



Design for Fostering Vocation in Place: Enhancing the Sense of Community in Residential Youth Camp Settings Regarding Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities



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Abstract

This report focuses on residential youth camp settings as a context for spiritual growth. It will delineate interpersonal communication variables that come together to form levels of interaction. Camp relationships are established, maintained and nurtured via human communication processes. The residential youth camp environment is especially ripe for human communication analysis because the new communication technologies are (for the most part) non-existent in the camp setting. The richness of face-to-face human interaction is emphasized and the relevance of human relationships is more readily recognizable. The residential youth camp environment is unique insofar as offering something of a laboratory for the individual to discover or rediscover part of his/her sense of self identity in ways that underscore agency and control.

This study will focus on residential youth camp settings as a context for spiritual growth. As such, it will delineate interpersonal communication variables that come together to form levels of interaction. Much of what youth camps are about are relationships. These relationships are established, maintained and nurtured via human communication processes. The relevance of such human communication processes can be overlooked at times but the face-to-face context moves them front and center. "God does act within the lived experience of young people. Intuitively responding to this reality, summer camps have elevated attention to experience in their practice of ministry [1].

The residential youth camp environment is especially ripe for human communication analysis because the new communication technologies are (for the most part) non-existent in the camp setting. Thus, the richness of face-to-face human interaction is emphasized and the relevance of human relationships is more readily recognizable. The residential youth camp environment is unique insofar as offering something of a laboratory for the individual to discover or rediscover part of his/her sense of self identity in ways that underscore agency and control. Such camps also can reinforce the bond between youth and their home congregations. Camps and congregations need to partner in these efforts of engagement. camp worship/programs are designed to get campers more excited about and engaged in their home congregations [2].

Keywords: Developmental disabilities; Youth camp; Human communication

Purpose

The main purpose of this analysis is to enable camp staff participants to become more aware of their vocation as it relates to human communication dynamics and how they can enhance such human communication processes among the campers they work with via fundamental understanding. Recognizing purpose begins with recognition of understanding and this can be an ongoing effort. The role of the camp staff helps to frame the experience of the campers he/she is working with. In doing so the counselor must consider the influences that exist in the residential youth

camp environment. Due to the simplicity of a camp setting it becomes clear that in-person human communication processes are a primary form of influence.

This contrasts with a non-camp environment when campers are back home in that the new communication technologies and varied forms of mass media have a far more prevalent role. This, added to the contextual landscape of a natural setting, allows for enhanced understanding of the role in-person human communication can play in our lives. This kind of contextual

framing takes a while to adjust to upon arrival into a camp setting and the camp staff can help campers integrate into this environmental shift. Guidance with such integration will be grounded in a fundamental understanding of interpersonal communication processes.

A key purpose of this small group study will be to foster understanding of human communication processes among camp staff so they can, in turn, offer guidance to those they serve in the camp setting. Appreciation of the camp environment as unique is especially relevant. "The camp model fits particularly well with John Dewey's notion of progressive education, which emphasized experiential learning, critical thinking and social interactions over pedagogies focused on direct instruction [3].

Learning/Formation Goals

A. Participants will learn about interpersonal communication processes that are relevant to face-to-face encounters. Such knowledge is important insofar as it serving as foundation for participants to promote increased awareness and application among the campers that participants serve. This knowledge helps to frame programming and activities that are developed for emphasis in residential youth camps. The relevance of such programming cannot be overstated as observed in the recollection of a camper in the following. That night we could make a big choice. We could choose to give our life to God if we wanted to. I did [4].

B. Participants will gain greater awareness for how improved interpersonal communication can enhance the camp setting via application of interpersonal communication skills that benefit conveyance of meanings in an accurate manner. This improved awareness will evolve through application of interpersonal communication skills in varied camp settings (programmatic and informal situations). As such, campers will be enabled with their development of interpersonal communication skill sets. This enables carry over into other areas of the camp experience. "Lutheran Summer Music camp gave me teachers who encouraged me to 'bloom where I'm planted,' no matter how obscure the calling [5].

