

World Changers Academy

Report of the results of the pre-test/post-test

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Purpose

The purpose of administering the pre-test/post-test was to determine the effectiveness of the Life Skills course.

Some Assumptions

1. We assume those participating in the Life Skills course learn skills, knowledge, and attitude. While all are important and integral to the course, we put the emphasis on attitude.
2. We assume that any meaningful learning that takes place causes a change in behavior.

Methodology

We have attempted to measure the degree in which learning takes place. We wished to determine what learning took place during the four-week Life Skills course.

A 30 item questionnaire was developed. This was the pretest as well as the posttest. The pretest and the posttest are identical tools.

The pretest was administered at the beginning of the course and then the same instrument, the posttest, is administered again. The two were then compared to see what changes the participants made. Changes were assumed to indicate learning.

Problems

There were various problems. First of all, the design of the pretest/posttest was flawed. At the beginning it was acknowledged that trying to measure attitudes would be difficult. After analyzing the results, some items were useless in measuring learning or change. Trying to determine a person's mindset with a few lines is not an easy task. In some cases it is doubtful if this approach could ever be successful.

The reliability of the questionnaire is in doubt. Sometimes participants would tick contradictory responses. It is assumed this was not done deliberately but rather was done without proper understanding or in a careless manner. The questionnaire developer tried to limit the number of questions so that "fatigue" would not set in. This is the phenomenon in which, during a long exercise, the participant becomes tired and this results in carelessness. For whatever reason, it remains that the reliability of the questionnaire is in doubt.

Another serious problem was that the questionnaire was not administered properly. Ideally, the questionnaire should be given before the participant knows anything at all about World Changers Academy and what we do. This is often not the case. If a participant learns anything at all about what we do, then his/her mindset is contaminated. Sometimes the pretest was given after an introduction or even after the first day of class. In one case known to this writer, a pretest was administered during the end of the third week to a participant due to losing the original.

It should be noted that citing these problems is not being done to point the finger at anyone. The area coordinators were not properly trained in what was expected of them.

Any misunderstanding on their part was not their fault. In no way is the exposure of the problems an attempt to find a scapegoat. The designers were aware of the problems at the outset and tried to minimize them with only limited success.

Despite the problems, it is assumed that some valid results were obtained from the pretest/posttest. These are numerated below.

Background

The evaluations of the Life Skills courses have shown that the vast majority of the participants understand what we are doing. In a few cases there is a lack of total understanding on a few topics. However, most say they have no problems in understanding what we are doing.

From casual observation, it seems that most of the participants are ready for what we teach. Most topics are relevant and the participants are ready to receive our message. One could argue that many are eager to receive our message.

Most of the evaluations show highly positive attitudes towards what we do. Many have indicated the four-week course is too short and indicate a desire for it to be much longer.

Most say the course has impacted them in a positive or good way. Many indicate that their attitudes have changed. Some say their awareness is increased while others say some of their behavior has changed. Seldom are details given as to exactly what the changes are. Many indicate that changes come in the area of vision and goal setting, worldview, healing of the past, relationships, conflict management, and dealing with anger.

Results

Similar results

In most cases, the results of the pretest and the results of the posttest were very similar. In other words, the participant marked the same response on both the pretest as well as the posttest. While this might indicate that we are teaching what is already known, it could indicate that while the initial attitude is the same, the course reinforced a vaguely held position. Moreover, while the initial response is the same, the participant could have gained much greater insight that would prove invaluable when under great stress. Let's give an example. Item number 19 says:

Which of the following is most true?

- A. having sexual relations with several people at the same time is okay as long as no one gets hurt.
- B. As long as a person tries to protect him/herself from sexually transmitted diseases then it doesn't matter what s/he does sexually.
- C. A person should be faithful to one person and not have sex with several people at the same time.
- D. I don't know.

