

Implementing Adventure Based Counseling in Schools: An Integrative Approach

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Abstract

School counselors are trained to implement counseling core curriculum lessons to address topics that can impact school climate. Adventure based counseling engages participants in team building activities that foster responsibility for behavior and has the potential to positively impact school climate. However, teachers have limited time to address academic curriculum, let alone allow time for counseling curriculum in the classroom. The authors present a cooperative approach to implementing adventure based counseling through physical education classes. This integrative approach simultaneously meets both academic and counseling curriculum standards.

Introduction

Adventure based counseling (ABC) is an innovative approach to group counseling where the group members actively participate in challenges that are designed to stimulate immediate feelings that are similar to those experienced in real life situations. The experiential group activity is then processed using a variety of questions designed to engage the participants in critical thinking about the immediate experience. A sample of more specific ABC processing questions is provided in Appendix A. The processing of the activity is also designed to assist the participants in transferring what they learned about their behavior and reactions to other relevant situations. During the processing of ABC challenges, facilitators effectively model appropriate behaviors to further solidify

the learning as well as provide effective feedback to assist group members in the development of those behaviors (Walsh & Aubry, 2007).

Adventure based counseling has been found to benefit the personal and social development of many diverse populations, including adolescents (Forgan & Jones, 2002). Some of the personal/social benefits experienced by participants include increased self-esteem, self-concept and self-confidence (Garst, Schneider, & Baker, 2001, Graham & Robinson, 2007; Larson, 2007), as well as enhanced problem solving abilities, group cohesion, and empathy (Brendtro & Strother, 2007). In addition, research indicates that when ABC is implemented, school-wide large scale benefits include group/school cohesion and improved social skills and self-efficacy for all students (Forgan & Jones, 2002; Glass & Benshoff, 2002; Marmarosh, Holtz, & Schottenbauer, 2005; Shirilla, Gass, & Anderson, 2009). The individual and group benefits of ABC challenges make it an ideal intervention technique in schools (Glass & Benshoff, 2002).

With the growing concerns in schools about bullying (Underwood & Kalafat, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2011), youth suicide rates (Fineran, 2012; Underwood & Kalafat, 2009), and school violence (Algozzien & McGee, 2011; Staff & Kreager, 2008), ABC seems to be an ideal intervention to address both the individual student's personal/social development and the overall school environment. However, with a finite amount of time in a school day, the personal/social well-being of students often takes a back seat to academic subjects (Au, 2007; Barnar & Brott, 2011; Brown & Clift, 2010; Foster, Young, & Hermann, 2005; Van Velsor, 2009; Vogler & Virtue, 2007).

This article presents an innovative way to impact both the school environment and the individual students' personal/social development. In this innovative approach, school counselors and physical education (PE) teachers collaborate to implement ABC in PE classes to meet both PE state academic standards and counseling core curriculum Student Standards in tandem. Through the collaborative efforts and combined professional expertise, ABC can be implemented school-wide to benefit all students.

Benefits of Adventure Based Counseling

Traditionally, ABC has been viewed as being an extreme adventure that takes place off campus and requires expensive equipment such as a ropes course (Glass & Benshoff, 2002). However, similar effects can be implemented through challenge activities that require inexpensive equipment that is readily available in PE programs on school campuses (Forgan & Jones, 2002; Glass & Shoffner, 2001). This suggests that adventure based ABC challenges may be successfully implemented in schools.

It is not the expensive equipment that brings about positive results, but rather the group experience itself that brings about change (Forgan & Jones, 2002). The challenge of requiring participants to work together to complete a specific task can be created in any low cost adventure based counseling activity. Examples of ABC activities are group juggle (Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997), moon ball (Ashby, Kottman, & DeGraaf, 2008), and upchuck (Ashby, Kottman, & DeGraaf, 2008). These sample activities are provided in Appendix B.

A key component of ABC is providing challenges that require member cooperation to complete a team based challenge (Forgan & Jones, 2002; Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997). These activities are designed to enhance the natural stages of group development because the amount of cooperation required to complete the challenges increases as group cohesion develops. As a result, students begin to learn to work cooperatively to accomplish the given task. In addition, the cooperative nature of the challenges also creates situations where students experience natural consequences. Consequences in ABC challenges come from other group members as well as from the experience of not completing the activity due to their performance. These required elements of ABC challenges foster student responsibility for their behaviors and their actions (Milner, Nisbet & Bacon, 1997).

