

Adolescent Leisure Activities

While some studies have found that adolescents like to engage in active achievement leisure, this does not always apply to large percentages of the samples surveyed. For example, in one study only 49% of adolescent girls participated in organized sport and 64% in any form of regular exercise (Tiggeman, 2001). Passive activity was rated above sport in two studies (Gordon and Caltabiano, 1996; Passmore and French, 2001) and it has been found, generally, that girls are more likely than boys to prefer passive activities (James 2001, Passmore and French, 2001). Furthermore, girls spend significantly more time alone than boys, liking to engage in what has been described as “bedroom culture” (Zeijl et al., 2000), that is to spend a lot of their time alone or socializing with friends in their bedrooms. James (2001) found that their choice of private or public recreational space was related to ‘situational body image’, that is their perception of their body image to a particular audience in a particular place, need for security and the need to control their own space, as well as a tendency to believe that many active recreational spaces are dominated by boys and/or are unsafe after dark. Self-esteem is one factor that has been shown to have some connection to choice of leisure activity. Tiggeman (2001) found a positive relation between self-esteem and participation in sports. Deviant activity was found to be strong in strong amongst these with low self-esteem (Gordon and Caltabiano, 1996).

The impact of social leisure activities is strong, particularly among urban adolescents (Gordon and Caltabiano, 1996). For example, where adolescents would typically spend 1-7 hours per week in solitary activities like reading and watching television (for girls, primarily soap operas depicting idealized ways of living), they would engage in socializing for 5-20 hours per week (Tiggeman, 2001). These activities, including talking, visiting, going out, talking on the phone, and eating with friends, were grouped as gregarious activities and were nominated first by 32.4% of all adolescents (Passmore and French, 2001). Nevertheless, there have been suggestions that even though adolescents like to participate in social leisure there is a tendency to feel dissatisfaction with their leisure activities, particularly amongst urban adolescents (Gordon and Caltabiano, 1996).

Some of the most popular social activities are not necessarily healthy. For example, in a sample of 460 11-16 year olds in England, amusement arcades were preferred as a place to meet friends (Fisher, 2001). Amongst older adolescents with greater freedom to choose their social leisure activities, there was evidence of a preference for commercial venues, such as bars and clubs (Passmore and French, 2001). These places were considered popular for their “fun atmosphere”, and because there was nowhere else to go, even though the adolescents reported that they disliked spending too much money, the noise and smoke, and the “horrible people” that were often encountered in such places (Fisher, 2001).

Computers and Internet Use

A discussion of adolescent leisure activities cannot be complete without considering adolescents’ use of computers and the Internet. Hollingsworth and Eastman (1997) found that of 565 middle school students, 97% used their computers primarily for playing games, while only 80% of the sample used their computer for word processing or other related activities. In addition, Kirkman's (1993) study found that 60% of the students in the study used their home computers exclusively for games. Downes et al. (1995) also found that the

most common use of the home computer by young adolescents was playing games, although some of these games were educational in nature (in Lauman, 2000). This may be influenced by the fact that found that many parents, both male and female, play games on their computers (Downes et al., 1995). Although these were mostly card games and these adults may well use the computer for other purposes, it is important for children to observe parents using the home computer for productive purposes, perhaps those relating to work.

A study of Internet use (Borzekowski and Rickert, 2001), however, found that the technology was used primarily for gathering health information – 49% of 10th graders surveyed had used it to get health information – particularly about sexually transmitted diseases; diet, fitness, and exercise; and sexual behaviors...because they could get this information in a confidential and non-threatening way.

How does choice of leisure activity affect the kind of people they become?

Research has indicated several factors associated with adolescents' leisure activities that can potentially have influence on the kind of adults they become. For example, some compelling evidence has been presented in favour of structured activities (Yin et al., 1999). Their results indicated that a higher level of involvement in delinquency and antisocial behaviour was associated significantly with increased participation in unsupervised socialization with friends and less frequent participation in organized leisure and sport activities or activities at home involving highly structured activity (for example sport or music) linked to low levels of antisocial behaviour. Mahoney (2000) and Mahoney and Cairns (1997) showed that boys and girls with multiple adjustment problems who subsequently became involved in school extracurricular activities were significantly less likely to drop out of school as adolescents or become arrested for a criminal behavior as young adults. Time spent in amusement arcades correlated with behaviours like stealing, borrowing money, selling possessions, or using lunch money to play games in game parlours (Fisher, 2001). In terms of antisocial behavior, it may be better to be uninvolved than to participate in an unstructured activity, particularly if it features a high number of deviant youth (Mahoney and Stattin, 2000).