Most of the participants tick "C" both on the pretest and the posttest. Therefore, it is assumed that most coming into the course think that a person should be faithful to one person and not have sex with several people at the same time. While this person's position would not change, his/her position might become stronger. After learning about relationships, the person might have a fuller understanding why this position is a good

one. The person might feel more of an ownership of his/her position. This would determine behavior later under stress. In other words, rather than changing his or her position when under pressure, the person would uphold his/her position.

By reinforcing an attitude, one might be better able to articulate his/her position. This would give greater confidence in a positive position and less likelihood of change for the worse later on.

As pointed out earlier, measuring such an attitude is very difficult to do. Moreover, measuring an attitude strengthening or attitude ownership is not easy.

Changed results

While many items on the questionnaire indicated minimal if any change, there were some which did indicate change. These will be numerated below.

Money

One of the questions asked, "What is the minimum salary you would accept for a job? _____ per week" Many had a higher amount after the course than before the course. Almost none had a lower amount and some had the same amount. We do not know why the participants answered the question this way. However, by conjecture it could be due to an increased sense of self-esteem. When people are empowered, then self-esteem should be enhanced. As people are empowered, then confidence should be enhanced.

Leadership

The Life Skills course attempts to help participants become more effective leaders. We hold to the notion that all people exhibit some leadership capacity and function. One of the questions asked,

"Which one of the following is most true?

- A. Most people will never be leaders.
- B. A few people are born to be leaders while most people are simply born to follow.
- C. Most people can learn to be leaders.
- D. I will never be a leader."

More participants were likely to tick "C" after the course than before. It is assumed that a better awareness of one's leadership capability would enable the person to take more initiative at leading. This should especially be true of shy, submissive people.

Conflict Resolution

The Life Skills course attempts to help participants take responsibility for their behavior, their feelings, and their decisions. One of the questions asked,

"Which of the following is most true?

- A. When I get angry it is always for a good reason and people better watch out for my anger.
- B. When I get angry I just try to forget about it.
- C. When I get angry I try to understand why and work it out in a good way.
- D. I don't know."

After the course more participants were likely to answer "C" than before the course. This is confirmed in the participants' evaluations. A good number have indicated that they now have a better understanding and better skills in resolving conflict in their lives.

Another question asks,

Someone hurts you. What would you first consider doing?

- A. I would try to hurt the person at least as much as s/he hurt me.
- B. I would try to get away from the person who hurt me.
- C. I would try to reconcile with the person who hurt me.
- D. I would just try to forget the person as well as the hurt.

After the course, more ticked “C” than before the course.

Job Preparation Skills

From casual observation it is known that many participants come to the Life Skills course with the motivation of getting a job. Therefore, it is not surprising that there would be keen interest in learning job preparation skills. The questionnaire has two questions relating to job preparation skills. These questions are:

What do you think is the most important quality an employer looks for when hiring a new worker?

- A. experience
- B. education
- C. skills
- D. attitude
- E. other _____
- F. I don't know

and

Which item is the **least** important of the following when you go for a job interview?

- A. to dress appropriately
- B. to have a good attitude
- C. to be on time
- D. to be confident
- E. to sell yourself to the interviewer
- F. to have a good understanding of the job that you are interviewing for

We put a lot of emphases on attitude. Apparently some learn this as more are apt to respond “D” on the first question and fewer answer “B” on the second question after the course than before the course.

Responsibility

On the questionnaire we asked several questions that required the participant to show responsibility. Obviously, at WCA we want all citizens to take responsibility for their lives. Here is one of the questions.

Which of the following is most true for you?

- A. Bad things have happened to me and I come from a difficult situation so my future doesn't look good at all.
- B. Bad things have happened to me and I come from a difficult situation but my future looks bright.
- C. So far things have gone fairly well for me but I fear for my future.
- D. So far things have gone fairly well for me and my future looks bright.

Some of the participants said that bad things had happened to them before the course and then after the course said things so far had gone fairly well and vice versa. However, after the course, most either ticked “B” or “D.” In other words, after the course, the participants, as a whole, thought their future looked brighter than before taking the

course. This is probably due to all sorts of factors. However, it is assumed that among these factors is the realization that each person has to take responsibility for one's life.