Furthermore, adventure based counseling activities focus on each participant's strengths and how those strengths contribute to the overall success of the group. This approach teaches students to appreciate not only their own strengths but the strengths of others as well (Milner et al., 1997). The challenges presented in ABC activities create an environment where the group members are encouraged to work together as a team to reach shared goals. This element contributes to a sense of group cohesiveness and increases the collective self-esteem of the group members (Glass & Benshoff, 2002; Marmarosh et al., 2005).

Not only do adventure based counseling groups foster cooperation and responsibility in individual students, research also indicates that adventure based counseling challenges incorporated on a school-wide basis increase problem solving abilities, cooperation, responsible behavior, and empathy school-wide (Brendtro & Strother, 2007). In addition, research indicates when ABC is implemented school-wide, large-scale benefits such as cohesion, increased social skills, and self-efficacy are found for all students (Shirilla et al., 2009). Finally, large scale effects of ABC include increased self-concept and self-confidence (Garst et al., 2001; Graham & Robinson, 2007; Larson, 2007). All of these outcomes contribute to large scale, school-wide change (Brendtro & Strother, 2007; Garst et al., 2001; Graham & Robinson, 2007; Larson, 2007). The multiple positive outcomes attributed to adventure based counseling groups have implications for school counselors who are charged with addressing school environmental concerns as well as the individual student's personal/social development.

School Counselor's Role

According to the American School Counseling Association (ASCA) school counselors are to address the personal and social well-being of both the individual student as well as the collective student body (ASCA, 2012a). In addition, the school counselor's code of ethics states that school counselors are to encourage the maximum development of every student (ASCA, 2010). The maximum development of students is outlined in ASCA's school counseling core curriculum (ASCA, 2012b). There are three areas of student development defined in the counseling core curriculum: personal/social, career, and academic. There are 121 specific indicators that make up the Student Standards within the counseling core curriculum. Forty-three of these 121 indicators are part of the personal/social Student Standards. Examples of the personal/social indicators include

teaching students to apply conflict resolution skills, problem solving abilities, and responsible behavior (ASCA, 2012b). School counselors are to address these Student Standards in an innovative and developmentally appropriate ways (ASCA, 2012a).

School counselors engage in direct and indirect counseling services in order to implement the counseling core curriculum's Student Standards for all students (ASCA, 2012a). Adventure based school counseling activities are examples of direct services that can be implemented in small group settings, classroom settings, or school-wide to meet the personal/social needs of all students as well as the overall school climate. In fact, ASCA recommends that 80% of a school counselor's time be spent in direct and indirect services, such as ABC, in order to address the career, academic, and personal/social development of all students (ASCA, 2012a).

Finding the time to address the personal/social development of students during the school day is a challenge. Teachers are forced to narrow curriculum, which limits their ability to meet the sociocultural needs of their students. In fact, teachers do not feel they have enough time to cover even the basics of the tested content (Au, 2007; Barna & Brott, 2011; Brown & Clift, 2010; Foster et al., 2005; Van Velsor, 2009; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). With the finite amount of time in the school day, interventions that address mental health issues often take a back seat to academic learning. In a survey conducted by Foster et al. (2005), school counselors reported that addressing students' personal/social developmental needs rated from moderately to very important in their jobs. However, the frequency of performing these activities ranged from rarely to infrequently. Areas such as evaluating violence prevention, and substance abuse prevention programs were activities that were rarely performed. According to the same study, teaching students about personal safety, physical contact, and personal boundaries were also rarely addressed in schools. This is troublesome given the need for personal/social development.

The lack of time to address the personal/social development of students is problematic. There is a growing concern for not only the individual student's psychological well-being, but also overall school climate. Bullying incidents are on the rise (Underwood & Kalafat, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2011), youth suicide rates are climbing (Fineran, 2012; Underwood & Kalafat, 2009), incidents of depression in youth are increasing (Auger, 2005; Kaffenberger & Seligman, 2007) and school violence is on the rise (Algozzien & McGee, 2011; Staff & Kreager, 2008). There is a need to find a way to address these needs while not taking away from the academic learning of all students. Collaboration between school counselors and PE teachers to implement ABC is an innovative approach to addressing these concerns.