What factors could contribute to these differences? It could be that when the activity is structured, they have access to competent adults and peers, building onto existing skills and interests, and opportunities to feel competent and accepted (Tarrant et al., 2001). Certainly the question of supervision and monitoring was suggested as being an important contributory factor to risky leisure behaviour (Meschke and Silbereisen, 1998). Not only is the structuredness of the activities an important factor, but it is also necessary to take into account the amount of challenge and variety, since research suggests that a lack of optimal arousal (lack of challenge) may stimulate high risk behaviour (Philipp, 1993).

Parental and family involvement and peer pressure

Peer influence in leisure choice was most evident in relation to involvement in sport, clubs and hobbies (Gordon and Caltabianco, 1996). Zeijl et al. (2000) suggested that intensive participation in peer groups is more important than interaction with parents for adolescents to try out their various social roles. Certainly adolescents have been shown to have definite beliefs about the kinds of activities that would be chosen by peers in the "in" social group and

the “outgroup” (Tarrant et al., 2001). Studies have particularly emphasized the importance of social support from non-deviant peers (Mahoney and Stattin, 2000).

The family also has a role to play. Some evidence has been reported of a relationship between perceptions of family functioning and perceptions of leisure including selection and satisfaction, even though the adolescent students surveyed were at an age where they had begun to differentiate from their families and develop their own leisure interests, partners, and involvements (Hood, 1993). Zeijl et al. (2000) suggested the importance of compensatory school programmes that focus on effective use of leisure time for those children who do not have high levels of support from their parents or the opportunity to attend structured leisure activities.

Leisure activities in Asia generally and Thailand specifically

The little research that has been done in Asia suggests that adolescent leisure activities are similar for Asian and western students (Sivan, 2000). Probably one of the major differences is that, in Thailand for example, young children are treated permissively but respect for elders is taught, elders are honoured and are active in teaching children to be responsible adults with some traditional values and so the young people are encouraged to develop a sense of responsibility/duties/participation in making important family decisions.

(<http://www.mahidol.ac.th/Thailand/glance-thai/land.html#Family>)

It is not the purpose of this chapter to prove anything or to make any comparisons, but rather to give a descriptive account of one school environment in which the leisure activities are structured specifically to bring out good qualities in the pupils that include:

- appreciation of the five basic human values of Truth, Right Action, Peace, Love and Non-violence as essential to the development of character,
- understanding of the cultures, customs and religions of other people along with their own, in order to appreciate the brotherhood of man,
- decision-making skills, which help to facilitate development of moral learning,
- a sense of responsibility for the consequences of their actions and to act with regard for the rights, life and dignity of all persons,
- self-discipline and self-confidence necessary to promote the fulfillment of their potential – by enhancing their moral, physical, social and academic achievements,
- value skills needed for personal, family, community, national and world harmony,
- a caring attitude towards all forms of life and to value the need for preservation, conservation and general care of the environment.

The School Philosophy

The Sathya Sai school is a boarding school, which is why it makes a good example of a very structured leisure programme that is common to all students in the school. It is a Kindergarten-Grade 11 school situated in Lobpuri Province, about two hours by road from Bangkok and 10 minutes from the nearest town, Lamnarai. It has 280 students who are drawn from a wide catchment area, including Bangkok and rural areas. Consequently there

is a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds represented and, in keeping with the school's philosophy, a mixture of pupils from troubled and stable backgrounds.

The school's philosophy is based on that of the international Sathya Sai Education in Human Values (SSEHV) programme that operates successfully in more than 160 countries, and is supported by national education department policies in several countries. It is a secular programme that is concerned with putting back character development and values into education and developing all domains of the student's personality: cognitive, physical, mental, emotional and particularly spiritual. It is based on five human values that are universal and inter-dependent: Truth, Right Conduct, Peace, Love and Non-violence and is concerned with eliciting these values that are already inherent in all of us. The fundamental principle of SSEHV is that all teaching is based on love and that the teacher's example in living the values is the most critical component of values education.

The school's goals, which permeate all aspects of the curriculum and extra-curricular activities are:

1. to bring out human excellence at all levels: character, academic, and "being";
2. the all-round development of the child (the heart as well as the head and the hands);
3. to help children to know who they are;
4. to help children to realise their full potential; and
5. to develop attitudes of selfless service.

In accordance with the schools' philosophy a lot of the leisure time activities are concerned with developing team skills and learning to accept and support each other's similarities and differences, hence many of the structured activities have a group emphasis. On the other hand, the school's philosophy is also to teach the pupils to learn to be happy with their own company, so teachers often talk to them about the importance of spending time alone rather than always seeking out company.

The school itself is in a natural environment that is conducive to constructive and creative leisure-time activities. For the younger children there is some excellent, challenging climbing apparatus, and there are areas including a lake where the children can engage in free play. In this environment the children have learned to love and respect nature to the extent that they will not even pick any flowers or growing plants.

While there are about two hours per day of free-activity time, there is also a lot of structured activity going on during these and other periods. This includes sport, music and art programmes. There are two types of teachers in the school: the full-time Thai teachers who live in the school, are on duty every weekday before and after school and every second weekend and take the role of surrogate parents. These teachers are selected in a very careful process to ensure that they agree with the philosophies of the school and have love for the students as their first priority.

