

A Program of Ministry to Improve Self Concept with Selected Students

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Roland Byrd, Campus Minister,
VPI & SU, Blacksburg, Va.

The following synopsis consists primarily of excerpt portions of the author's Doctor of Ministry research paper entitled, "A Program of Ministry To Improve Self Concept With Selected College Students," along with a summary of the present and projected use of the personal growth seminar in working with college students.

The formulation and expression of a good self-identity is basic to the planning and functioning of the student's total life. The self-esteem is reflected in one's trust abilities, sense of autonomy, personal initiative, and intrinsic values.

The self-esteem which contributes to a sense of identity is based on the rudiments of skills and social techniques which assure a gradual coincidence of play and skillful performance, of ego ideal and social role, and thereby promise a tangible future.¹

Self-esteem is regarded according to Coopersmith as:

The evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains with regard to himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval, and indicates the extent to which the individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. In short, self esteem is a personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes the individual holds toward himself.² Such an evaluation centers upon the relatively enduring estimate of general self-esteem rather than upon more specific and transitory changes in one's estimate of his self-esteem. By firmly based self-esteem, we mean that which is

soundly based upon real capacity, achievement, and respect from others, according to Lowry.³

Statement Of Need

The need of selfhood is especially evident in the personal identity formation for the average college student. He questions whether he is of value as a person and what he is going to do with his life. He asks himself questions, such as: Do my present academic studies fit me as a person? Will I be satisfied in my projected field of work? What do I really have to offer? Will there be sufficient job opportunities when I graduate? What if I fail in my academic studies and in my social relationships? How do I get people to appreciate me?

"Self-evaluation" in the above definition, which incidentally is substantiated by Coopersmith, refers to the judgmental process in which the individual examines his performance, capacities, and attributes, according to his personal standards and values, and arrives at a decision of his own worthiness.⁴

Basic Goals

The primary goal of this research project is to structure a program of ministry through a growth seminar, which will improve the overall self-esteem of a selected group of college students. For a given student the program will seek to provide a better self-understanding, leading to a greater self-acceptance and to more self-confidence by raising his level of trust within a supportive community. A balance of self-disclosure and affirmation is projected for the total participation in the growth seminar.

Several assumptions should be noted. (1) Every individual is a person of unique worth and God has given each one special gifts. (2) Experiences of self-worth are best realized in human interpersonal relationships. (3) Development of the inner person is equally important to that of the outer person in becoming a total human being (4) Jesus Christ is the central link to fulfillment of the inner life with the Holy Spirit as the enabler.

The program of ministry will seek to strengthen interpersonal relationships through the encouragement of self-expression and creative listening in a caring fellowship. It will seek to clarify the importance of self-love in responsible relationships by dealing with the negative self concepts within a support community. The seminar will aid in the clarification of the individual's goals and values. The fundamental value of relationships in the formation and maintenance of a good self concept will be explored through small group interaction.

The positive interaction of the participants will aid each other in the discovery and declaration of their God-given gifts.

Such a program of ministry seems to provide a logical beginning point for additional campus ministry programs to develop according to college classification and personal needs. Seminars projecting beyond this basic personal growth seminar could possibly include such areas as leadership skills, value clarification, human sexuality, time management, witness training, and career development.

It is anticipated that this program of ministry will be utilized and adapted by other college groups at other campuses in the future. The desire is to make it substantial and practical so that it can be administered with the limited expertise of student leadership.

