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Investigating the Usefulness of Counselling Tool to Improve Students' Self-Awareness

Nurul Fitriah Alias, Sharifah Muzlia Syed Mustafa & Zaiton Ahmad

Faculty of Education, Puncak Alam Campus, UiTM Selangor 42300 Bandar Puncak Alam, Selangor
Darul Ehsan, Malaysia

Email: nurulfitriah@salam.uitm.edu.my, muzlia@salam.uitm.edu.my, zaitu327@salam.uitm.edu.my

Abstract

The concept of self-awareness has long been observed by researchers as a crucial means that could help individuals to alleviate their psychological distress, thus leading to psychologically healthy individuals. Self-awareness is the state of being consciously aware of one's internal states and their interactions or relationships with others. The present study was conducted in order to evaluate the usefulness of counseling tool or game in connecting theoretical concepts (self-awareness concept) to practical applications. Most of the time, it is quite difficult for the clients to self-disclose during a counselling session, especially during a group counselling session. Self-disclosure is a process of communication by which one person reveals information about himself or herself to another. With the elements of surprises and fun game embedded in the counseling tool, clients feel more comfortable and confident to complete the task given, especially when playing in a group. Thus a counseling game was developed to help participants feel at ease during a group counseling session, and then through the activities of the game could increase and improve their self-awareness. The objectives of this study are: 1) to determine whether students' self-awareness improve after playing the game and 2) to investigate to what extent using a game can help counselors to bring out more self-disclosure from participants. The self-awareness game was pilot-tested on a group of 41 underprivileged male adolescents staying at a shelter home. The feedback given by the participants indicates that they enjoyed the game, contributing to easier and faster self-disclosure as well as engagement. Using a brief pre-post-test which were given to participants before and after they played with the game, it was found through paired samples t-test that two out of seven aspects of self-awareness were significantly improved. The general conclusion that can be derived from this study is that counseling session using games can help to increase the effectiveness of the counseling session. The game provides a fun and interactive approach in order to encourage clients to open up during the counseling session. It is hoped that the game can be a useful tool that benefits counselors in improving clients' self-awareness and self-disclose during the counseling session.

Keywords: Self-Awareness, Counselling Tool/Game, Self-Disclosure, Group Counselling, Underprivileged Adolescents

Introduction

The concept of self-awareness has long been observed by researchers as a crucial means that could help individuals to alleviate their psychological distress, thus contributing to psychologically healthy individuals. Self-awareness can be generally defined as “the extent to which people are consciously aware of their internal states and their interactions or relationships with others” (Sutton, 2016). Oden, Miner-Holden & Balkin (2009) also concurred that self-awareness is the awareness of one’s own feelings, cognitions and behaviors. Similarly, Chin-Yen (1998) illustrated that one has achieved self-awareness when he or she is able to understand, appraise and make meaning of him/herself by reflecting on his or her own feelings, thoughts, behaviors, relationships and personal characteristics (Topuz & Arasan, 2014). Fayeze, Sulieman & Denise (2015) identified self-awareness as higher order cognitive function that distinguishes between self and non-self. It is known as the ability to accurately examine one’s own self; specifically one’s own traits, abilities, attitudes and the ability to understand the behavior of other human beings. Hence, in other words, self-awareness can be defined as the ability to accurately observe and understand ourselves. In this state, one is effectively becoming aware about oneself by identifying, processing and storing the information about oneself.

It is extremely important for individuals to recognize and reflect their own strength, weakness, feelings, cognitions, behavior, attitude, and motivations in order to lead a healthy and balanced life. Lack of self-awareness could cause individuals to have difficulty to perform and work in effective manner (Kalaiyaran & Solomon, 2016). This could disrupt their daily activities such as household work, studies, work, relationship and so on. According to Fayeze, Sulieman & Denise (2015), those who experience psychological disorders have been found lack the ability to self-reflect. These people exhibits a wide range of behavioural manifestations including impaired insights of their own actions, lack of empathy and lack of social understanding. In addition, individuals with low levels of self-awareness have been found to be lacking of internal self-monitoring. This internal self-monitoring is a trait that will assist them in understanding and coping with their feelings, thoughts, desires, and behaviors. Briere & Rickareds (2007) stated that people who lack the ability to be self-aware constantly experience emptiness, feeling confused about who they really are, feeling vulnerable, having conflicting thoughts and feelings, as well as failing to set goals for the future.

