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WILDERNESS LEADERSHIP TRAINING: INFLUENCE ON JUDGMENT AND DECISION MAKING

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ECOEE is a semester field studies program of Western Illinois University's Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Administration, emphasizing adventure education, outdoor education, conservation, and professionalism. The Wilderness Education Association's, WEA, National Standard Program for leadership development is the first phase of the ECOEE program and consists of a four to five week wilderness expedition.

A critical component of the curriculum and subsequent WEA leadership certification, is the development of good, safe judgment and decision making skills (Cain, 1988; Drury & Bonney, 1990; Petzoldt, 1984). ECOEE provides the student with the setting to develop humane judgment and decision making (J/DM) abilities. This is introduced formally through the WEA curriculum and informally as the students live and work together, grappling with differences between people, assumptions, behaviors, expectations, disappointments, and getting acquainted with themselves. The curriculum stresses knowledge in the areas of safety, environmental awareness, technical skills, group and personal responsibilities, and expedition behavior. All of these, added to the experiences of life before ECOEE, become the foundation out of which J/DM are made and levels of moral development are determined.

ECOEE's educational format falls into the personal development arena, with a great deal of experiential activity and self-reflection. Kolberg (1984) indicates that social experiences are particularly good for development of moral thinking, particularly if situations permit the participants involved to take the view point of another or be placed

in positions of leadership in which one must think about the safety and concerns of fellow human beings. The structure of ECOEE requires that each student take the leadership role for the group, experience the consequences of her/his actions, and receive feedback from the group on her/his performance.

Rest (1986) maintains that "behaving morally" indicates a process that must be functioning in four areas. These four areas of growth and development in judgment and decision making closely parallel the educational goals and objectives of the ECOEE program:

1. The person must have been able to make some sort of interpretation of the particular situation in terms of what actions were possible, who (including oneself) would be affected by each course of action and how the interested parties would regard such effects on their welfare.
2. The person must have been able to make a judgment about which course of action was morally right (or fair or just or morally good), thus labeling one possible line of action as what a person ought (morally ought) to do in that situation.
3. The person must give priority to moral values above other personal values such that a decision is made to intend to do what is morally right.
4. The person must have sufficient perseverance, ego strength, and implementation skills to be able to follow through on his/her intention to behave morally, to withstand fatigue and flagging will, and to overcome obstacles. (Rest, 1990)

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Instruments

Rest's (1990) Defining Issue Test (DIT-P) was developed by James R. Rest, Ph.D. Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Minnesota. Test-retest reliability for the DIT-P scores are generally in the high .70s or .80s, and Cronbach's Alpha index of internal consistency is generally in the high .70s, (Rest, 1990). The DIT-P instrument was developed to help understand "why certain people believe certain courses of action are right when other people may believe they are wrong. The instrument gives a characterization of the reasoning process by which a person arrives at a judgment of what is the moral thing to do in a moral dilemma. Moral judgment (instrument) scores are characterizations of the conceptual tools used by a person to make a judgment" (Rest, 1990). Rest illustrates moral development by describing stages based on the concept of justice held by the individual and how they perceive cooperation is organized. "A stage score is a more general structure than any particular situation setting or action—it is a general way of understanding how cooperation should be organized" (Rest, 1986).

Procedures

A repeated measures design was used to examine changes in the level of moral decision making attributed to participation in the ECOEE field studies program. The treatment group consisted of 15 ECOEE participants during the 1991 school year. Their course followed the 18-point WEA wilderness leadership curriculum as outlined in the *Backcountry Classroom* (Drury & Bonney, 1990). The remainder of the semester consisted of interacting with professionals in the field, attending and critiquing interpretations of cultural and natural history, observing and participating in outdoor education with 5th and 6th graders, completing requirements for courses offered through the University at the Horn Field Campus, and learning how to live, work, and play together as a group.

Results

Analysis of the DIT-P was completed at the University of Minnesota. Comparisons

were made utilizing the norm groups set up from the extensive use of the DIT-P over time; t-tests were run between ECOEE and these norm groups (college students, graduate students, and philosophers/ seminarians. The ability to process moral dilemmas was within the normative range of the norm groups for pre-course, end of expedition, and end of semester. Post-test scores were significantly higher than two of the norm groups, with a .008 difference between ECOEE and college students and a .024 difference as compared to graduate students.

Discussion

The ability of students to identify moral issues increased dramatically during and after their participation in the ECOEE semester program. The researchers attribute this increase to the effects of shifts in the educational paradigm between the university and the ECOEE program: from little practical application to extensive practical application; from few immediate consequences to a more significant immediate consequences (including personal comfort levels). It is believed that the small group and wilderness settings of the ECOEE program lent immediacy and significant consequences to the ability of the students to identify issues accurately and efficiently in order to solve problems in the group process, to negotiate terrain, and to accommodate events in the environment (i.e., bears, inclement weather, others in the group, mode of travel and outdoor recreation activities—canoeing, rock-climbing, etc.). These factors, coupled with the immediacy and significance of consequences of misadventures arising from misjudgments in these settings, relationships, and endeavors, lent credence to the idea that a mere shift of educational settings and tasks will not result in such changes. Rather, such shifts would more likely occur in settings, endeavors, and relationships where student attempts at defining problems, developing solutions, and applying those solutions result in significant immediate consequences—"feedback" regarding the effectiveness of problem identification and solving attempts.

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