There are also groups of foreign teachers who come for ten-week blocks to study the SSEHV programme and to teach English in the school. This presents a unique situation for the school because these teachers mostly do not speak Thai and have therefore had to learn to communicate with the pupils more intuitively and from heart to heart than through language.

Both of these groups of teachers are involved actively in leading the structured activities and very often participating (but not dominating) in some unstructured activity such as rowing on the lake in a boat with students, playing informal games or helping with homework. There is

considerable focus on the culture of their country, so many of the leisure activities on offer are linked to Thai music, art and dance. The visiting teachers run Sunday Clubs for two hours on Sunday mornings, giving the pupils across the whole school opportunities to experience all sorts of activities from other cultures, for example ethnic dancing, calligraphy, languages, photography and yoga. The pupils also have opportunities to share quality time with their parents. Many parents and siblings visit on weekends and bring picnic lunches.

An interesting feature of the school system in Thailand is that all pupils and teachers are expected to belong to the Boy Scout and Girl Guide movement, and to participate in these activities one afternoon per week. There are occasions when special activities are set up to offer challenge and to give the students the chance to stretch their strength and courage to the limit. One example of this was an exercise in parachute jumping. After receiving training, many of the senior students and some of the teachers participated in a jump from a high tower.

In all of the structured leisure activities and informal leisure-time interactions, the teachers have been trained to be alert to opportunities to develop the children's characters in a way that is consistent with the school's philosophy. One very important aspect is that of giving selfless community service, with groups participating in an ongoing range of projects including gardening and caring for their own environment, to projects in the outside community. Also, this notion of service is carried over into the pastoral care, with the older students having quite a lot of responsibility for caring for the younger ones during leisure time. All of this is carefully planned to ensure that the pupils, particularly the older ones, learn to be caring and giving individuals. Another important component that permeates the total school programme is spiritual – as distinct from religious – education. Through songs, story-telling and a wide range of active and passive activities, the pupils are encouraged continually to develop

The Focus Group Interviews

Three in-depth focus group interviews were conducted, with a total of 10 students from Grades 8, 9 and 10. In the Grade 8 group there were three students, two girls and a boy, all aged 13, who had been at the school for 6, 7 and 8 years respectively. There were four Grade 9 students, all aged 14. The two girls had been pupils of the school for 8 and 10 years respectively and the two boys for 9 and 10 years respectively. The three Grade 10 students were all aged 16: two boys who had been at the school for ten years and two years respectively and a girl who had been there for 9 years. The interviews were conducted in Thai by an interpreter who translated the students' responses as they were made to the non-Thai speaking interviewer. Individual interviews were also conducted with three Grade 10 girls whose English was good enough to be interviewed directly by the researcher. Two of these had attended the school for one year, and the other one for eight years.

Results

Activities they choose to participate in

There was a clear preference for participating in organized sport during school time, with one of the Grade 8 students and all of the Grades 9 and 10 indicating this as a preference. Singing and/or playing a musical instrument were also popular choices with one grade 9 girl and all of the Grade 10 students. This probably reflects the strong emphasis in the school on musical development. There was not a lot of indication that they liked to engage in solitary activities – one Grade 9 girl said she likes to read a book and two of the Grade 10s said they like to do homework. In the younger group, two of the Grade 8s said they like to play with friends but did not have anything specific that they particularly like to play.

As far as playing computer games during leisure time at school was concerned, the pupils were divided. Two Grade 8s (one boy and one girl), two Grade 9s (also a boy and a girl) and one Grade 10 boy said they did. They did not have any particular favourites, liking any game that is “fun and amusing”. The Grade 9 pupils who do not play games at school said this is because they do not like to, while the others said they would like to but their schedules do not allow it. The three boys who do play games on the school computer said they would like to have access to shooting, fighting and football games, which they play at home but are not permitted at school. The Grade 9 boy also said that he likes to play games for self-improvement.

There is no Internet access at school because there are no telephone lines, but four of the pupils (one Grade 8 boy and three Grade 10 students – all girls) said they used the Internet at home. The main purposes were for chat room and email communication with local friends and they agreed that it is not considered particularly important for them but just something they use if they get lonely. Two of the Grade 10 students used it for sport and news.

In contrast, all of them except the two Grade 8 girls and two of the Grade 10 girls said that they play sport at home. The boys all play football (also their school sport) both with clubs and in self-organised games with friends, while the girls organize their own basketball or football (again their school sports) with friends. Only the Grade 8 boy participates in a sport that he doesn't play at school – his reason for this is that he wanted to learn a new sport at school so he chose something different.