In addition, Prince & Alexander (2017) asserted that self-awareness is a crucial component in effective leadership. Leaders with high self-awareness understand their strengths and weaknesses (Avoloi, 2005), more aware of their emotions and how these emotions impact others and more likely to use emotional responses when dealing with problem and less likely to use rigid decision making (George, 2000), more capable in instilling trust and cooperation from followers (George, 2000) and overall more effective in their leadership.

Literature Review

On a positive note, a previous study conducted by Myers (2003) affirmed the role of self-awareness in promoting personal growth. The study examined sixteen volunteer participants who were engaged in activities that require self-reflection, introspection, and interaction on personal growth and development. The participants were asked to think and write about their own personal

experiences. The results from their written narratives included heightened awareness of self, recognition of personal potential, enhanced empathy for self and others, and improved interpersonal relationships. This study demonstrates the importance of self-awareness in promoting personal growth. Self-awareness enables individuals to reflect and process their strong suit and limitation as well as increase understanding of self and others thus contribute to improved interpersonal relationships.

More recent study conducted by Sandu, Panisoara & Panisoara (2015) explored the relationship between self-awareness and self-esteem among teenagers. 50 participants were given two tests; the first test is called 'Who am I?' developed by Kuhn and McPartland in 1954 which aims to highlight the individual characteristics, attitudes, and personal beliefs. The second tool used was questionnaire on self-image and self-esteem. The result from the study revealed that there was a strong association between the responses in the first and the second test. Data showed that self-awareness was related to the development of self-image and self-esteem of the teenagers. Those who scored higher for self-awareness test were found to have positive and favorable self-image as compared to those who scored lower on the self-awareness test. Thus, this study has shown the significant role of self-awareness in developing one's self-concept of themselves.

In assessing the role of group counseling in improving levels of self-awareness and reducing PTSD symptoms for children experiencing symptoms of trauma in the West Bank of Palestine, Fayez, Sulieman & Denise (2015) found that the activity conducted in group counseling significantly improved the level of self-awareness as well as decreased the symptoms of PTSD when compared to the control group. This finding indicates that the interaction between the members in the group counseling makes a significant impact on the lives of the children and thus helps improve their self-awareness and reduce PTSD symptoms. This is also supported by Bell, Limberg, Jacobson & Super (2014) who believed that creative activities used during counseling session could provide a medium for the client's self-awareness.

Problem Statement

Most of the time, it is quite difficult for the clients to self-disclose during a counselling session, especially during a group counselling session. Self-disclosure is a process of communication by which one person reveals information about himself or herself to another. In the local setting, the culture of respecting the elders and not being too outspoken have developed a tendency for some to not easily self-disclose and express opinions or feeling to others. This tendency can negatively affect a counseling session where clients ideally are encouraged to talk about themselves in order to better explore the issue. Adolescents are especially shy on first meeting and have difficulty expressing themselves. Therefore, for counseling as well as self-development purposes, there is a need for counselors or facilitators to be creative in cajoling young clients to speak out and participate in a given activities. The purpose of this study is to investigate to what extent using a game can help counselors or facilitators to bring out more self-disclosure from participants. In addition, it is to determine whether having more fun and being at ease in a session help to increase self-awareness among participants.

Methodology

Participants. The group activity was conducted on a group of 41 male adolescents who live at a shelter home. They aged from 13 to 17 years. Many of them attend nearby schools while a few without proper personal identification attend in-house workshops held at the shelter. They are underprivileged adolescents who live away from home and family, with some without any parents. It is significant that these protected young individuals be nurtured and facilitated to grow into positive and capable citizens. Thus the topic on self-awareness was especially chosen as one attempt to assist the participants into becoming more aware of their self, strengths and weaknesses.

Instrument. The group activity was conducted using a wheel-of-fortune like wheel to inject an element of fun. The wheel has 16 stripes with different colors. Each color was associated with a question on self-awareness such as asking about one's likes and dislikes, perception towards friends (and vice versa), as well as life goal and interest.