Collaboration Between School Counselors and Physical Education Teachers

Instead of interrupting academic instruction to address personal/social concerns, school counselors can integrate personal/social development into existing academic lessons. Collaboration between school personnel and school counselors is essential for the effective delivery of all counseling curriculum presented to students school-wide (ASCA, 2012a; Williams, 2004). In fact, ASCA recommends that school counselors use

co-teaching with other educators as a method of delivering the school counseling core curriculum (ASCA, 2012a).

Implementing ABC challenges in PE classes is one way school counselors can collaborate with teachers to address the personal/social development of all students. This innovative approach combines the unique training of professional PE teachers and school counselors, which results in a single lesson that benefits all students.

Furthermore, PE standards, as defined by various state educational agencies, are very similar to ASCA's school counseling core curriculum's Student Standards. For example, sample PE standards drawn from state educational agencies are requiring that students develop the skills necessary to work cooperatively and demonstrate socially acceptable conflict resolution skills (Bergeson, Davidson, & Domaradzski, 2008; Connecticut State Department of Education, 2006; Kansas State Department of Education, 2005; National Association for Sports and Physical Education, 2004; Nebraska Department of Education, 2006; Office of Public Instruction and Montana Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, 1999; Ohio Department of Education, 2009; Texas Department of Education). As a result of the crossover of academic and counseling standards, collaborative efforts of school counselors and PE teachers effectively meet both standards while also impacting the overall school climate.

Steps for Implementing ABC in PE Classes

School counselors and PE teachers need to spend some time planning integrated lessons. A sample form to guide the integration process is included in Appendix C. The form includes steps to manage the integration process such as making note of the time required for the activity, materials, counselor's role, teacher's role, procedures, process questions and so forth. The first step is for the school counselor to present the idea of adventure based counseling to the PE teacher. It is important to highlight the benefits associated with ABC, as well as the need for processing the group challenges. In addition, the school counselor and PE teacher should review academic standards and counseling core curriculum Student Standards to identify overlaps. This discussion about overlaps in standards may lead to natural places in the PE curriculum to interject or supplement current curriculum with ABC challenges.

After defining ABC, the teacher and school counselor will then need to work together to find activities that will effectively meet both sets of standards. This may include enhancing current PE activities or identifying appropriate ABC challenges. Many sources for ABC activities are readily available (Ashby, Kottman & DeGraaf, 2008; Portrie-Bethke, Hill, & Bethke, 2009; Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997). A few examples of these activities, group juggling, moon ball, and upchuck, are included in Appendix B. Both new challenges suggested by school counselors or current PE class activities that meet the criteria of requiring student cooperation to complete a challenge can be used. A consideration when selecting ABC challenges is the equipment required to complete the challenge. The PE teacher will know what equipment is available.

Furthermore, the school counselor and PE teacher will want to determine how many ABC challenges will be dedicated to meeting both curriculum standards. When

deciding how many activities to implement, it is important to consider the amount of time needed to complete each challenge as well as the time it takes to process each challenge. It should then be determined when during the academic year the selected ABC challenges will be implemented.

Once the general integration process has been discussed, the PE teacher's role and the school counselor's role should be discussed. It is suggested that the school counselor and PE teacher work together to present the challenges to the students. Part of presenting the challenges to students includes explaining guidelines that foster a supportive environment. Forgan and Jones (2002) listed some basic rules that will help to establish a positive community. These guidelines include:

- Students will work cooperatively to accomplish goals
- Give and receive honest feedback in a supportive manner
- Encourage each other and encourage yourself
- When something happens to upset you, talk about it and then let it go

PE teachers can encourage students to work together to complete the challenge and oversee general classroom management. Part of the conversation concerning PE teacher and school counselor roles should include clarifying the importance of the processing stage of ABC. It is important to allow time to process the activity and to foster the transfer of skills to other situations (Glass & Benshoff, 2002). During the processing phase, students reflect on their role and the role of others in the completion of the task. Students also process how these skills can relate to other areas of their lives. In fact it is important to ensure that the processing of these activities is led by a professional skilled in the facilitation of processing experiential activities. Ineffective processing can lead to the impact of the activities being lost on the participants (Glass & Benshoff, 2002). Examples of processing questions that can be utilized in all adventure based counseling challenges are provided in Appendix A. Processing questions are divided into four areas: (a) questions about the activity, (b) questions about the individual's role, (c) questions about the experiences of others, and (d) questions about planning.