C. After consideration of their vocation as described in the aforementioned, participants will be in a position to identify at least one framework for application of learned interpersonal communication skills from the following. This will position participants to move forward with their development in such a way so as to serve in a sharpened vocation that reflects appropriate consideration and reflection. This consideration and reflection cannot be overstated.

Knowledge base for interpersonal communication

The group camping environment is dynamic. It is constantly changing on multiple levels. Much of the evolution that occurs is the result of varied approaches with styles of, and orientations with,

communication processes. Probably one of the primary obstacles to effective communication is the assumption of it. No two people or two camp organizations will engage in communication the same way. Such communication processes will be directly linked to the individuals who comprise such groupings. Each will have unique perspectives regarding expectations with communication processes. There may be significant overlap but there will also be differences to be considered.

Communication is a complex process. It is comprised of many variables and produces a variety of effects. Communication theorists offer communication definitions that stress different elements of the communication process. However, most definitions will acknowledge, directly or indirectly, basic elements such as source, receiver, competence, message, feedback, channels, noise, and context. Taken together, these communication elements serve to create a powerful context that encourages significant reflection as evidenced in the following memory offered by a camper. "Camp was the place where I came to understand the unconditional love and grace of God [6].

There are many types of models and definitions that explain communication processes. A review of communication studies literature will reveal a wide range of perspectives. Some explanations are very detailed in their descriptions while others are far more abstract in their conceptions. The aforementioned basic elements will typically be recognizable in most of these models and definitions. Common in definitions of communication is the importance of sender and receiver motivation to engage in communication. This commonality serves to underscore the importance of each.

Four Communication Objectives

Human beings are frequently described as social animals. That is, interaction with others occurs through different objectives. These objectives help us exist and define ourselves as being human. Four such objectives are commonly addressed: physiological objectives, functional objectives, relationship objectives, and self-concept objectives.

Physiological objectives

Communication is a necessity of good physical health. The absence of social interaction poses a threat to health similar to high blood pressure and obesity. Different individuals have varied communication needs just as people have varying degrees of need in areas such as sleep, food, and shelter. But that communication fulfills a physiological objective is worth noting.

Functional objectives

Perhaps most basic is that communication is a means that allows us to achieve functional objectives such as learning a skill, order a hamburger at a restaurant, understand illness symptoms in our children, and describe what is on our mind. We use communication frequently during a typical day to meet objectives.

Some of the objectives are simple (i.e. asking a family member to pass the salt) and some are more complex (i.e. explaining how to change the oil in a car).

Relationship Objectives

Communication meets relationship objectives in a manner similar to how it meets self concept objectives. Communication is the means through which we interact socially. It is through these interactions that we develop relationships.

Self-concept objectives

Communication helps us learn who we are via our interaction with others. We constantly receive feedback that reinforces or rearranges our self-concept. Our interaction with others tells us if we are valued, embraced, or rejected. Though reaction from others is not always what we want to hear, the fact we receive the feedback addresses our self-concept objective.

Three Orientations for Communication

Three orientations for communication offer general frameworks for understanding the communication process. These orientations are labeled according to the themes they espouse: mental, linear and relational.

Mental Orientation

This orientation emphasizes the importance of perception as a mental process. Communication is seen as more abstract than as with the linear orientation. Communication is recognized as being dependent upon the perceptual frames of reference of the interactants. Thus, the communication process will vary significantly depending on psychological variables such as the backgrounds, intentions, wants, needs, and observations of the interactants. A shortcoming of this perspective is that, while it acknowledges many psychological variables that comprise the communication process, it can lack focus due to this acknowledgement.

Linear orientation

This orientation is so named because it promotes the understanding of communication as a linear process. That is, meaning moves from source to receiver in lock-step, mechanical, assembly line fashion. Communication is fairly predictable. It is a process that progresses from beginning to end. Communication operates much like a machine. A problem with this perspective is that it simplifies the communication process to consideration of primary elements that comprise the process.