The other instrument is a brief pre and post survey which listed 7 aspects of self-awareness, generating 16 items. Simple questions ask about their ambition, hobby, perception about friends, and place of living. Questions also ask a friend to describe another person, or tell about one good thing about that person. Researchers constructed the 7 aspects of self-awareness based on the definition of concept of self-awareness itself. The questionnaire was developed only after consulting the experts from the field of education, counselling and psychology.

Method. Participants were divided into small groups of 5 to 7 according to similar age to ease interaction. Each group has a facilitator who was volunteers from among lecturers. The main facilitator explain the rules of turning the wheel, which is for every group to take turn to spin the wheel, pick a card according to the color of the stripe that the wheel stops at, and bring back the card question to their group. Members will take turn to answer the question with the facilitator encouraging more elaboration, self-disclosure and active listening from peers. After one round of sharing, the group can go to wheel again to take a spin, and respond to another question.

Analysis. Paired samples t-test was conducted to see whether there is any significant difference in the rating towards self-awareness that participants have before and after the activity. Observation was also made by the facilitators to describe how participants enjoy spinning the wheel which added to their enthusiasm to participate in the sharing session.

Findings and Discussions

Table 1 shows the result of paired-sample t tests conducted on the ratings that participants gave towards items in a pre and post survey. It can be seen that two aspects showed a significant difference before and after the wheel activity. The aspect "dislikes about self" shows a significant increase of awareness (t value = 3.820, $df=31$, $sig=.001$). The mean before activity was 3.44 whereas the mean after activity was 4.25. In other words, playing with the wheel that makes them answer questions about things that they dislike have significantly help to increase their awareness about this aspect of their selves.

Another aspect showing a significant increase in awareness is "things I appreciate in life" (t value = 2.156, $df = 31$, $sig. =.039$). The mean before activity was 4.34 while the mean after was 4.69.

This indicates that participants on average became more aware of what they appreciate in life after sharing session in the group. This indicates that playing with the wheel as a tool to encourage participants to think about their selves and others, and thus making them more aware in these two aspects of self.

Table 1: Pre and post ratings on self awareness aspects

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	T value	df	sig
Future goal	before	4.22	32	1.008	2.003	31	.054
	after	4.56	32	.716			
Like s about self	before	4.25	32	1.016	.902	31	.374
	after	4.44	32	.801			
Dislikes about self	before	3.44	32	1.435	3.820	31	.001
	after	4.25	32	1.047			
Likes about friends	before	3.69	32	1.091	1.729	31	.094
	after	4.03	32	1.121			
talents	before	4.03	32	1.204	.528	31	.601
	after	4.16	32	1.081			
Likes about school	before	3.97	32	1.356	1.686	31	.102
	after	4.31	32	1.176			
Appreciate in life	before	4.34	32	1.004	2.156	31	.039
	after	4.69	32	.738			

In addition, observation made by the facilitators also revealed that the participants enjoyed spinning the wheel and they were eager to answer the questions so that they get to spin the wheel again. It is noticeable that they were shy and reserved at first, however after participating in the activity, the participants seemed very keen and enthusiastic in answering the questions related to themselves. Therefore the wheel game managed to attract the participants' interest and attention and help counselors to bring out more self-disclosure from participants.

Previous research has demonstrated the importance of self-awareness in developing personal and emotional growth. Due to its significance, this present paper seeks to increase self-awareness of the participants of the study who are underprivileged adolescents currently live at a shelter. They are underprivileged adolescents who live away from home and family, with some without any parents. The topic on self-awareness was especially chosen as one attempt to assist the participants into becoming more aware of their self, strengths and weaknesses. It is hoped that through this activity, these protected young individuals be nurtured and facilitated to grow into positive, confident and capable citizens despite obstacles they are facing.

Conclusion

It is evident that the activity where participants can take turn to spin the wheel, pick a question, and then share their thoughts and feelings in the group has helped increase their awareness about self. Self-disclosing in a fun and relaxing atmosphere has made reserved and shy participants more open and free to talk about themselves. Conducting a group activity with underprivileged adolescents can be a challenging task due to the sensitivity and vulnerabilities of the individuals. Nevertheless, using the wheel has contributed to an element of surprise and fun among the participants, making them loose and eager to talk and share so that they can quickly have another spin of the wheel. Using the wheel has made participants more engaged in the task given to them. In addition, facilitators have less difficult time making the adolescents share about them since the atmosphere is more relax and entertaining.

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