

2010

Expanding the SEA Program: Course Conception, Rationale and a Plan for Implementation

Michelle Schulz

Minnesota State University - Mankato

Follow this and additional works at: <http://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds>

 Part of the [Disability and Equity in Education Commons](#), [Psychiatric and Mental Health Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Schulz, Michelle, "Expanding the SEA Program: Course Conception, Rationale and a Plan for Implementation" (2010). *All Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects*. Paper 495.

This Other Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects at Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Expanding the SEA Program

Course Conceptualization, Rationale and a Plan for Implementation

Michelle Schulz, LSW, Department of Social Work, Minnesota State University, Mankato

Abstract

The Student Educational Adventures (SEA) Program was created in 1995 to help motivate youth with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (E/BD) to view education as important as well as to assist with the graduation rate of students with E/BD. Using an experiential method of teaching, each of the four courses in the SEA Program are specifically designed to teach life-long skills, such as team building, decision making, service, leadership, conflict resolution, anger management, goal setting, and taking responsibility, to youth who typically struggle in those areas.

Due to the current financial state of SEA Program funders, the Goodhue County Education District seeks to develop a new nine week course to replace one of the most expensive existing courses. This new course must be consistent with the SEA Program's mission to improve the graduation rate of students receiving special education services for E/BD through experiential education in Goodhue County, Minnesota. This new course must also be fiscally sustainable over time, engage students in school, support mentoring relationships with school personnel, and provide opportunities for students to practice and learn pro-social skills. The purpose of this Capstone Project is to research potential experiential education options available for the SEA Program to implement that are both feasible and supported by the literature.

Literature Review

Issues Pertaining to Diverse Populations

Students with E/BD have the lowest graduation rate of all populations (US Department of Education, 2009). Indicators for predicting school dropout include:

- ❖ Failing grades and grade retention
- ❖ School disengagement
- ❖ Misbehavior
- ❖ Low attendance
- ❖ Little involvement in extra-curricular activities
- ❖ Negative interactions with peers and school staff
- ❖ Aggression

(Blafanz, Herzog & Maclver, 2007; Kemp, 2006; Rechsly & Christenson, 2006; Anderson, Kutash & Duchnowski, 2001; Nelson, Benner, Lane & Smith, 2004)

Retaining a student's engagement in school is an important factor in combating the dropout rate of youth with E/BD (Blafanz, Herzog & Maclver, 2007; Rechsly & Christenson, 2006). Youth who experience a stronger sense of school relatedness:

- ❖ Have an increased supply of inner resources
- ❖ Behave differently from those who do not
- ❖ Perceive themselves as more competent with higher levels of motivation
- ❖ Have more positive attitudes toward school, teachers, peers, and class work
- ❖ Are more likely to interact with adults in pro-social ways

(Kemp, 2006; Osterman, 2000; Blafanz, Herzog & Maclver, 2007)

Teacher and school personnel support is especially important in helping the student feel a sense of connectedness to the school environment (Osher & Hanley, 2001; Osterman, 2000).

Issues Pertaining to Rural Communities

Rural and small communities are potentially impacted with difficulty in implementing programs targeted toward improving the graduation rate of adolescents with E/BD (Osterman, 2000) due to limited:

- ❖ Funding
- ❖ Resources
- ❖ Transportation
- ❖ Funding
- ❖ Personnel

Experiential Education

Experiential education, when used in conjunction with outdoor education and traditional social work group therapy, is commonly referred to as adventure-based group therapy (Larson, 2007; Tucker, 2009). The key components of adventure based therapy groups include:

- ❖ Challenge by choice
- ❖ Interpersonal learning
- ❖ Social skills development
- ❖ Sequencing
- ❖ Concrete and immediate consequences
- ❖ Problem solving
- ❖ Utilizing a novel environment
- ❖ Physical safety
- ❖ Foster mentoring relationships

The use of activity in social work groups with children and adolescents is a well established and valued practice (Conley, Caldarella & Young, 2007; Tucker, 2009; Roaten & Schmidt, 2009; Muscott, 2000; Ward & Yoshino, 2007; Larson, 2007). Experiential education, or adventure-based group therapy, is an appropriate intervention for social workers to use with youth diagnosed with E/BD due to its adaptability to address the needs of individuals with differing abilities, while still maintaining the essential key components necessary for a successful intervention (Caulkins, 2010; Ward & Yoshino, 2007; Larson, 2007; Conley, Caldarella & Young, 2007; Tucker, 2009; Roaten & Schmidt, 2009; Muscott, 2000).

References

A complete reference list is available from the author upon request.

Findings

Archery Course

Description

Students learn a new skill while enhancing character development through practicing communication, cooperation, following rules, showing respect, setting/achieving goals, practicing self control, and fulfilling commitments.