Focus Of Concern

Erikson in his "eight stages of man" seems to support the thesis that such crucial characteristics as trust, autonomy and initiative are discovered primarily in the nature of the relationships between the child, his parents and his siblings.⁵ These same crucial identity elements are rediscovered during adolescence:

In their search for a new sense of continuity and sameness, which must now include sexual maturity, some adolescents have to come to grips again with crises of earlier years before they can install lasting idols and ideals as guardians of a final identity. They need, above all, a moratorium for the integration of the identity elements ascribed in the foregoing to the childhood stages: only that now a larger unit, vague in its outline and yet immediate in its demands, replaces the childhood milieu—'society.'⁶

It seems that in the college situation, the environment focuses upon the reexamination of all those things previously taken for granted. Erikson used the word "crisis" to designate a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when "development must move one way or another, marshaling resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation."⁷ It is, therefore, to be expected that crises will be the rule rather than the exception for college students.⁸

During pretesting the students were asked to list some things that they would like to accomplish in a growth seminar. They listed as primary concerns self-understanding, self-expression, and the ability to relate to other persons. The desire for self-acceptance and self-confidence was cited by most of the students. Several of the potential participants wanted help with the formation of good attitudes along with assistance in the development of communication skills. The

ability to cope with personal problems and other people was also cited as an area of concern.

Because freshmen and sophomore students in the late adolescent developmental stage generally undergo greater developmental transition than do juniors and seniors, it seems appropriate to focus upon them in this project in ministry within and through the Baptist Student Union.

The striving of an individual to find and to fulfill a meaning and purpose in his life is what Viktor Frankl terms the *will to meaning*. He regards this as a primary motivational force for man.⁹

This purposeful interaction with other students in the seminar will allow the individual an opportunity to establish and maintain responsible relationships which the writer regards as the foremost task of human beings. Viktor Frankl supports the writer's theological contention that positive functional relationships with God and other persons are essential in the maintenance and improvement of one's self concept.

By declaring that man is a responsible creature and must actualize the potential meaning of his life, I wish to stress that the true meaning of life is to be found in the world rather than within man or his own psyche, as though it were a closed system. By the same token, the real aim of human existence cannot be found in what is called self-actualization. Human existence is essentially self transcendence rather than self-actualization . . . For only to the extent to which man commits himself to the fulfillment of his life's meaning, to this extent he also actualizes himself . . .

Love is the only way to grasp another human being in the innermost core of his personality. No one can become fully aware of the very essence of another human being unless he loves him. By the spiritual act of love he is enabled to see the essential traits and features in the beloved person: and even more, he sees that which is potential in him, that which is not yet actualized but yet ought to be actualized. Furthermore, by his love, the loving person enables the beloved person to actualize these potentialities. By making him aware of what he can be and of what he should become, he makes these potentialities come true.¹⁰

The actualization of some of these students' potentialities is the goal of the personal growth seminar. The intent of the writer's program of ministry is to clarify and to improve the self concept of individuals in the areas of trust ability, personal identity, self-confidence, self-acceptance, value priorities, communication skills, po-

tential gifts, and behavioral attitudes within the context of a support community.

Evaluation And Summary

The Tennessee Self-Concept Scale was used by the author. This recognized test was used to measure whether the project affected the students self concept and how much. A "control group" not involved in the project was given the test at the same time as the "test group" involved in the project. Both groups were tested prior to and following the actual project.

The increase in positive attitudes towards self by the students in the test group met an expressed personal need. According to the personal satisfaction inventory given prior to the seminar, only fifty percent of the freshmen and sophomores liked themselves and felt good about their relationships with others. The composite test scores showed a significant positive change for a similar college group in personal self-regard which in turn affects their motivation and behavioral responses.

The primary goal of the program of ministry was to improve the overall self-esteem of a selected group of freshmen and sophomores in a supportive community of mutual trust. The feedback which the writer received from the retreat and from each of the five sessions, along with the results from both tests and the final evaluation forms, pointed to a solid growth in self-understanding. Also, the students' self-acceptance and self-confidence were significantly greater, seemingly because of their participation in activities involving self-disclosure and affirmation. Also the group interaction allowed the participants to risk and to deal with success and failure in a supportive environment.