Another question asked,

Which of the following is most true?

- A. Some people are healthy and some are not healthy and there is not much anyone can do about it.
- B. A person's health is his/her responsibility and cannot be blamed on other factors.
- C. I don't know.

Again, after the course, more ticked "B" than before the course.

Another questions asked,

Which of the following statements best describes the difference between successful people and non-successful people?

- A. Successful people use their time wisely.
- B. Successful people have better luck.
- C. Some people are born to be successful while others are born to be unsuccessful.
- D. Successful people live in a good environment while unsuccessful people live in a bad environment.
- E. I don't know.

At WCA we teach that successful is the responsibility of each person. We also teach wise time management and the importance of spending time on important, non-urgent tasks.

After the course, more ticked "A" than before the course.

Another question checked for responsibility but it is shared responsibility. The questions was,

Who is responsible for solving the crime problem in South Africa?

- A. the police
- B. all members of society
- C. the criminals
- D. I don't know

After the course, more ticked "B" than before the course. At WCA we put a heavy emphasis on having responsibility for one's community and giving to the community rather than merely taking from the community.

Vision/goal setting

We teach vision and goal setting during the first week of the course. Nevertheless, on the evaluation, many respond that the course has helped them formulate their vision and goals. Checking one's attitude concerning vision and goal setting is not easy to do by asking a multiple-choice question. Without having a fairly clear goal for one's life, the other topics will not likely impact the person's life with any significance. In other words, the person may hear the words but they are likely not to stick, at least for long.

Forgiveness

In "Healing of the Past" we teach that people need to forgive others as well as themselves. This topic is somewhat different from the others in that it touches people's emotions in a way that the other topics don't. Moreover, some have deep hurts that will take much time to heal. While some topics lean more toward knowledge while other

topics lean more toward skills. Hopefully all will impact the participant's attitude. "Healing of the Past" touches a person's emotions and in some cases this is rather strong.

At WCA we realize that we do not have to capacity to help some participants in the way they need help. Hopefully, we can be a resource to point the person in the right direction. Moreover, we try to encourage all to confront anything that would stand in a person's way to achieving his or her goals.

Relationships

At WCA we spend lots of time on relationships, especially romantic relationships. Most, but not all, of our participants are young adults and are not married, nor have they ever been married. Two questions were asked on the questionnaire concerning relationships. One has already been asked. It is,

Someone hurts you. What would you first consider doing?

- A. I would try to hurt the person at least as much as s/he hurt me.
- B. I would try to get away from the person who hurt me.
- C. I would try to reconcile with the person who hurt me.
- D. I would just try to forget the person as well as the hurt.

As already mentioned before, after the course, more ticked "C" than before the course.

Another question was,

Which of the following is most true?

- A. Having sexual relations with several people at the same time is okay as long as no one gets hurt.
- B. As long as a person tries to protect him/herself from sexually transmitted diseases then it doesn't matter what s/he does sexually.
- C. A person should be faithful to one person and not have sex with several people at the same time.
- D. I don't know.

Before the course, most ticked "C." After the course, even more ticked "C."

Reflection

It is difficult to ask a person's attitude concerning his/her ability to reflect on life with a multiple-choice question. We hope we have enabled participants to better reflect on the more important aspects of their lives. While this is not being done with the questionnaire, the evaluations have revealed that participants are reflecting and gaining new insights.

Areas of Help

There are a number of areas in which the Life Skills courses have made an impact. These are briefly listed.

1. Increase in voluntary activity – Participants are often eager to do good things and the Life Skills course gives them an outlet in which to be involved.
2. Confidence – Participants gain confidence in their ability to lead, find jobs, speak out and articulate their concerns, seek solutions, solve problems, and interact with others.
3. Self-esteem – By taking the Life Skills course participants increase their self-esteem.
4. Managing conflict – Participants find ways to see problems in a new light and seek solutions in a constructive ways.

