

Moral Reasoning and Adventure Based Programs: Any Affect?

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Background/Purpose

Situational factors are cited as reasons why university students may not act in an ethical or moral manner. Estimates of cheating ranged from 50 to 99 percent (Greene & Saxe, 1992; Tom & Borin, 1988; Walker, 2012). When the consequences of 'not doing well' were life altering, researchers found that students were more likely to change their responses (Anderson & Bogenschutz, 1993; May & Loyd, 1994). Numerous researchers have concluded that education can enhance the ethical and moral behavior of students. (Gibbons et al., 1995; Stoll & Beller, 1993). The nature of adventure based programs (ABP) seems well suited to positively influence moral and ethical reasoning due to the inclusion of reflection (processing) and discussion (debriefing). This study investigated the impact of a 14 week adventure based program on the moral reasoning of university students.

Method

Eighty-six undergraduate students with an average age of 20.34 (SD = 1.84) volunteered to participate in this study, which utilized Rest's (1979) Defining Issues Test (DIT). The DIT investigates how individuals arrive at making decisions, and formulates a "P" (Principled moral reasoning) score for each subject. The study was cleared by the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at the university prior to data collection.

Analysis/Results

The data analysis was a 2 (Group) by 2 (Time) ANOVA utilizing the GLM on PCSAS. The groups were found to be homogeneous in moral reasoning at the pretest (adventure based $\bar{x} = 36.07$; control $\bar{x} = 33.58$; $F = 0.05$). The control group did not improve in moral reasoning from pretest to posttest (posttest $\bar{x} = 34.13$, $F = 0.06$). The ABP group did not improve statistically from pretest to posttest (posttest $\bar{x} = 40.98$, $F = 2.75$). There was a statistically significant difference on the posttest scores of the ABP participants ($\bar{x} = 40.98$) in relation to the control group ($\bar{x} = 34.13$) ($F = 3.84$).

Conclusion

The results of this study demonstrated that the adventure based program participants were significantly different from the control group at posttest in regards to their score on principled moral reasoning. It is postulated that the adventure based program students; through front-loading, emphasis on reflection, critical thinking, problem solving, and adherence to the full value contract, did enhance their level of moral reasoning. Through the combined modeling of behavior and discussion, changes in behavior can occur. The nature of adventure based programs seems well suited to positively influence moral and ethical reasoning.

Sources:

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