Relational orientation

This orientation purports meanings evolve through interaction. That is, the meanings we have for phenomena in our lives are realized via interaction we have with others. Thus, over time a child learns beer is a social intoxicant that is usually consumed with relaxation as an objective. As the child ages, she/

he will learn beer can be a bad thing for an alcoholic but can be a more positive phenomenon for the non-alcoholic consumer.

Roles are an important consideration with the relational orientation. The roles we play provide context and expectations for our interaction. For instance, a person who is wearing a police uniform will be afforded certain liberties when she/he interacts with a non-uniformed person. We are more likely to surrender our driver's license to a stranger in a police uniform than a stranger in a cowboy outfit. We do this because our interactions have taught us people in police uniforms are permitted to make inquiries, unique to that line of work, that help them achieve their occupational objectives.

Learning approach

The overall teaching/learning approach will be tailored to the residential youth camp context. Any camp organization will be guided by basic intentions. There will be countless interactions that will occur among camp participants as they seek to develop a common understanding and language for approaching these intentions. Each individual will bring into these interactions varied needs to be addressed. Such physiological, ego oriented, social and functional needs will be the motivations for subtle interactions that will result in shared meanings and will impact the continued evolution of the organization. To ignore these needs is to ignore what drives the organization. These needs and their resolution are ripe for teaching/learning applications.

We often hear about "communication breakdowns" within camp units. Communication does not actually breakdown. The communication processes are typically functioning as they should. The issues that arise typically rest upon the individuals who are engaged in the interactions. Each can have a unique orientation with communication processes. Highlighting the dynamics within these phenomena offers keys to understanding. Focus on cognitive, affective/dispositional and behavioral goals within this learning approach will highlight benefits of the orientation being used.

The counselor who sees communication primarily as a mechanical process will be seeking clearly defined vivid communication steps, with a definite beginning and concrete end, that may not exist in many situations. The camp director who is sensitive to varied perceptions of each individual in the unit will be practicing a mental model orientation whereby different perceptions will be expected, not just tolerated. The staff member who finds understanding via interactions that surround occurrences (new activities, new leadership etc.) will be especially keen to the importance of meanings that evolve from relationships among cabin members and things in their environment. These patterns can be harvested as learning opportunities.

When one reflects on the many orientations that can exist within a given camp setting it is sometimes surprising that we have as much common understanding as we do. Appreciation of the concepts presented in this analysis will help individuals and organizations grow toward more tolerance among varied orientations and, ultimately, more positive understandings will evolve. The learning approach will offer stepping-stones on this path and this path can lead to meaningful outcomes. "Camp experiences have statistically significant impacts on multiple measurements of faith formation [7].

Session Outlines

Session one

Session Title: An Overview of the Role of Perception in Interpersonal Communication

Session Theme/Topic: Participants will be introduced to the concept of perception and how it serves as foundation for human communication processes in camp settings.

Content for the Session: Participants will meet with others in the group and review the topics conveyed in the session steps section.

Cognitive Goal: Participants will be exposed to the sessions steps topics and how these topic areas have relevance for human communication.

Affective/Dispositional Goal: Participants will express increased awareness of the relevance of the topic areas regarding their impact on human communication in camp settings.

Behavioral Goal: Participants will be motivated to learn more about how the relevance of these topic areas can be manifested in representative illustrations.

Session Steps:

1. Perception Defined
2. Three Stages of Perception
3. Rationalization
4. Attribution Theory
5. Self-fulfilling Prophecy
6. Stereotyping
7. Fact/Inference Misinterpretation
8. Role of Age

Session two

Session Title: A Summary of Fundamental Listening Concepts Central to Interpersonal Communication

Session Theme/Topic: Participants will be introduced to general concepts having to do with listening processes and how

they impact human communication processes in camp settings.

Content for the Session: Participants will meet with other individuals to consider the relevance of the listening topics noted in the session steps section.

Cognitive Goal: Participants will be learning how the stated listening variables impact the listening process individually and collectively.

Affective/Dispositional Goal: Participants will illustrate increased awareness of the listed listening concepts regarding how they impact human communication.

Behavioral Goal: Participants will be likely to implement the listening concepts within their interactions with other participants in camp settings.

