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AN APPLICATION FOR REALITY THERAPY IN SECRETARIAL TRAINING

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A special secretarial training program at the College of Eastern Utah is incorporating courses in secretarial science with the strength and control principles of Reality Therapy. The program incorporates control theory techniques developed by Dr. William Glasser (Glasser, 1981), the skill development practices of Dr. Gary Applegate (Applegate, 1982), and a perception model described by Dr. Stephen Covey (Covey, 1982).

A traditional secretarial science curriculum prepares students with skills needed to succeed in information management careers. This secretarial curriculum is supported by Reality Therapy based training which helps participants build their skills in gaining a greater degree of inter-personal understanding and control in their life.

The process used to help students gain greater control in their life, provides trainees with a series of easily learned techniques which help them gain greater control. The trainees also participate in relationship building seminars, instruction in professional modeling, individual counseling, tutoring, remedial math and English studies, and the regular college degree oriented programs. Participation in this program does not insulate trainees from problems. Many of the problems they face are college related, i.e. registration errors, schedule changes, tests, and grades. For these students, school related difficulties are often coupled with intense personal and emotional stress. In this environment, the students, guided by the program coordinator, find many opportunities to practice choosing between alternatives and planning to efficiently meet needs.

NEED FOR THE SPECIAL TRAINING PROGRAM

Emotional and/or physical disabilities along with low levels of basic educational skills (ie, Reading, Mathematics, and English) were criteria in selecting those who would participate in State or Federally sponsored rehabilitation programs. Many of those entering training have a history of consistent failure. Prior to the implementation of this program, 70% of participants in rehabilitation programs achieved success. Even with the 70% success, most agency and college administrators felt that even more students could become completers if additional ways of providing emotional support and increasing trainee morale could be developed.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

In 1981 the Southeastern Utah Division of Vocational Rehabilitation spearheaded the development of a special training program for "hardcore unemployable" people who had been attracted to Southeastern Utah by the then booming coal industry but had not been able to gain employment. The

program was a success (Kraync, 1982) and provided the foundation for the development of special secretarial training activities.

The program for secretaries was designed to provide trainees who may normally not complete a regular training program with a 34 week intensified training experience. The program was supported by a series of classes which were coined as "Life Skills".

'LIFE SKILL' FEATURES

The Life Skills curriculum was initiated in August 1982. The basis for Life Skills activity is primarily the recognition of the fact that people have a basic need to succeed, and from a success identity can come the emotional strength to handle problems, deal with stress, and live more responsibly (Ford, 1975). Supporting this concept is a self-fulfilling prophecy model (Covey, 1982) which illustrates how perception determines experiences and attitudes which direct one's behavior.

The Life Skills program emphasizes that every action a person chooses is purposeful to meet one or more of eight personal needs. The eight needs used in the program are: Fun, Belonging, Self-Worth, Security, Freedom, Knowledge, Faith, and Health.

In an orientation program which follows the format of "Taking Effective Control Seminars" (Glasser, Note 1) students are taught about how they create mental pictures and then choose actions based on those pictures. They learn how their inefficient choices may meet one or more of their needs, diminish the importance of other needs and are an attempt to change their past or control their future, and an attempt to control the actions of others. The participants also learn that more efficient choices will also meet one or more of their needs, yet will stress self control, promote living in the present, and not diminish the importance of other needs (Applegate, Note 2).

LIFE SKILL ACTIVITIES

The Life Skills experience appears successful. Trainees comment on how well their newly learned skills help them make positive changes. They further comment that they have more control in their life and a more positive outlook. The most useful realization reported by many of the trainees is of the power they gain by efficiently meeting needs, and of the positive effect that has in reducing stress. To bring this about, each need area has been developed into study units which students use as they learn to make efficient choices. Fun was the first need developed.

Early in the implementation of the Life Skills program we realized that many of the trainees had forgotten or had never learned how to build efficient fun skills. We also felt that the fun need was one which could be taught while initial friendship-making was taking place. Fun for many of the new students was had at the expense of another person, by gossiping, overeating, through the use of drugs, or by the use of alcohol. Fun for most of them was something which came into their lives at irregular, fleeting intervals. Background information on the thoughts, feelings, and actions

associated with inefficient fun making was presented. The students were introduced to the ideas that it is all right to be a fun maker with adults, that laughter is truly the ultimate relief for stress, and that with training and practice one can become a promoter of fun.

