Combining the Old and the New to Help Adolescents: Individual Psychology and Adventure-Based Counseling

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Abstract:
Adventure-Based Counseling (ABC), and in particular low-element challenge courses (LECC), are group-oriented programs that help participants learn to share responsibility, develop cooperative problem-solving skills, and increase self-confidence and well-being. The outcomes are consistent with the tenets of Adler's Individual Psychology, such that an intentional combination of the two approaches offers a unique opportunity to help adolescents--especially delinquent youth—achieve positive therapeutic outcomes.

Article:
The use of outdoor activities as team-building techniques has become increasingly popular (Springett, 1987). Participants are typically removed from their normal social context and engage in a number of activities that often are not directly related to the group's primary purpose, with the aim of attaining new goals, both as individuals and as a group (Martin & Davids, 1995). Outdoor structured activities such as challenge courses are often utilized as interventions for youth coming from urban settings (Davis, Ray, & Sayles, 1995) and have come to be known as Adventure-Based Counseling, or ABC. ABC includes a combination of experiential learning, outdoor education, and group counseling strategies that can be adapted to a variety of settings (Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988). It incorporates behavioral, cognitive, and affective components in an integrated process of events intended to promote positive change (Fletcher & Smith, 1999: Priest & Gass, 1997: Schoel et al., 1988).

Participants in ABC programs experience psychological, sociological, educational, and physical benefits that can help improve their self-concept, self-confidence, and well-being (Ewert, 1989; Kelly & Baer, 1971: William & Chun, 1971). Although these benefits are uniformly desirable, ABC programs have proven especially useful with children and adolescents at risk for delinquent behaviors. For example, Lieberman and DeVos (1982) found that special- needs students with behavior and adjustment difficulties who participated in ABC activities in the school system improved their self-concept, decreased their anxiety, and showed an increase in positive attitudes toward school. Similarly, Sakofs and Schuurman (1991) found positive results in a one-year follow-up of a treatment program for adjudicated youth that integrated adventure-based counseling with a community-based component. Glass and Benshoff (2000) found that participation in a one-day, low-element, challenge course program (a type of ABC) caused an increase in level of group cohesion among adolescents between the ages of 11 and 14.

Schoel et al. (1988) suggested that ABC programs, specifically low-element challenge courses (LECCs), have as a primary goal improving individuals' self-concept through elements of trust building, goal setting, and problem solving. Further, these programs are designed to help groups as well as individuals identify faulty thinking and improve their ability to solve problems in a variety of situations. This focus on cooperation is similar to what Adler called social interest, a phenomenon that forms the foundation of healthy behavior (Sweeney, l999). By intentionally combining the tenets of Adler's Individual Psychology (IP) with the ABC approach, it may be possible to enhance the impact of such programs beyond what has been proposed in the literature to date. Further, given the success of Adlerian interventions with adolescent populations (e.g., Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 1963; Sweeney, 1998), it is possible that using IP with this population can help reduce the incidence of delinquent behaviors while teaching adolescents healthy skills for conflict resolution and cooperation.

In this article, LECC programs are described and the benefits of these programs are considered. Adler's IP is briefly described, including theoretical perspectives and interventions. A case study is presented to demonstrate the application of LECC and IP to help a disruptive adolescent become a cooperative member of his peer group. Implications for counselors are considered.

ABC AND LOW-ELEMENT CHALLENGE COURSE PROGRAMS

The evolution of Adventure-Based Counseling can be traced to the 1940s, when Kurt Hahn and Lawrence Holt developed a wilderness program incorporating helping interventions that later became known as Outward Bound (Harris, Mealy, Matthews, Lucas, & Moczygemba, 1993). As the program evolved, participants were required to overcome naturally occurring challenges while sharing responsibility and solving problems as a team, however, the focus remained on individual rather than group accomplishments (Harris et al., 1993), The Outward Bound model became the foundation for other ABC programs; however, the scope of activities in such programs varies widely and may last from a few days to several months (Harris et al., 1993).

Low-element challenge course programs, an outgrowth or subset of ABC, are typically shorter in duration, lasting only a few hours, While typical Outward Bound or ABC programs utilize high-element exercises or a series of rope-based activities that are constructed 25 or 35 feet above the ground (Steinfeld, 1997), LECC programs include activities that are constructed low to the ground, requiring less physical risk. A third difference is that LECC programs are conducted in groups and emphasize group cooperation to a greater extent than do high-element ABC programs. The goal of both ABC and LECC programs is to help individuals deal with their fears and push them outside of their physical and psychological comfort zones.

Elements of LECCs

Glass and Benshoff (2000) noted that several factors contribute to the success of LECC programs, notably the equipment, selection of appropriate interventions, and qualifications of the staff. In fact, LECC programs have been referred to as "the Swiss Army knife" of the adventure field, in that they present various challenge levels and address a number of program arid participant goals (Rogers, 2000, p. 77).