With the belief assumptions and goals stated at the beginning of the growth seminar, a common value base was projected with some definite ideals for each person to work toward. The Christian belief that each individual is to be regarded as a total human being who is both gifted and a person of unique worth, along with the belief that Jesus Christ is the central connecting link for fulfillment of the inner life, provided the foundation and context for the ministry program. It was equally important for these students to seek to realize personal growth through inter-personal relationships.

The positive results of this program of ministry support the contention of the writer that an individual's realization of his uniqueness, worth, and God-given abilities is best done by affirming Jesus

Christ as the central value in life. Through such a purposeful value assumption these individuals were allowed to discover and to develop their special gifts and relate responsibly to the various facets of their lives. Such an approach to reality gave positive meaning to their lives, resulting in an attitude of celebration as a natural outcome. The overt theological perspective added a significant dimension to this ministry research project and to overall growth that occurred.

Modification Of The Design For Future Ministry

The growth seminar, which had many worthwhile features that should be retained, provided an adequate balance for a reasonable approximation of the projected goals. The group contract and personal work booklet provided a solid, defined working base for the growth seminar.

Based on the interaction and positive feedback from the participants, the beginning retreat was essential in establishing an adequate trust level in personal relationships. The sense of Christian community was evident with freedom of self-expression and openness to new growth experiences during the successive five weekly sessions. The eighteen hours provided enough time for the formation of some genuine functional personal relationships.

An actual description of the program of ministry was not included because of space limitations, but if you desire additional information or actually want a copy of the ministry project design, contact the writer at his campus address.

In follow-up usage, three other personal growth seminars have been conducted during the past two years involving 62 additional college students and they achieved positive growth similar to the initial seminar. Several common interest groupings were made, namely, BSU Executive Council, juniors-seniors, freshmen-sophomores, freshmen and transfers. The current seminar involves a combined range of classes from freshmen to graduate students with seemingly effective responses and interaction. On another occasion the writer adapted a major portion of the seminar content to a three day retreat setting with young adult church group beyond college age with reasonable success.

You may wonder about the continued involvement of participants in BSU activities beyond the seminar. At this time, more than seventy percent of the 77 former participants have continued to be actively involved in our BSU program of activities in the capaci-

ties of leading, sharing and growing with equal or greater consistency than non-participants. The seminar has proven itself for the writer to be a reliable base unit of personal witness and Christian growth in the total programming of the BSU.

A diversified, balanced program of campus ministry is the writer's overall concern. With the modified growth seminar as a basic beginning of a larger curricula of ministry with college students, several programs should be added. One follow-up program should be an expanded values clarification seminar. Also empathy training along with a program on human sexuality is needed if the seminar remains six weeks in length. To aid students in their spiritual growth and maturity, a share seminar emphasizing Christian witnessing skills should be offered as well.

Since the Baptist Student Union is made up of voluntary leadership, a program of leadership skills training is essential in the growth process of the students along with a life planning seminar which will allow them to integrate their personal and career goals. Also, the development of Christian community in the midst of worship and task-oriented functions will encourage the desired personal growth during their college years.

These programs of ministry ideas provided for a writer a realistic dream of a diversified campus ministry curricula for college students that came into being as a result of this program of ministry attempting to improve the student's self concept. Plans are now being made to continue to use the modified growth seminar as the beginning base and to try to develop similar quality programs of ministry. The developed program of ministry, discussed in this paper, can and ought to be adapted for use on other campuses to allow college students to improve their self concept.

1 Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1968), p. 71.

2 Stanley Coopersmith, *The Antecedents of Self-Esteem* (New York: Freeman Publishing Co., Inc., 1967), p. 4.

3 Richard J. Lowry, ed., *Dominance, Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization: Germinal Papers of A. H. Maslow* (Monterey, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Co., Inc., 1973), p. 162.

5 Erikson, pp. 93-95.

6 Erikson, p. 128.

7 Frederick W. Coons, "The Developmental Tasks of the College Student," *Adolescent Psychiatry*, 1:257. 1971.

8 Coons, p. 257.

9 Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), p. 154.

10 Frankl, p. 175-177.