Television viewing

The issue of television viewing is an interesting one because the students do not have access to television during their leisure time at school, although they do have the chance to watch videos on Sunday afternoons. When we first look at the amount of time they like to spend watching television at home (Table 1), it seems that perhaps the school's policy on television viewing has not had any impact as they mostly spend five hours or more per day. However, it can be seen that they have fairly healthy viewing habits, liking mostly to watch movies and sport and in the focus group interviews they agreed that they are in fact watching less than they did previously and they think their habits have changed and they have found other things to do with their leisure time because of the restrictions imposed at school – although the two Grade 10 girls who said they watch for long hours justified this as being a novelty because

they don't spend any time watching at school. Another changed habit reported by the Grade 10 students in the focus group was in their television viewing behaviour. Now they will not sit in front of the television continually but will take a break to do something else such as play music, and then go back to the television.

Grade 8		Grade 9		Grade 10	
Hours spent watching TV daily	Programmes watched	Time watching TV	Programmes watched	Time watching TV	Programmes watched
B: 5	Movies – any except romance	B: 7	Game shows, sport	G: 2	National Geographic
G: 2-4*	Game shows	G: 7	Cartoons, movies	G: 2	Movies
G: 5*	Drama	G: 7	Cartoons, movies	G: 15	Drama, movies
		B: 5	Anything	B: 5	Movies, sport
				B: 5	Cartoons, football
				G: 12	Cartoons, music

Table 1: Television viewing habits (B=boy, G=girl)

*Not every day

Other leisure activities at home

When we asked the students if there was anything they had carried over into their home leisure time from their leisure time at school, they all agreed that there were some things. For the Grade 8s it was listening to music (boy), making up games (girl) and reading books (girl). Two of the Grade 9s listed sport 'because it has become a good habit'. One girl said she reads a lot of books because once she starts she wants to continue until she has finished. The other boy said he spends more of his leisure time at home taking care of his younger brothers and sisters because this is something he has learned to do in his role as a senior student at the school. Three of the Grade 10s said they have carried over football and guitar-playing into their home leisure activities and another girl plays the piano which is one of her structured activities at school. Thus it seems that some of the leisure activities they do at school have some effect on what they do at home.

To give us some yardstick for comparison, we asked them what their friends who attend regular schools do in their leisure time. The Grade 8s said their friends go to movies and game parlours and play sport, which they do together, and go to the shopping mall, which they don't do. The Grade 9 group appeared to be very selective in their choice of friends out of school saying that they tend to stay with others in their same family or, in the case of two of them their close religious circles, therefore have similar activities. In the Grade 10 group, they indicated that they will go with their friends to game parlours or to get something to eat, but not to the shopping mall or the cinema because these are too crowded. Most of them said

their friends like to go to game parlours 'because they find the games fun and addictive'. The boys in all groups said that they tended also to go to game parlours so they could be together with their friends but that it was harmless fun and they were not hurting anyone. However, one Grade 9 boy said he does not want his friends to go because it is not good for them – he believes that something “happens inside”, so he tries to persuade them not to go. One of the Grade 9 girls and two Grade 10 girls said they go for the companionship of their friends, although the Grade 9 girl said she does not enjoy playing and just waits for her friends. Some of them said that they have exerted some influence on how their brothers and sisters – and in some cases parents too – spend their leisure time. In particular, they are more prepared to spend time with siblings, for example playing computer games, because of their responsibility to do this with the younger members of the school family. One boy (Grade 9) reported that when he first started going home from the school he would expect his mother to serve him, but now he spends his leisure time helping her with everything. One of the Grade 10 boys passed on his guitar-playing skills to his mother and one of the girls taught her family to do art, which they now do together. Another boy takes his mother shopping.

Choice of music

Students at Sathya Sai Schools are very deliberately and carefully exposed to a wide range of music. They are taught to be discriminating in their choices and, particularly, to understand the effects of different kinds of music on all levels of the physical, mental, and emotional bodies. As a result of this, they have reported some differences between themselves and their friends at home in their music tastes. The Grades 9 and 10, particularly, reported that they share some common tastes with their friends (for example, Britney Spears and some rock) but that some of their friends like heavy rock which they do not enjoy. In contrast to their friends, some of these students were showing a mature appreciation of a range of music including 'lifestyle and comfortable' and 'pop, dance and romantic' that they have come to recognize as beneficial to them but that their friends do not like.

Social interaction with friends

The students were asked about the importance of having social interaction with friends. In all three year groups all of the students said that this was extremely important for them, but they all agreed that they believed it is important to be discriminatory in their choice of friends and to choose good ones who will not influence them in bad ways. They all said they were happy with their social interactions both at school and at home, although they preferred the company of their school friends who had developed similar kinds of thinking as them about what is good and bad.