Session Steps:

1. Three Motivations for Listening
2. Active Listening
3. Three Barriers to Listening
4. Three Variables Affecting Listener Response
5. Three Types of Listener Feedback

Session three

Session Title: An Overview of Nonverbal Elements That Impact Interpersonal Communication

Session Theme/Topic: Participants will learn about general elements of nonverbal communication and how these elements impact human communication processes in camp settings.

Content for the Session: Participants will meet with others to consider the relevance of the nonverbal elements noted in the session steps section.

Cognitive Goal: Participants will comprehend how the stated nonverbal variables impact the human communication process.

Affective/Dispositional Goal: Participants will exhibit fundamental awareness of the listed nonverbal elements regarding how they impact human communication.

Behavioral Goal: Participants will be able to apply understanding of the nonverbal elements with other participants in the camp setting.

Session Steps:

1. Vocalics
2. Kinesics
3. Facial Communication
4. Eye Behavior

5. Tactile Communication
6. Physical Characteristics
7. Silence
8. Metacommunication

Session four

Session Title: Focus on Basic Considerations Having To Do With Intrapersonal Communication and Self-Disclosure

Session Theme/Topic: Participants will be introduced to issues linked with intrapersonal communication and self-disclosure in camp settings.

Content for the Session: Participants will meet with other individuals to discuss the importance of the self-disclosure topics noted in the session steps section.

Cognitive Goal: Participants will be learning how the stated self-disclosure variables impact human communication processes.

Affective/Dispositional Goal: Participants will give due consideration to the relevance of self-disclosure in their camp interactions.

Behavioral Goal: Participants will employ strategies to enhance their interactions with regard to self-disclosure variables.

Session Steps:

1. Self-Disclosure
2. Four Reasons for Self-Disclosure
 - a. Addressing Past Behavior
 - b. Quid Pro Quo
 - c. Clarification
 - d. Image Maintenance

Session five

Session Title: Detailing the Six Stages of Relational Deterioration With Focus on Camp Settings

Session Theme/Topic: Participants will be oriented with six stages of relational deterioration as they commonly occur within camp settings.

Content for the Session: Participants will dialog with others and address unique variables relevant to relational deterioration in camp settings.

Cognitive Goal: Participants will become knowledgeable about how relational deterioration is a unique consideration in camp settings.

Affective/Dispositional Goal: Participants will evidence an enhanced appreciation for relational deterioration and how it

impacts human relations.

Behavioral Goal: Participants will be able to employ strategies for improved outcomes in relational deterioration that occurs in camp settings.

Session Steps:

Six Stages of Relational Deterioration

1. Disillusionment Stage
2. Clarification Stage
3. Mutual Understanding Stage
4. External Sharing Stage
5. Historical Assessment Stage
6. Closure Stage

6.6. Session six

Session Title: A Summary of Interpersonal Scripts in Camp Settings

Session Theme/Topic: Participants will be introduced to categories of interpersonal scripts that impact human communication processes.

Content for the Session: Participants will meet with others to focus on the notion interpersonal scripts and how they have significance in human relations.

Cognitive Goal: Participants comprehend fundamental concepts having to do with interpersonal scripts and understand their interrelationship.

Affective/Dispositional Goal: Participants will be centered with their understanding of interpersonal scripts in such a way that their interactions will benefit from this awareness.

Behavioral Goal: Participants will make use of their understanding of interpersonal scripts by exhibiting awareness of the varied scripts that exist within the camp environment.

Session Steps:

1. Interpersonal Communication Scripts
2. Cultural Scripts
3. Family Scripts
4. Personal Identity Scripts
5. Three Guidelines for Working With Impersonal Scripted Relationships

Session seven

Session Title: An Overview of the Four Foundations of Power in Relation to Interpersonal Communication

Session Theme/Topic: Participants will be introduced to power as a variable in human communication processes in camp settings.

Content for the Session: Participants will meet with other individuals to assess how the four foundations of power manifest themselves.

Cognitive Goal: Participants will grasp how the four foundations of power impact the human communication process with varied degrees of intensity.