5. Anger management – Participants learn insight in to their emotions, awareness of causes, and ways to cope with all sorts of anger.
6. Responsibility – By taking the Life Skills course participants now see themselves as responsibility for all aspects of their lives.
7. Purpose, vision, and goals – Participants are confronted with their lack of purpose, vision, and goals for their lives. By careful guidance, they formulate a more coherent purpose for their lives with a clearer vision and realistic goals.
8. Encouraging the positive – While many come to the Life Skills course with good intentions, the course gives structure to their yearnings in a way that makes them more concrete and viable.
9. Forgiveness – It is not uncommon for participants to forgive others for deeply held hurts. Less dramatic but also important are participants coming to a healthy understanding of their own shortcomings.
10. Relationships – Participants increase their understanding and awareness of the complexity of relationships. Moreover, skills are learned that enable them to better enjoy healthy relationships.
11. Leadership – Participants learn their latent leadership capacities and the skills to exploit this for building up their communities.
12. Job preparation skills – Many come to the Life Skills course motivated by the prospect of getting a job. They gain valuable skills and their attitude and confidence are enhanced by the course.
13. Awareness – The Life Skills course enables participants to better understand their world and their role in it.

Stagnation

The response of one question on the questionnaire was puzzling. The question was, Which of the following best expresses your feelings?

- A. It is very important to learn about the other cultures and countries in order to succeed in life.
- B. It is nice to know about other cultures and countries, but it doesn't help that much with finding success in life.
- C. I don't care about other people's culture.
- D. Culture is not important.
- E. I don't know.

The responses after the course did not change much. There may be several reasons for this. One might be that the question is poorly designed. Another reason may be that the emphases in the Life Skills course are on one's community. The community is usually interpreted in this context to mean a neighborhood that can be covered rather easily by walking. In other words, it does not include other countries or even all of South Africa.

The Life Skills course is limited to four weeks. The emphases are put on more immediate needs such as finding a job, romantic relationships, healing of the past which often includes one's own immediate family, job preparation skills, personal finances, dealing with anger, and the like. These issues are seen primarily as individual issues that need immediate attention. Some topics, such as worldview and African renaissance deal with more global issues and look at the broader picture. Nevertheless, much emphasis is

placed on improving one's own self and not so much on a person making a large splash in the world stage.

Topics such as global warming, politics at any level, class consciousness, macro-economic concerns, and the like are rarely, if ever, discussed or considered.

Other observations

From casual observation, there are several phenomena that are apparent. During the course the participants usually form a fairly strong bond. This can be easily observed on the last day, or graduation day. The usual custom is that the participants take the initiative and plan all the events for graduation themselves with only minimal input from the area coordinators. While many of the participants are well known to each other before the course, there are many cases in which the participants are total strangers.

The bonding that participants do is not explicitly planned for. This is usually just an extra benefit for all concerned. This does have some applications for WCA as we plan. The bonding can help in changing participants' worldview. This can be either positive or negative. Fortunately for us it is usually positive. In other words, if most participants hold a positive viewpoint, then others are inclined to adopt it also. Of course, this is only likely to occur if a participant sees other participants as worthy of emulation. This may have important implications with criminals. This would need further investigation.

Another unplanned-for outcome is the potential for using "cooperative learning" experiences for enhancing learning. In other words, participants can help each other in learning. This might be especially true with certain topics such as "healing of the past." Of course it could be for any topic. Participants give insight into the community that an outsider would not have. Participants can encourage each other by sharing common experiences. This would make participants feel less isolated. Participants can often help make a caring environment in which people are not afraid to voice their concerns. This safe environment allows for optimal learning and growth.

Another benefit that seems to be unplanned for is helping participants to better reflect on their lives. Often during the Life Skills course the participants are confronted with issues they have never faced before in a serious and systematic way. By having to do this daily and having good outcomes, the participants develop the habit of critically examining all aspects of their lives.