Time spent alone

Of all the students interviewed, only three said that they liked to be alone. One of these, a boy, likes to think and reflect while the girls, respectively, like to listen to music and read alone, and to sleep under a tree, write about things that worry her, and then destroy the writing. The others all said they preferred not to be alone because it is 'too boring' or 'too lonely'. It appears that perhaps because of the emphasis on community spirit and family atmosphere in the Sathya Sai programme, the majority of these adolescents have carried the preference to be engaging in group activities over into their home leisure time, although the

older ones do seem to be showing some signs of liking to be alone with themselves.

Problems for adolescents of their age

Some interesting comments were made about the students' perceptions of the biggest problems existing for adolescents of their age in their community. They nearly all mentioned drugs, alcohol, smoking and gambling, and in the older group sex and uncontrolled spending money. But they also identified some more subtle problems. One – mentioned by nearly all of them - was the lack of love and understanding they feel from their parents:

- *'They listen more to their friends than their parents about their work – need love from parents, family'* (Grade 8 girl)
- *'Parents don't have time for children, so they play with children who aren't good. They need parents to have a lot of time and to teach their children'* (Grade 8 girl).
- *'Parents should have a lot of time'* (Grade 8 boy).
- *'Parents should have a lot of time to teach/love students because at the moment most parents don't have time'* (Grade 9 boy).

In all the focus groups, the students indicated that they either choose their friends carefully from amongst those who do not engage in destructive behaviours or try to tell their friends not to participate in destructive behaviours:

- *'Many students don't obey their mother/teacher. I can tell them to be good/do good. They listen to me and then they stop because they believe their friends more than their parents'* (Grade 9 boy).
- *'They ask me to join [drugs and smoking] but I don't, I just say no. Sometimes I say I'm busy. But I go to 'healthy' entertainment with them'* (Grade 10 boy).

Another perceptive comment was on their peers' lack of self-confidence. The Grade 10 focus group, collectively, agreed that they try to warn their friends and the friends listen while they are there, but go on with the same behaviour when they are not there, because they are influenced by the bad environment. They also said that some friends lack the self-confidence to say no, especially if they are living in university or other school hostels where the peer pressure is great.

As far as their own parents are concerned, these students said they feel they receive enough time and attention. In most cases this was in the form of having meals together and talking about feelings and problems, and having their parents look after them and set rules and expectations. We asked about the influence of their teachers, in their role as surrogate parents, on their choice of leisure activities. The Grade 8 group did not think the teachers had a great deal of influence, but the Grade 9 group said they have been influenced to help each other and help themselves to use their spare time in a good way because the teachers always encourage them to spend their spare time serving others. The Grade 10 group said that their teachers have influenced them because all the time they find things to do and activities to offer to the students, including sport and music, and so this forms a habit that carries over into their leisure time.

Discussion

Even though there has been little research reported about Thai adolescents' leisure activities, the young people interviewed in this study indicated that their peers engage in very similar kinds of leisure activities as those reported in the more western-oriented research described above.

Considering the disadvantaged backgrounds of many of the pupils in the school, the leisure programme fits what Zeijl et al. (2000) described as a "compensatory programme", that is it provides leisure activities and opportunities that these students would not receive in their home environments. As can be seen from the above description, the leisure activities in the Sathya Sai School have been structured in such a way as to meet all of the requirements indicated by previous research as being important components of a leisure programme that will help prepare adolescents to be responsible and fulfilled adults. These components include a variety of types of leisure activities offered and encouraged, with a particular emphasis on what Passmore and French (2001) described as achievement leisure (sport, Boy Scout and Girl Guide activities, art, music, dance, informal outdoor activities and a range of hobbies introduced by the visiting teachers. The activities not only have structure but plenty of variety and also challenge, as in the example of the parachute jumping. Girls are equally encouraged to participate in active activities such as playing football and basketball, hence there is quite a high level of participation by the girls in these active activities that has not been evident in other research findings such as Caltabiano (1996), Passmore and French (2001) and Tiggeman (2001). There is a safe environment, which means that even the girls do not have to worry about safety issues, this being one of the things suggested by James (2001) that can prevent some adolescent girls engaging in activities outside the home. The peer group issues are addressed in several important ways – the peer group plays an important role for these adolescents but at the same time they are deliberately being taught how to discriminate between good and harmful activities and good and harmful people to associate with, and the results of the interviews have suggested that this is showing some benefits. All of the activities are designed with a focus of encouraging the participants to feel complete, accepted and to build their self-esteem, and the time put in by adults – particularly the teachers in the role of surrogate parents – plays an important role in developing these attitudes. They are monitored but not controlled by the participating adults, who know when to step in as leaders and when to step back and let them take their own leadership responsibilities.

