

ABSTRACT

Evaluation of Life Effectiveness and Leadership Development of a Challenge Day Program for High School Students

Keywords: Leadership, Youth Development, High School, Evaluation, Life Effectiveness, Experiential Education, Adventure Education, and Challenge Day

Terry Nail

The purpose of this study was to determine to what extent Challenge Day and its follow up Challenger Program improved life effectiveness and developed leadership in high school students. Additionally, it examined the relationships between students' life effectiveness and leadership, and their ethnicity, gender, and grade in school. A secondary goal of this study was to provide Challenge Day program staff, program beneficiaries, and program sponsors with information on the outcomes of their program activities regarding noticing oppression and isolation, implementing safe and effective intervention tools, making contributions, and demonstrating acts of integrity. Challenge Day has not had a formal evaluation of this program prior to this study.

This study was an outcome-based program evaluation with a pre-posttest design, which included the Life Effectiveness Questionnaire (LEQ), developed by James Neill (Neill, Marsh, & Richards, 2003), additional leadership items, program generated questions, and a content analysis of self-reflection logs completed by students participating in the follow up Challenger Program. There are eight domains of personal effectiveness that have been identified and included in the (LEQ-I). These are time management, social competence, achievement motivation, intellectual flexibility, task leadership, emotional control, active initiative, and self-confidence.

The participants were 72 teacher-identified students in grades 9-12 from six classrooms at Jefferson High School, Daly City, CA who participated in a 2 day, 12 hour Challenge Day and Challenger Program that included facilitated experiential activities focusing on breaking down the barriers of isolation, creating connections, and inspiring students to be positive leaders of change. Three of the classrooms participated in a follow up program documenting acts of change in logs for 12 weeks. All student program effects were evaluated using data from surveys administered by the teacher prior to the program intervention and then a post-survey three months after the intervention. Data from journals/logs were used to record daily acts of change during the Challenger Program follow-up activity for three class periods for three months.

The results of the study indicated that Challenge Day and its follow-up Challenger Program did improve life effectiveness as five of the eight LEQ factors: social competence, intellectual flexibility, task leadership, emotional control, and self-confidence (Pre-Posttest) were found to be statistically significant. Additionally, the results indicated that this program did develop leadership in high school students. This is shown through significance found in task leadership in the life effectiveness measure and

the leadership measure. When compared with average change in outdoor and adventure education programs (Neill, 2002), the effect sizes for leadership rated high. The effect sizes for self-confidence, social competence, and emotional control rated above average. The effect sizes for time management and task leadership rated average. The effect size findings for this two day program were even more extraordinary due to the fact that they are being compared with programs that range from two to fifty-six days with an average program length of three weeks.

This study found there was not a positive relationship between students' gender and grade in school and life effectiveness and leadership. However, youth who identified as Latino/a showed a significant positive relationship between post self-confidence and ethnicity (Latino vs. Other). Additionally, the results of the study indicated that Challenge Day and its follow-up Challenger Program increased skills in noticing oppression and isolation, practicing safe and effective intervention tools, and demonstrating acts of integrity. The study also found that there was a significant increase in participants standing up for themselves and for others.

The log data showed participants documented more acts of change out in the world than in school. There was also a decrease in the documentation of acts of change as the weeks after the intervention increase to 12 weeks. Additionally, the results indicated that this program led to participants making contributions. The top five ranked acts of change participants recorded in their logs were contributions, (helping others, helping peers, connected with peers, hugs, and community service). This was the first doctoral level research study of this nationally renowned program that showed significant effects of this experiential two-day program. This study provided empirical evidence that will help provide support for the organization (which has already served over 300,000 youth) in their goal of "serving one million youth" (Challenge Day, 2003a).