Cost

\$5,000 Start-up Cost
\$1,500 Yearly Cost

Funding Sources

- ❖ National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP)
- ❖ Goodhue County Education District
- ❖ Goodhue County Social Services
- ❖ United Way

Partnering Organizations

- ❖ Youth OutReach
- ❖ National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP)
- ❖ Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- ❖ United Way
- ❖ Goodhue County Social Services
- ❖ Goodhue County Education District
- ❖ School Districts in Goodhue County

Location

Youth Outreach Building
Red Wing, Minnesota

Time Constraints

Course held for three hours once per week between the hours of 9:00am and 2:00pm

Duration

9 Weeks

Strengths

- ❖ Held during the school day
- ❖ SEA Program owns equipment
- ❖ Meeting space is readily available and located close to Goodhue County Education District office
- ❖ Low yearly cost
- ❖ Organization collaboration
- ❖ Introduce students to an extracurricular activity and a potentially life-long hobby

Limitations

- ❖ Start-up cost
- ❖ Can be seen as a dangerous activity
- ❖ May need to buy different equipment to involve students with limited mobility

Therapeutic Riding Course

Students participate in a volunteer role at an existing agency and have an opportunity to experience a sense of accomplishment, learn what it's like to give to others, and enhance leadership and responsibility through caring for other people and animals.

No Start-up Cost
\$1,500 Yearly Cost

- ❖ Goodhue County Education District
- ❖ Goodhue County Social Services
- ❖ United Way

- ❖ RideAbility
- ❖ United Way
- ❖ Goodhue County Social Services
- ❖ Goodhue County Education District
- ❖ School Districts in Goodhue County

RideAbility
Pine Island, Minnesota

Course held for three hours once per week after traditional school hours

9 Weeks

- ❖ Low yearly cost
- ❖ RideAbility would provide meeting space and all necessary equipment
- ❖ Organization collaboration
- ❖ Introduce students to volunteering, others of differing abilities, and a potentially life long hobby

- ❖ Dependent on another agency
- ❖ May not be able to accommodate students with differing abilities
- ❖ Students may be fearful of horses
- ❖ Course held outside of the school day or may have a limited volunteer opportunity if run during school hours
- ❖ Located 30 minutes away from the Goodhue County Education District office

Methodology

Phases

Design

Data Collection

Analysis

Reporting

Steps

1. State the goals and expectations
 2. Specify SEA Program mission and goals
 3. Select appropriate methods of data collection
1. Literature review of target populations
 2. Interview stakeholders
 3. Literature review of experiential education activities and adventure-based group therapy
 4. Research possible resources in Goodhue County
1. Determine feasibility of potential courses
1. Present information to SEA Program staff
 2. Develop poster
 3. Present poster at Capstone Forum

Discussion and Recommendation

While either the Therapeutic Riding Course or the Archery Course would provide the SEA Program with an appropriate intervention to target adolescents with E/BD in Goodhue County, it is recommended that the SEA Program facilitators and stakeholders move forward in implementing the Archery Course as the new spring course.

The recommendation to implement the Archery Course is due to:

- ❖ The course being held during the school day
- ❖ SEA Program ownership of equipment
- ❖ Meeting space being readily available and located close to Goodhue County Education District office
- ❖ Low yearly cost
- ❖ An available grant to fund half of the start-up cost for the course
- ❖ Collaboration with organizations that the Goodhue County Education District has not previously collaborated with
- ❖ Introducing students to an extracurricular activity and a potentially life-long hobby
- ❖ Students learn a new skill while enhancing character development through practicing communication, cooperation, following rules, showing respect, setting/achieving goals, practicing self control, and fulfilling commitments.

Next Steps

The next steps towards implementing the Archery Course include:

- ❖ Applying for the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) grant through the Minnesota DNR
- ❖ Buying archery equipment
- ❖ Design the course in order to determine time frames and a general plan for each session
- ❖ Develop a budget
- ❖ Set up a plan for evaluation
- ❖ Reserve meeting space for each session
- ❖ Select ten students from area high schools
- ❖ Measure student baseline data
- ❖ Implement program

Implications for Practice

Upon review of the literature, it is evident that more research needs to be done in the area of experiential education and its impact on students with emotional and behavioral disorders. While there is a great deal on information regarding ropes courses and camping, research must be expanded to identify the effectiveness of alternative programs that follow similar intervention framework even though the activities are significantly different.

Social workers must continue to look for interventions that engage the targeted population while assisting in positive change. Utilizing the experiential theoretical approach in the group context is a particularly effective intervention strategy with adolescents with emotional and behavioral disorders.

Acknowledgements

Practicum Agency: Goodhue County Education District

Field Instructor: Lori Nicolai, MSW, LGSW

Field Liaison: Robin Wingo, MSW, LISW

Academic Advisor: Nancy Fitzsimons, MSW, PhD