Affective/Dispositional Goal: Participants will proceed with awareness for how power dynamics are a factor with human communication.

Behavioral Goal: Participants will exercise awareness of power dynamics in a manner that benefits their pragmatic functioning within interactions.

Session Steps:

Four Foundations of Power

1. Sanction Power
2. Charismatic Power
3. Formal Power
4. Personal Orientation Power

6.7. Session eight

Session Title: An Overview of Conflict Approaches and Dysfunctional Conflict Considerations Within Interpersonal Communication

Session Theme/Topic: Participants will receive instruction with Conflict Approaches and Dysfunctional Conflict with regard to relevance with human communication processes in camp settings.

Content for the Session: Camp participants will meet with other team members to discuss

varied approaches to conflict and dysfunctional conflict.

Cognitive Goal: Participants will be learning how conflict and dysfunctional conflict impacts functioning of groups within camp settings.

Affective/Dispositional Goal: Participants will proceed with awareness for how they need to be mindful of conflict and the resulting dysfunctional reactions that can occur.

Behavioral Goal: Participants will employ behaviors that promote positive outcomes in relation to encounters resulting from varied conflict approaches and exhibit awareness of dysfunctional conflict concerns.

Session Steps:

1. Three Conflict Approaches
 - a) Avoidance Approach
 - b) Aggressive Approach
 - c) Conciliatory Approach
2. Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict
7. **Detailed Learning Plan**

Description of Specific Setting: These sessions have been developed for use in a camp setting or church setting that has one large room with moveable tables & chairs, chalkboard and suitable instructional technologies that can be used to convey content. The tables & chairs will be moved in accord with the instruction being stressed. Flexibility with the ability to rearrange will be beneficial. There is flexibility with regard to the physical layout and room for re-orientation per the situation. A primary consideration will be to continually evaluate and reassess the progression of the program and the participants involved.

Learning Goals for the Event: Address cognitive, affective/dispositional and behavioral goals as noted below.

Cognitive Goal: For camp staff members to know fundamental interpersonal communication theory having to do with perception, listening, nonverbal communication, self-disclosure, relational deterioration, scripts, power and conflict.

Affective/Dispositional Goal: For camp staff members to understand/appreciate how the preceding interpersonal communication theory noted within the cognitive goal can have relevance for camp communicative climate.

Behavioral Goal: For camp staff members to apply their understanding/appreciation of interpersonal communication theory via their work with the camp community to enhance development and maintenance of meaningful interpersonal relationships within the multi-levels of camp programming and functioning.

Description of each segment in the event

One Perception: 1. Perception Defined, 2. Three Stages of Perception, 3. Rationalization,

4. Attribution Theory, 5. Self-fulfilling Prophecy, 6. Stereotyping, 7. Fact/Inference

Misinterpretation, 8. Role of Age

Two Listening: 1. Three Motivations for Listening, 2. Active Listening, 3. Three Barriers to Listening, 4. Three Variables Affecting Listener Response, 5. Three Types of Listener Feedback

Three Nonverbal Communication: 1. Vocalics, 2. Kinesics, 3. Facial Communication, 4. Eye Behavior, 5. Tactile Communication, 6. Physical Characteristics, 7. Silence,

Metacommunication

Four: Reasons for Self-Disclosure: a. Addressing Past Behavior, b. Quid Pro Quo, c. Clarification, d. Image Maintenance

Five: Relational Deterioration: 1. Disillusionment Stage, 2. Clarification Stage, 3. Mutual Understanding Stage, 4. External Sharing Stage, 5. Historical Assessment Stage, 6. Closure Stage

Six: Interpersonal Communication Scripts: 1. Cultural Scripts, 2. Family Scripts, 3. Personal Identity Scripts, 4. Guidelines for Working With Impersonal Scripted Relationships

Seven: Power: 1. Sanction Power, 2. Charismatic Power, 3. Formal Power, 4. Personal Orientation Power

Eight: Conflict Considerations: 1. Avoidance Approach, 2.

Aggressive Approach, 3. Conciliatory Approach, 4. Functional and Dysfunctional Conflict

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