Most LECC programs are based on Project Adventure, a program developed in 1970 in Hamilton, Massachusetts, which was unique in that it adapted the principles of Outward Bound to high school education in the form of individual and group problem-solving activities (Wood & Gillis, 1979). The programs consist of a series of exercises, also known as elements. Various elements can focus on a number of issues, including leadership roles, cooperation, and trust, while all of the elements require the participants to work together to solve problems or challenges (Steinfeld, 1997). The choice of elements should be decided by desired outcomes, which may differ depending on the clientele (Harris et al., 1993).

Role or the Counselor in LECCs

LECC programs appeal to counselors, in part due to the ability they have to meet a wide variety of program and participant needs (Rogers, 2000). The LECC is usually conducted outdoors, based on the premise that nature provides a healing environment (Fletcher & Smith, 1999; Miles, 1987), thus providing both a break with the familiar and an element of risk and challenge (Priest, 1990). While counselors utilizing ABC implement traditional counseling skills (e.g., reflective listening, verbal and nonverbal communication, ethical behavior), skills in group process and dynamics are particularly important. For example, group leaders need to ensure common ground among participants, facilitate group balance, identify abuse potential, assess cognitive and physical abilities, and measure degrees of intensity towards the assigned task (Schoel et al., 1988). As in other group counseling settings, it is important for the group leader notice themes that emerge in a group. Members often have shared concerns and effective linking allows them to deal with these issues by talking to others who have similar worries (Corey, 2000). In addition, leaders must protect participants from counterproductive behavior towards each other and choose elements wisely according to stage and ability of the group. Finally, it is important that LECC leaders possess the ability to help participants transfer their experiences from the unique

elements of the outdoor setting back into their everyday lives. It is at this point that meaning is derived from the elements.

The relationship between the group leader and the participants is an important aspect of LECC programs. Leaders attempt to create an environment where the group members work together to solve their own issues, those relating to the challenges being faced, and those within the group structure. From an adventure-based perspective, behavioral, cognitive, and affective changes can be implemented, practiced, and processed during the session (Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997). LECC group leaders attempt to develop rapport between themselves and the group members, however, they feel the relationship the participants create among themselves is more important. LECC leaders create an environment of trust and respect, where participants are able to experience successes while dealing with emotions, including fear, joy, compassion, laughter, pain, and love (Rohnke, 1989).

In addition, a well-trained staff includes individuals competent in the challenges used, committed to the safety of participants, and able to define lessons appropriate to the specific needs of participants. Group leaders regulate the stresses encountered by program participants and must know when to terminate an exercise. A group leader in this instance initiates an activity by describing a task and then framing or staging the element for participants. After the task is completed, successfully or not, the counselor processes the events with the entire group. The purpose of this process is to allow the participants to discuss in detail what they have experienced and to relate the activities to their everyday lives.

Failure to employ counselors trained in LECC programs can result in a challenge program that provides fun for its clientele, but otherwise offers little or no therapeutic or educational value (Harris et al., 1993). Moreover, when all of the counselors adhere to a common basic model of interventions and goals, counseling outcomes will be more consistent and effective for all participants. One such model is found in Adler's Individual Psychology.

ADLER'S INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

Adler proposed a positive, holistic understanding of personality and viewed people as "worthwhile, socially motivated, and capable or creative, independent action" (Sweeney, 1998, p. 3). He considered all behavior to be purposive and saw people as choosing behaviors based on individual goals that reflected their private logic or life script. This life script developed during the first 6 to 8 years of life and remained unchallenged so long as individuals functioned well in their daily lives. Similar to other cognitive theorists, Adler (1963) believed that people were not influenced by facts, but instead by their interpretation of facts.

A basic premise of the Adlerian approach is that the client is an integral part of a social system. Adler defined social interest as the fundamental human motivation, noting that people have "a basic inclination toward being a part of the larger social whole, a striving to feel belongingness, a willingness to serve the greater good for the betterment of humankind" (Sweeney, 1998, p. 8). Social interest is a person's ability to interact in a cooperative way with others; social cooperation then leads to a healthy society (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999). IP is based on the notion that our happiness and successes as individuals are largely related to this social connectedness (Corey, 1991).

As children develop, they seek a place in society and have a basic need to feel worthwhile and accepted by others (Sweeney, 1999). When that need is thwarted, low self-esteem results and behaviors may become disruptive rather than cooperative. Sweeney (1998) explains the goals of children's misbehavior as resulting from a discouraged attitude toward life, self, and others. To help children learn cooperative behaviors that reflect high rather than low social interest, counselors need to respond appropriately based on assessment of the goal of the misbehavior and focus on providing encouragement rather than punishment. The outcome of the Adlerian counseling process is that children will feel that they belong, feel valued, and develop positive self-worth (Pryor & Tollerud, 1999).