To a casual observer the Life Skills course might be mistaken for a religious meeting, at least at times. It is not uncommon for each session to begin with hymn singing and prayer. Graduation often has prayers and hymn singing. This, as far as is known, initiated by the participants themselves. While the vast majority of the participants would claim at least some familiarity with Christianity, some do not. In fact, some participants are confessionally not Christians. How this might affect non-Christians is not known.

The methods used involve low technology. Most often the only materials used are paper and pen. Most venues are community based and free. If not free, then only modest fees are required. This enables the Life Skills course to be self-perpetuating. In other words, area coordinators are chosen from those who are undergone the course previously. This enables the Life Skills course to operate with little outside input of resources.

While the purpose of Life Skills is to impact the participants, it must be noted that perhaps those who are impacted most are the area coordinators and speakers. In order to be an area coordinator one has to take initiative, be able to lead one's peers, make

decisions, solve problems, do public speaking, administer various mandates and functions at once, handle conflict, attend to emergencies, handle money, write reports, and various other functions that require fairly advanced skills and knowledge. The process of leading others could turn out to be our best product.

Evaluations

The evaluations done by participants at the end of the course have revealed some insight into their expectations. Many have expressed the need for the Life Skills course to be longer. Presently the course is four weeks long. It can be assumed that participants enjoy the course if they wish for it to be extended. While decisions to increase or decrease the time of the course will be ongoing from time to time, it should not be taken merely because some voice this concern. In fact, it could be argued that the expression of this sentiment is a good thing. Obviously we do not want participants asking for the course to be shortened. It could be argued that it is desirable for this sentiment to be expressed. As long as there is hunger then people will want more.

The nature of the Life Skills course is not to satisfy all desires for learning that a participant might have. Rather, it is to light a fire or to nudge people so that they can take responsibility for their own learning. In other words, we are happy to work ourselves out of a job.

Some complaints have been voiced concerning a lack of professionalism on the part of WCA staff. Especially upsetting are speakers who do not show up or who make little effort to be punctual. Poor planning is irritating and upsetting to many. The fact that people complain probably points to the fact that such mistakes are the exceptions rather than the rule. In other words, participants have expectations that WCA staff will act fully professionally and that speakers will be of such a quality that meaningful learning will take place.

Recommendations

While this assessment of the Life Skills course is focused on the short-term outcomes, it is more important to assess long-term changes. The Life Skills course is able to make the participants feel good about themselves and the learning they undertake. However, there is a concern that after the glow of the moment fades away, participants might revert back to bad habits and negative ways of thinking. More long-term assessment, while difficult to undertake, would be desirable.

There are probably blind spots that are being neglected. As mentioned before, we do not touch on various topics that some might consider important. We may be functioning in a way that some segments of the community find, at least to some extent, relevant. We may not be employing methods that would make our course more efficient with little effort on our part. Bringing in a knowledgeable outsider to assess the Life Skills course is recommended.

Some participants drop out during the course. While we are able to offer a relevant course that brings positive change to many, we may have a niche that some do not feel comfortable fitting in to. Language, social class, age, educational attainment, and a host of other factors might hinder some from fully participating. It might be wise to find out who those people are who are not benefiting from our Life Skills courses.

At WCA there is continual staff turnover. This is not a negative phenomenon but it does cause a threat to effective delivery in that new staff are constantly being brought in. It is highly recommended that staff development continue.

As mentioned earlier, both the design and the implementation of the pretest and posttest have problems. It is recommended that this be suspended for the time being. If it is resumed, it should only be under more strict conditions. In the short term, administering it now would only give us information that we already know.

Sometimes things evolve over time so that the purposes that were originally solid give way to newer and more relevant purposes for those involved. It is recommended that the purposes of the Life Skills course be revisited and examined. The functions and roles that the Life Skills course play should be monitored and examined. The inputs and outputs of the course should be monitored constantly. Feedback should be from all involved.

Summary

The Life Skills course is positively embraced by many. As mentioned above, it is self-perpetuating and executed with minimal resources. There are numerous benefits and these are mentioned above. Vigilant and constant assessment of the program is needed to ensure that it remains sustainable, relevant, and of the highest quality that our limited resources allow.