The society from which many of the students come is rife with problems, including drugs, alcohol and a high level of AIDS. These adolescents still like to go with their friends for company to places like amusement arcades, but their comments suggest they choose places where they can be sure they are not doing anything harmful - and when their peers do engage in something harmful they have the powers of discrimination to say no and even to try to dissuade their friends. Consistent with the view of Gordon and Caltabiano (1996), it may be suggested that the very heavy emphasis on developing self-esteem and the ability to draw on their own inner strength for solutions to their problems that permeates all of the school's curricular and extra-curricular activities has contributed to this. The findings are also consistent with those of Mahoney and Stattin (2000) about the importance of social support from non-deviant peers – these students felt strongly the importance of being with peers who had been brought up in the same environment. It seems they are more able than their friends

to discriminate about their choice of friends – they still do some of the things all adolescents do and it is very important for them to have social interactions with their peers both at school and at home but, as they indicated, they are now tending to select their friends from those at school who have learned to like to do the same things as they do. Furthermore, they can withstand peer pressure and not get involved in something they do not regard as appropriate, and have the courage to tell their peers if they are doing the wrong thing. One of the things that this school environment does for these students is to provide the two things they deem as critically important for all adolescents – time and love. Teachers are expected to create an atmosphere of love that promotes the development of their self-confidence. It is also interesting to note that all of the students interviewed felt that they receive sufficient time and love from their parents – which may be a consequence of the training that parents receive from the school.

We might expect to find that as the result of the structured leisure programme in their school, these would become ‘good’ students who do not engage in any inappropriate leisure activities at home. However, we find that there are some activities in which they do still want to participate. Take for example television viewing. The fact that they are encouraged to do other things than watch television at school does not completely dispel the urge to watch long hours of television at home. Keeping them away from shooting and fighting games on the computer at school does not stop them from wanting to play them or from playing them at home. But when we look below the surface we can see that perhaps there is in fact some effect because they appear to have developed some sense of what is appropriate and what is not, as well as the self-confidence not to do that which is inappropriate, even if it means going against their peers. The reason for not watching television or playing shooting and fighting games at school is to give them a break from constant exposure to negative events, so they can be immersed in some positive stimuli, so perhaps in their comments we can see some elements that this kind of discriminatory thinking is beginning to develop in them. At least one student expressed an awareness that computer games can be used for the purpose of self-development.

The service aspect of the leisure programme at the Sathya Sai School appears to have had some impact on the students who were interviewed. Several of them reported that they have become more helpful at home, looking after siblings or helping a parent. This also led to positive effects on family togetherness – these students passed on skills they had learned in their leisure time at school to their families so they could do these things together.

One of the notable features of the school is that the younger children really know how to play – something which tends to be happening less in childhood these days with increasing pressures to perform well in academic activities. They are in a natural environment where they are free to explore, invent and imagine, and watching the younger children at play it is clear that they exercise their creativity fully in their play. There is evidence that creative play in childhood has important effects on balanced behaviour in adolescence (Golcher, 1978). In fact, Golcher suggested that some forms of adolescent deviant behavior appear to be channels for misappropriated playful and sociable impulses. Thus it appears that one of the positive benefits of the Sathya Sai School’s leisure philosophy is that the students learn freely for themselves how to channel this playfulness appropriately and effectively.

One thing that was evident from these interviews that the students did not particularly like

being alone. This might be a function of the importance placed in Thai society on family togetherness. Nevertheless, it does suggest the need to place some emphasis on learning to like being alone in leisure time.

Conclusion

This chapter has reported the comments made by a small group of Thai adolescents about their leisure activities. In particular, the interviews were conducted to gain some insight about how the philosophy of the school and particularly the structured leisure activities has influenced the students' choice of leisure activities. While we cannot make generalizations about the impact of the school's programme from such a small sample, it is interesting to note that there were some encouraging signs of healthy use of leisure time. It adds weight to the argument that philosophies of values education such as that of the Sathya Sai School can lay a worthwhile foundation for adolescents to utilize their time healthily and thus to develop into adults with good character.

To add further to this argument, it may be interesting, in conclusion, to consider some further anecdotal evidence from written comments by students of the Sathya Sai School of Zambia, in Africa, which follows the same philosophy of values education (Kanu, 2000). Many of the students wrote that they had often succumbed to peer pressure to smoke, drink and take drugs, and that they developed strength of character to resist this pressure.

“I stopped doing many of the bad things I was doing at home. Here at Sathya Sai School I have improved. I am in Grade Eight, still in school and enjoying the lessons, especially the SSEHV. Instead of laughing and mocking at me, my friends now admire me. Some are drunkards and they have nowhere to go.”
(Year 8 student)

“When I first came here, I thought it was a mistake to be at Sathya Sai School. I didn't have time to see friends I used to play with. They were bad company; they used to smoke and drink beer and due to them I became selfish and used to go home around 2300 hours. However, as the days passed, I started thinking about why these people at Sathya Sai School were there for us. At first I did not know about the five human values, so I was confused. One Monday I started learning about the human values and I started working hard.... My mother is happy because she can't believe that I have changed.” (Year 8 student)