Once activities are selected, the dates of implementation are determined, and roles are established, the lessons are ready to go. Once the unit is completed, the school counselor and PE teacher will evaluate the effectiveness of the unit in reaching the desired curriculum standards. If necessary, the school counselor and PE teacher will also determine necessary areas for improvement.

Limitations

While adventure based counseling seems to be an innovative and effective way to meet school counselor and PE teacher standards, barriers exist that could complicate the administration of this process. For example, successful collaboration and delivery of ABC activities requires cooperation from all parties. It cannot be guaranteed that PE teachers will be willing to collaborate with school counselors. Even when PE teachers are willing to assist, it cannot be guaranteed that they will contribute in a method that increases the effectiveness of the activities. School counselors will need to plan the activities carefully with the PE teachers to ensure that the appropriate results are reached.

Another limitation to the implementation of adventure based counseling is the amount of processing required in order to reach the desired effectiveness. While the activities require physical exertion during the challenge, the time spent processing the challenges requires a sacrifice of time that might be spent on other physical activities. The school counselor will want to discuss these limitations with the PE teacher and receive his/her support before attempting to implement these activities.

A final limitation is the availability of the school counselor to collaboratively implement integrated lessons. Presenting these lessons school-wide may entail collaboration in many classes. Multiple class lessons take time, a luxury for which many school counselors may have to advocate. It is suggested that school counselors consider having the collaborative lessons included in the schools Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) plans as one way school counselors are addressing school environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, collaboration between PE teachers and school counselors through the implementation of ABC is an efficient way to meet PE standards and school counseling core curriculum standards simultaneously. Collaboration between school counselors and PE teachers provides a unique opportunity in the school setting to address the personal/social development of students while positively effecting school climate.

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Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/VISTAS_Home.htm

Appendix A

General Adventure Based Counseling Processing Questions

- Questions About Activity
 - How did you feel about the activity?
 - What did you enjoy?
 - What were some things that your team did well?
 - What did you find difficult?
 - What would have made it easier?
- Questions About Individual's Role
 - How did you contribute to this activity?
 - How did you hinder this activity?
 - What role would you have wanted to play?
 - What can you do to change your role?
 - How can other group members help you change your role?
- Questions About Experiences of Others
 - What was it like to work with other group members during this activity?
 - How did you handle any negative feelings toward others?
- Questions About Planning
 - How did your group decide your strategy?
 - What was your role in the planning?

Appendix B

Sample Adventure Based Counseling Activities

Group Juggling (Nassar-McMillan & Cashwell, 1997).

Circle of participants tosses a ball across the circle to a teammate; sequence is continued until everyone has received the ball. The same pattern is repeated. See how long the group can keep this up without dropping.

Moon Ball (Ashby, Kottman, & DeGraaf, 2008).

Using volleyball-like techniques, the participants work together to keep the ball in the air. No participant can hit the ball two consecutive times. Each time a participant hits the ball in the air, the group can add to their count of hits. When/if the beach ball hits the ground, the count begins at one again.

Upchuck (Ashby, Kottman, & DeGraaf, 2008).

The object of this activity is to have each participant throw his or her ball in the air and make sure that all balls are caught. No participant can catch the same ball he or she threw. Have the group members stand in a circle. Allow participants to practice

throwing and catching their own ball for two or three tosses. After the group members have been able to practice, inform the participants that when they throw up their ball, they are not allowed to catch the same ball they threw. After everyone has caught a ball, count the number of balls that were not caught. The goal is to have all balls caught.

Appendix C

Planning Form: Integrating Adventure Based Counseling Into PE Classes

Time requirement (45 minutes, 2 class periods, etc.):

Materials and or technology needed (Balls, scooters, tape, etc.):

Set-up or preparation needed:

Academic topic / lesson:

State academic PE standard(s) addressed:

Counseling core curriculum standard(s), competency(ies), and indicators being addressed

(A1.1, A2.1):

Counselor's role:

PE teacher's role:

Counseling lesson / topic, if applicable (cooperation, team building, etc.):

Synopsis of how guidance and PE academic lesson are related and integrated:

Procedure (include teacher and counselor role in the lesson):

Process questions:

Follow up if needed:

Attach a copy of lesson, any handouts, power points, or additional materials: