledge they learned, or knew from previous experiences, into the activity. If students do not understand the concept clearly, as a group they are able to assist each other to come to a solution or understanding.
Nature of the Learners

As a humanistic programmer, I agree with Boyle as he states that learners are “...capable of achieving her or his own unique potential” (Boyles, 1981, p. 26). As mentioned earlier, I believe that participants come to programs with some type of knowledge. It would be beneficial as a program planner to ensure that the program satisfies all participants while keeping each students’ individual needs in mind. By hosting programs that have participants engage in activities or experience practical examples, students will discover new knowledge at their own pace and in their own way. I understand that all students learn differently which is why it is important to plan programs that encourage growth and development.

Recently in my GA position, I had to assist with our Annual Day of Service event where the theme was Food Insecurity. We had a great number of students and staff members sign up to volunteer at various sites in the Piedmont Triad area. Once all sites were done volunteering, we hosted a lunch debrief discussion with students who were involved. The purpose of the discussion was to make a connection with the service projects to food insecurity issues happening in the world. During the discussion, I tried to identify each students’ unique previous volunteer experience while challenging all of them to think about the impact they made throughout the community. Each student shared how their individual work made a difference in the community and provided a concrete example from their experience earlier that day. As a planner, I understood that many students had experience volunteering, while for some this was their first time participating in community service. I believed that each student had learned the concept of the event, yet, learned in their own unique way.

Role of the Program Planner
As suggested by White and Brockett, I believe my role as a program advisor is to “serve as a facilitator of the learning process” (as cited in Zinn, 1990, p. 46). As a humanistic and progressive planner, I plan to facilitate knowledge and development among the participants as well as challenge students to utilize problem solving skills. Throughout my philosophy I mentioned hosting interactive activities or role play experiences. As the program planner, I do not participate in the activities, but rather observe students as they engage with in the activity. I step in only when the students need an intervention or to be challenged intellectually. If I observe students having trouble with the concept or going off path completely, I will guide them back on the path in the right direction. My role is to empower students during their learning process and be there for them at the end to congratulate them once they have achieved the necessary skill or knowledge from the program.

**Conclusion**

Education programs are an opportunity for students to learn more about a particular topic then put their knowledge to practical use. Moving forward as a student affairs professional, I plan to foster student development in educational programs by taking a progressive and humanistic approach. Although not every program is the same, I intend to use my best judgement as to whether I will be more progressive or humanistic as the program planner. I want to ensure students grow throughout the learning process and are challenged with problem-solving scenarios. Through these methods, I believe that students will gain the knowledge they need to make a difference in the world.
References