“Before I came to this school I was a boy with a bad character. I used to do all sorts of bad things. I used to fight, steal money from my father, mother, brothers and sisters; cheat, insult, kill living things like plants, ants and frogs. I used to be greedy and I liked throwing stones at dogs. When I came to this school it became worse, so I started dodging school, and cheating my parents and teachers. After staying for about five years I realise that what I was doing was bad. After doing SSEHV lessons there has been a big change. I stopped cheating, stealing, fighting, killing living things and being greedy. These SSEHV lessons have taught me to love others, to be peaceful with people, to tell the truth, to have right conduct and to be non-violent. I have learnt to be kind, to have good manners, consideration and respect and to be helpful.” (Year 8 student)

“I found out that what I was doing was useless and everything was pointless in my life. I remember the nights I spent crying with regret and pain that I had wasted my life. I’ve always been glad that I came here I know my life has been changed in my devotion to helping others.” (Year 12 student)

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to acknowledge Teerapoj Lueleartham (Adam) for his able assistance as an interpreter during the focus group interviews.

Appendix: Questions asked during interviews

What are your favourite things to do in your spare time at school?

Do you play computer games at school? If so, why do you like computer games? Are there any games you would like to play at school that you cannot get here? Do you play these games at home? Why do you like them so much?

Do you use the Internet when you are at home? What kind of information do you look for on the Internet?

Do you use it to communicate with other people? (email or chat groups?) If so, why is this important for you?

Do you play any sport when you are at home? If so, what sport do you play? Is it with a club or do you organize your own? Why is this an important social activity for you?

How much time do you spend watching television when you are at home? What do you watch? Have your television-watching habits changed since you came to Sathya Sai School? Why do you think this is?

Are there any things you learned to do in your spare time at Sathya Sai School that you now also do at home? If so, why are these activities so important or special that you want to do them at home as well as at school?

What do your non-Sathya Sai school friends do in their spare time? Do you join them in their activities?

Have you had any influence on your brothers and sisters or friends from outside the school on how they spend their spare time?

Do you ever go to game parlours with your friends? What is your main reason for going (e.g. for companionship? because you find the games addictive?....) What do you think about your friends’ attitudes to game parlours – are they healthy attitudes?

When you are at home, do you like to spend time by yourself? If so, where do you go to be alone? What do you do when you are alone?

What do you think are the biggest problems for people of your age these days? What do you think they want or need to be able to help to fix these problems?

Have your teachers at Sathya Sai School had any influence on how you like to spend your spare time – at school? at home?

What things do your parents do with you when you are at home? Would you like your parents to do more things with you?

Do you and your outside friends like to listen to the same music? What do you like to listen to? Is there any music they like that you do not?

Is it important to you to have social interaction with your friends? Are you happy with the kind of interactions you have with your friends at school? at home?

References

- Astleitner, H. & Leutner, D. (2000). Designing Instructional Technology from an Emotional Perspective. *Journal of Research on Computing in Education*, 32 (4), 497-510.
- Borzekowski, D.& Rickert, V (2001). Adolescent cybersurfing for health information: A New Resource That Crosses Barriers. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 155 (7), 813-823.
- Chang, N. (2001). Is it developmentally inappropriate to have children work alone at the computer? *Information Technology in Childhood Education Annual*, 247-262.
- Cohen, V. (2001). Learning Styles and Technology in a Ninth-Grade High School Population. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 33 (4), 355-365.
- Dale, D., Corbin, C., & Dale, K. (2000). Restricting opportunities to be active during school time: Do children compensate by increasing physical activity levels after school?. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 71 (3), 240-254.
- Dyson, A. (2001). Donkey Kong in little bear country: A first grader's composing development in the media spotlight. *The Elementary School Journal*, 101(4), 417-435.
- Fisher, S. (1995). The amusement arcade as a social space for adolescents: An empirical study. *Journal of Adolescence*. 18, 71-86.
- Gareis, E. (2000). Intercultural friendship: Five case studies of German students in the USA. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 21(1), 67-102.
- Goldsmith, D. (2001). Communication, Humor, and Personality: Student's Attitudes to Learning Online. *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 5 (2), 108-114.
- Gray, D. & Palmer, J. (2001). Learning Styles and Web-Based Learning: The 4MAT Methodology. *WebNet Journal*, 3 (2), 43-55.
- Hinchcliff, J. (2000). The Globalisation of Education. In: Cross-Roads of the New Millennium. Proceedings of the Technological Education and National Development (TEND) Conference (2nd, April 8-10, 2000, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates).
- James, K. (2001). "I just gotta have my own space!": The bedroom as a leisure site for adolescent girls. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 33(1), 71-90.
- Kanu, G. (2000). Sathya Sai Education in Human Values – Its Impact, The Zambian Experience, The African Institute of Sathya Sai Education

Kraus, L., Reed, W. & Fitzgerald, G. (2001). The effects of learning style and hypermedia prior experience on behavioral disorders knowledge and time on task: a case-based hypermedia environment , *Computers in Human Behavior* 17 (1), 125-140.