Teaching efficient fun as a 'life skill' is accomplished through the use of a hierarchy of behaviors which progress from low risk forms of fun-making toward higher skill levels. The skill levels taught at the College of Eastern Utah are:

1. Learning and sharing trivia. Trainees are taught how to locate and use the abounding masses of luscious tidbits of information which may never make a difference in life other than to provide entertainment. Each student is required to maintain a trivia file and be able to share one new piece of trivia at a moment's notice.

2. Making music. Music can be made by either singing or by playing a musical instrument. Trainees are taught that even the worst of singers can sound better if they sing in a shower. Each trainee is presented with a personal shower song kit. A kit consists of a Zip Lock style plastic bag, a spring loaded clothes pin with a hole drilled in one of the non-holding ends, a piece of cord to be placed through the clothes pin's hole and hung over a shower head, and printed copies of lyrics. The students are instructed to use their song kit. During their morning shower, they are to place the lyric sheets in the plastic bag and seal the closure, clip it to the clothes pin and hang the cord over the shower head. Then during the course of their shower they are instructed to sing three different songs. Though musical instruments are not seriously considered in the program, trainees who refuse to sing in their showers are offered the use of kazoo's.

3. Learning magic. Each trainee is expected to learn and demonstrate one magic trick. Magic is used throughout the Life Skills course to illustrate major instructional points and as a release during tense moments.

4. Game playing. The trainees are taught the differences between playing games for the process of play and playing games solely to win. Quiet games such as jacks, 'UNO', board games, and 'Pig Pen' are used. Active games from The New Games Book (The New Games Book, 1976) and More New Games (Kretz, 1981) are relied on for the teaching of having fun with activities which do not stress the 'all importance' of winning.

5. Joke telling. At this level the trainee is required to locate good joke material. (Good material is that which can be used in mixed company without causing embarrassment to any listener.) Each trainee is expected to develop a delivery technique in order to make the jokes humorous, and, finally, be able to have fun in telling the joke rather than depending upon a listener's reaction.

6. Story Telling. Stories are told from the first day of the training program. As the trainees' skill in fun-making increases, they are expected to use creative story telling in the Life Skills program.

7. Being child-like with children. Since all of the trainees are single parents or have daily contact with children all are expected to use the material learned during their Life Skills course with children. Demonstra-

tions on being child-like are presented and workable plans or being child-like with children are discussed.

8. Being child-like with adults. At this level the trainees are exposed to the fact that it is possible to increase efficient fun if they are able to include others. The process of teaching this skill includes having the trainees remember what they once did for fun and then include some of those activities in their present fun making (see Applegate, Note 2).

The applications of fun-making along with efficient skill building activities in the other need areas are interfaced with other training activities. During the Life Skills course, the secretarial trainees learn office relationship skills. They are trained as members of a Quality Circle. They become certified as professional models, and they learn job seeking techniques. During each stage of their training, Reality Therapy principles of efficient doing and the building of a success identity help the trainees experience increasing levels of control.

RESULTS

As the trainees begin to take greater control for meeting their needs, they claim to discover ways of improving the quality of their living. Some stated they had gained more control of situations at home; others saw within themselves improvements in their ability to handle emotional upsets and stress; and others stated they were able to create more meaningful relationships.

The actual practicing of meeting needs efficiently is considered to be the greatest single strength in the Life Skills Program. This has been evidenced in the actions of those who completed their training. The previously stated success ratio of 70% completers has been increased to 84%. This increase is credited to the linking of the Life Skills Program with the regular secretarial training activities.

APPLICATIONS

The Life Skill Program at the College of Eastern Utah, with its focus on Reality Therapy applications of gaining control, provides a format which is proving to be very successful. Indications are that the better individuals become in efficiently building their skills, the more capable they are in facing personal difficulties. This more efficient behavior helps them reduce stress, enables greater group contributions, and increases personal and group productivity.

The Life Skills Program has also increased trainee retention in college programs. It provided the foundation for the students to solve their own problems, on their own, by taking effective control of their life. This and other Reality Therapy based programs could provide techniques for consideration by institutions attempting to reduce trainee drop-out (Wilder, 1983).

Since lasting change cannot be forced upon the trainees, it is essential for the Life Skills Program instructors to use the skill building process of demonstrating genuine caring, gathering specific information, and

modeling efficient behaviors to help each trainee create an improved life situation (Applegate, 1982). Efficiently meeting needs is one tool which has demonstrated productive improvement in strengthening human efficiency and effectiveness in secretarial training.

Reference Notes

1. Glasser, W. From material presented during the 1983 TEC Seminar in Salt Lake City, Utah, May 1983.
2. Applegate, G. From material presented during Reality Therapy Certification training in Salt Lake City, Utah, January 1983.

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