Adlerians work to help clients recognize patterns in their lives, thereby making it possible for people to change previously damaging behavior. Further, Adlerians seek to reeducate clients so they can experience their role in society as an equal, both giving to and receiving from society (Corey, 1991).

CASE STUDY

The following case study is taken from the practice of one of the authors. It describes the use of IP in a LECC setting with A group of 14 adolescents who were part of one classroom. They were referred by their teacher as a result of sustained disruptive behavior and were described by the teacher as being angry with each other and worried about themselves. They were in a separate classroom from other students in the school due to their disruptive behavior, and the teachers wanted to do something that could help them work together more effectively. In LECC terms, the purpose was to increase cohesion and provide lessons for life. From an IP perspective, the goal was to help the group members gain a positive sense of social interest and cooperation.

Design of the LECC

The group participated in a low-element challenge course experience at an outdoor facility in a southeastern state. This program is based on the Project Adventure model and used elements that required the participation of all group members in order to successfully complete the challenges. Structured group exercises required participants to share responsibility and solve problems as a team. Through processing after each element, participants were encouraged to apply what they had learned to problems in their everyday lives.

Activities

Five of the activities used during the challenge course are described below. In each case, the criteria for success are also specified.

TP Shuffle. Participants stand shoulder to shoulder in a random order on a 2" x 4" board approximately 15 feet in length that is positioned 6 inches above the ground. The group leader then asks the group to line up in order of their birthdays or their height. To get in order the group mast follow these directions: a) no one in the group is allowed to touch the ground, doing so would cause the group to start over in their original order; b) the group members are allowed and encouraged to touch and hold onto one another; and, c) when in order they must notify the group leader. The challenge is completed when the group is correctly in order.

Shipwreck. The objective is to see how many participants can get on a platform at one time and hold their pose for at least 5 seconds. A small platform is placed on the ground, The participants must: a) have all of their feet off the ground to accomplish the task, but each person must have at least one foot on the platform; b) participants are not allowed to stand on each other's shoulders or lift people off the ground: and c) when the group begins to fall off, participants should let go of each other so they do not pull the group down on top of them.

The Spider's Web. The object is to move the entire group through the web without touching the web material and ringing the bells attached to the web. Four or five small bells are tied on the well so movement of the cords that make up the web (a touch) is transferred to the bells. A sounding of the bell indicates that the participant has touched the web. He or she must begin again. Only one person can pass through each web opening. The challenged is successfully completed when all members pass through the web safely.

King's Ring. The object is to remove and replace a tire that encircles a 10 foot vertical log as quickly and efficiently as possible without the sides of the tire hitting the log. The tire must be in the hands of participants while being passed up and down at all times. The group may not throw the tire at any time.

The Swinging Log. A log (approximately 15 feet in length) is suspended 6 inches above the ground by ropes, The log will swing freely as participants begin to stand on it. The entire group must stand on the log without using the ropes for support for 5 seconds.

Initial Stages of Group

Upon arrival at the low-element challenge course program, the adolescents appeared uninterested and wary about the activities that lay ahead of them. However, the outdoor setting helped to capture their attention. During the initial stages of the group, the group members were encouraged to interact, define their problems, and set limits and rules on the group interactions. During this time, the facilitator/counselor was engaged in observation and needs assessment.

One male in the group, who seemed to be a leader for the other group members, dampened the enthusiasm for the process and kept many of the group members silent and unwilling to participate in the challenges. As a consequence, the entire group spent some time before engaging in the low-element challenges just sitting and talking with one another. During this time, the counselor began to slowly shape the nature of the discussion by generating a focus on creating group goals and rules and allowing each member of the group an opportunity to participate in the goal-setting process. At first the members were reluctant to share ideas, but with some encouragement from the counselor, most members helped to determine the rules and goals that would shape the day's activities for the group.

The first rule the group agreed upon was that there would be no negative talk towards each other. This was decided so that the group members would not spend their time being critical towards each other. Instead, they felt it would be beneficial to spend their time being supportive and giving encouragement to group members. In addition, they agreed that they would spend time before beginning each challenge to discuss the activity and develop a plan to be successful at the activity. Finally, they created a rule that every member of the group would be given time to share their ideas before the group attempted to complete any of the challenges.

Coping with Acting Out Behaviors

Through the first 30 minutes of warm-up activities, it became apparent that the adolescent leader was acting out and causing a disturbance for the rest of the group, making it difficult for the counselor to help the other group members complete the activities successfully. The disruptive behavior by the one adolescent created a ripple effect among the other participants. The members of the group distanced themselves from discussing ideas and formulating solutions to the challenge, instead they opted to argue amongst themselves and become critical of one another. The counselor allowed this behavior to continue for several minutes before interrupting the group.