Lauman, D. (2000). Student Home Computer Use: A Review of the Literature. *Journal of Research on Computing in Education*, 33 (2), 196-204.

Lewis, C. & Fabos, B. (2000). But will it work in the heartland? A response and illustration. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 43 (5), 462-469.

Mahoney, J. & Stattin, H. (2000). Leisure activities and adolescent antisocial behavior: The role of structure and social context. *Journal of Adolescence*, 23, 113-127

Maldonado, N. & Winick, M. (2001). Catching up with science education. *Childhood education*, 77(5), 333 -335

Passmore, A. & French, D. (2001). Development and administration of a measure to assess adolescents' participation in leisure activities. *Adolescence*, 36 (141), 67-74

Ross, J., Drysdale, M. & Schulz, R. (2001). Cognitive Learning Styles and Academic Performance in Two Postsecondary Computer Application Courses. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 33 (4), 400-412.

Selker, T. (2001). Affecting humanity. *Communications of the ACM*, 44(3), 45-46.

Sivan, A. (2000). Global influence and local uniqueness: the case of **adolescent leisure** in Hong Kong. *World-Leisure-Journal*.2000, 42: 4, 24-32;

Tarrant, M., North, A., Edridge, M., Kirk, L., Smith, E. & Turner, R. (2001) Social identity in adolescence *Journal of Adolescence*, 24, 597-609.

Tell, C. (1999/2000). Generation what? Connecting with today's youth. *Educational Leadership*, 57 (4) 8-13.

Tiggeman, M. (2001). The impact of adolescent girls' life concerns and leisure activities on body dissatisfaction, disordered eating, and self-esteem. *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 162(2), 133-142.

Wax, P. & Reynolds, N. (2000). Just a click away: Student internet surfing for recreational drug information. *Journal of Toxicology: Clinical Toxicology*, 38(5), 531

Wetzel, K. & Thormann, J. (2001). Reaching Students with Emotional Disabilities. *Learning & Leading with Technology*, 29 (2), 22-26.

Zeijl, E., te Poel, Y., du Bois-Reymond, M., Ravestloot, J. & Meulman, J. (2000). The role of parents and peers in the leisure activities of young adolescents. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 32(3), 281-301

Taplin, M. (2004). Factors associated with adolescents' leisure time that influence the kind of people they become: Case study of a situation in which leisure activities are designed as an extension of a total school programme aimed at the development of human excellence. In Margaret Robertson and Michael Williams (Eds.) *Young People, Leisure and Place: Cross-cultural perspectives*. Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Jobling, I & Cotterell, J. (1990). **Adolescent leisure**: sport and physical recreation. In Heaven, P & Callan, V. (Eds.) *Adolescence; An Australian Perspective* Sydney, NSW: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, pp.184- 197.

Gordon, W. & Caltabianco, M. (1996). Youth leisure experiences in rural and urban North Queensland. *Australian Leisure*, 7 2, 37-42

Scott, D. & Willits, F. (1998). Adolescent and adult leisure patterns: a reassessment. *Journal of Leisure Research* 30 3, 319-330.

Philipp, S. (1993). Research on adolescents and leisure activities. *Parks-and-Recreation-Arlington*.1993, 28: 3, 19-21, 23, 25, 161.

Hood, C. (1993). Family functioning and **adolescent leisure** patterns. *Dissertation-Abstracts-International.-A,-Humanities-and-Social-Sciences*. 53: 9, 3363-3364; Thesis, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1992, 244pp., available from University Microfilms, Inc..

Importance of play: [an ingredient of thai programme] TITLE: AUTHOR: Golcher,J.(1978) Play and the Adolescent. *YOUTH-IN-SOCIETY* 30, 8-10.

Gordon, W. & Caltabiano, M. (1996). Urban-rural differences in adolescent self-esteem, leisure boredom, and sensation-seeking as predictors of leisure-time usage and satisfaction. *Adolescence* 31 124, 883-901

Yin, Z., Katims, D. & Zapata, J. (1999). Participation in leisure activities and involvement in delinquency by Mexican American adolescents. *Hispanic-Journal-of-Behavioral-Sciences*, 21 2, 170-185.

(Meschke,-Laurie-L; Silbereisen,-Rainer-K

Meschke, L. & Silbereisen, R. (1998). The association of childhood play and adolescent-parent interactions with German **adolescent leisure** participation. *Journal-of-Adolescent-Research*, 13(4): 458-486.

Taplin, M. (2004). Factors associated with adolescents' leisure time that influence the kind of people they become: Case study of a situation in which leisure activities are designed as an extension of a total school programme aimed at the development of human excellence. In Margaret Robertson and Michael Williams (Eds.) *Young People, Leisure and Place: Cross-cultural perspectives*. Nova Science Publishers, Inc.