At this point, the counselor stopped the group and had each of them sit down in a circle so they could face each other. To help the group members focus on cooperation and social interest, the counselor asked, How well are we doing on this challenge?, and then stepped back from the conversation. The group discussed the issue with interventions from the group leader used only as a means of facilitating the conversation.

The group discussed how the behavior of a couple of people was keeping them from reaching the goals that they had decided upon as a group. Furthermore, the participants discussed the negative behavior, how it was a violation of the rules they had created for the group, and the effect it was having on their ability to succeed on the challenges. All members, including those who were causing the most disruption, were allowed to discuss their impressions of how well the group was working together. This process gave each member an equal opportunity to give his or her version of what is taking place and allowed other members to respond to what they are hearing, After discussing the rules they had created earlier and developing a new course of action for the current activity, the group returned to its attempt and successfully completed the challenge.

Group Process and Outcome

The participants were able to accomplish both individual and group goals. While learning to work effectively with each other, the group members were able to discuss and alleviate some of their anger towards one another. Through group discussions, the members gained a better understanding of their individual responsibilities, while realizing the potential of the group as a whole when the individual members worked as a group. In addition, the LECC program helped the participants begin to take some responsibility for the other members.

Rather than focusing on themselves only, the participants began to work together and showed concern for each other.

The combination of Adlerian Counseling and a LECC program was successful in this case scenario as evidenced by the cooperation displayed by the group for the remainder of the program. While there were additional issues that arose during the process, the counselor used those times as opportunities to once again engage the entire group in discussions about how the group was doing and what they could do differently to improve their situation. Eventually the group began to think about ways to help each other complete the challenges successfully and worked not only to please themselves, but in an effort not to let down the other group members. This process allowed the participants to take responsibility for their actions and the accomplishment of their goals, and made the successful completion of the activities more meaningful for them because the goals they were trying to reach were their own rather than those imposed by others.

This process adheres to the Adlerian premise that the client is an integral part of a social system. Adlerians focus on reeducating individuals within their social context, the LECC group, and thus reshaping society (Corey, 1991). Following Adlerian principles, the LECC leader helped to reeducate the group members so they could experience their role in the ABC community as an equal, both giving to and receiving from society (Corey, 1991). The LECC program, using Adlerian principles, helped the adolescents feel that they belonged to the group, thereby helping them develop a positive self-worth. Through participation in the activity, goal setting, and group processing, members of the group began to work together effectively. They were given an opportunity to see their damaging behavior and change accordingly for the betterment of the group.

Discussion
The process employed in the case described above adheres to the Adlerian premise that the client is an integral part of a social system. Adlerians focus on reeducating individuals within their social context—in this case the LECC group—and thus reshape society—in this case behavior in the classroom from which the students were originally referred (Sweeney, 1998). Following Adlerian principles, the LECC leader helped to reeducate the group members so they could experience their role in the community as an equal, both giving to and receiving from others (Corey, 1991).

The goal for the group leader was to allow the group members to police themselves and attempt to work out their own problems without interference from outside forces. The leader attempts to facilitate the discussion and keep group members on the task at hand, but to stay out of the way of the discussion as much as possible. The sense of belonging in low-element, challenge course programs is a step towards Adler's concept of social interest, causing the participants to create a cohesive group that makes each member feel as though they are an integral member of the process. Adler believed that persons who engage in delinquent or disruptive behavior will interpret punishment only as a sign that society is against them. A young person who is disruptive may view their contact with society as a sort of continuous warfare in which they are trying to gain victory. Adler believed that the key to changing disruptive behavior is to help the individual change his or her mistaken goals and redirect them towards a goal of social interest and cooperation. LECC leaders attempt to win participants for cooperation as well, realizing that the successful completion of all activities is determined by the amount of cooperation demonstrated among the participants.

Another important commonality between IP and LECC is the issue of encouragement. Encouragement is viewed by many Adlerians as being the single most effective tool in changing behavior (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1990). Similarly, leaders of a LECC use encouragement to strengthen relationships among group members by suggesting that they can be successful in the challenges as well as in life. The process focuses on success and skills rather than focusing on failure or lack of ability.

The combination of IP and LECC appears to be a natural alliance. Each technique is based upon an equal alliance between counselor and participant(s) and focuses on clients' strengths rather than weaknesses.

Furthermore, Adler's premise that the client is an integral part of a social system meshes well with the demand of group work involved in low-element challenge courses. In addition, the purposefulness of behavior is an important concept for each of these techniques and provides a powerful area for discussion The blending of the old and new between IP and LECC represents a progression of counseling, acknowledging new ways of dealing with counseling issues while incorporating the teachings or the innovators of the past. Together, these strategies have the potential to create positive change in adolescents, especially those identified as delinquent.

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