

Introducing STEP (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting) to Japanese female college students

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1. Adlerian parent education theory

Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) is a parent education program invented by Dinkmeyer, D. and McKay G.D. (1976) based on Adlerian psychology¹. Adlerian parent education was started by Alfred Adler when he established the first child guidance clinic in Vienna in 1922. In this clinic, parents, teachers, and interested audience studied ongoing cases of children with problems. By 1930 there were 32 clinics conducted by schools and parent-teacher associations directed by Adler. There are several theoretical assumptions in Adlerian psychology which also form the basis of Adlerian parent education. Croake summarized that there are 12 important points in Adlerian parent education. These are as follows (Croake, 1981, p65-66).

- 1) All behaviors are purposive and goal directed.
- 2) The goal is to move from a feeling of inadequacy to perfection.
- 3) The goal is unique for each individual. The creative self within each person draws upon personal biology and environmental stimuli to construct a fictive goal. The goal is fictive because it requires perfection, which is impossible. Adler believed that everyone felt inferiority in the face of their own unique goal of perfection. People believe that achievement of the goal will give them a place in the social group. The formative social group is the family. The goal is usually fully developed and fixed by about age five and rarely changes even with psychotherapy.

¹ The theory and psychoanalytic practices put forward by Alfred Adler (1870-1937). Adlerian psychology is often referred to as individual psychology. Adler believed that people each seek their own goals, which are not merely based on sex as Freud thought, and that most people have feelings of inferiority. In consequence they may seek power and attempt to conceal their weaknesses from others (Sutherland, 1989, p206).

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- 4) The majority of the goal is not known to the individual; this unknown aspect of the goal is referred to as the unconscious by Adler.
- 5) The goal is that part of personality which gives unity, and all other functions of the individual, including physiological, are subservient to, and in keeping with, the goal. This unified pattern of movement is the "life style".
- 6) Self-evaluation and evaluation of the environment, "apperceptive schema, "are component of the life style. The totality of the life style is present in every psychological process. The person operates in totality in all behaviors, and examination of the isolated system within the individual is meaningless.
- 7) There is an iron-clad logic of social embeddedness. We live in a community with other humans; therefore, problems are interpersonal and not intrapsychic.
- 8) There is an innate potential for co-operation with other humans, but like the potential for reading, this too must be nurtured in the right environment for proper development. Adler referred to this co-operation as "social interest."
- 9) Maladjustment is characterized by self-centeredness and lack of social interest. When maladjustment is present, problems are not solved in the common sense, with concern for the individual and the group, but in a selfish movement seeking personal superiority.
- 10) For each person reality is subjective. This results in two people interpreting a given situation in two different ways. Each individual operates upon the environment and is operated upon by the environment in two different ways because their unique apperceptive schemas, goals, and movement toward their goals result in idiographic interpretation of the situation.
- 11) Idiographic movement is characteristic of the individual rather than a nomothetic principle which can be applied to many people; each person is unique.
- 12) Probability exists rather than determinism. Individuals create their own life styles. The life style mediates the environmental situation. Individuals determine their own fate.

The leading proponent of Adlerian psychology in the United States was Rudolf Dreikurs who was a student of Adler in Vienna. All of the current Adlerian parent education programs are based on the teachings of Adler as interpreted by Dreikurs. Dreikurs created a number of formulations which are applicable to parent education based on the writings of Adler. He published a book entitled *Children: the challenge* in 1964 and started Parent Study Groups (PSGs) based on this book. There are four objectives for PSG. They are 1) to let parents understand the four goals of children's misbehaviors and learn how to respond to these

misbehaviors; 2) to let parents understand that misbehaving children are discouraged children and learn how to encourage them by communicating with love and respect; 3) to stop parents using rewards and punishments and teach them how to use parenting techniques such as natural and logical consequences; 4) to let parents learn how to hold family meetings.

According to Croake (1981) Dreikurs referred to the children's misbehaviors as "goals" because they are the immediate purpose of the child's behavior. Dreikurs pointed out that there are four goals of misbehavior.

- 1) Attention getting: Typical attention-getting behaviors include behaviors of "teacher's pet" and "cute child", seeking praise and recognition for performance. Since these behaviors are in keeping with adult desires, they are not seen as maladjusted. However, these behaviors do not increase children's sense of belonging and self-confidence.
- 2) Power: The purpose of the misbehaviors related to this goal is to show the adult that "I can do anything I want, and you can not stop me." The child wants to be the boss. Goal II behavior occurs when at least one of the parents believes that the way to control children is to use power and show them who is in charge. It declares a belief in authoritarian rule. Goal II behaviors include disobedience, refusing to follow rules, telling lies, laziness and arguing.
- 3) Power with revenge: The child feels hurt and wishes to hurt the adult in return. Vicious, violent, brutal, dishonest, cruel misbehaviors characterize Goal III.
- 4) Display of inadequacy: This reflects extreme discouragement and loss of social interest. The child feels helpless and wishes to be left alone. Typical Goal IV misbehaviors include hopeless clumsiness, inaptitude, inferiority complex, stupidity and giving up. All of these behaviors are designed to have the adult remove expectations of performance and to treat the child as inadequate.

According to Dreikurs, the basic theoretical assumption of Adlerian psychology is that a misbehavior is purposive and directed toward the parents. Misbehaving children feel discouraged and are attempting to establish a place for themselves within the family in a noncooperative manner because they do not feel that they can have a place of significance through positive helpful behaviors. However, once the behavior is understood in relation to the adult, the parents can act in a manner to increase the child's feeling of belonging.

2. What is STEP?

In 1976 Dinkmeyer and McKay published *Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP)*, which is a modification of the Dreikurs' approach to parent education. The basic philosophy and advocated child rearing methods of STEP are the same as those of PSG. STEP has 9-week group sessions of 1 and 1/2 to 2 hours for each. The sessions include didactic presentation, group discussion and homework. The program emphasizes a skill training for parent-child relationships. A group leader does not play a role of authority but a role of organizing and facilitating the group. The program itself is the authority and a leader has to follow the instruction in the leader's manual. Also the leader uses cassette tapes or videos as a complement. The topic of discussion in the sequence is as follows.

- 1) understanding children's behavior and misbehavior
- 2) understanding more about your child and about yourself as a parent
- 3) encouragement
- 4) communication: how to listen to your child
- 5) communication: exploring alternatives, expressing your ideas and feelings to children
- 6) natural and logical consequences
- 7) applying natural and logical consequences
- 8) the family meeting
- 9) developing confidence and using your potential

There are more than 1.2 million parents in the United States who are taking STEP courses. The effectiveness of STEP has been evaluated by some researchers and the results have already been reported. Burnett (1988) has reviewed research studies on Adlerian parent education and concluded that they strongly support the effectiveness of the programs. These studies have shown that children's behavior, children's self-concept, parental behavior, and parental attitude have changed in a positive direction. Although most of the parents taking STEP belong to the white middle class in the United States, STEP has been also introduced in different cultures. The successful results have been reported not only from English speaking countries such as Canada and Australia, but also from Mexico, Korea and Japan.

3. STEP in Japan

STEP was translated into Japanese in 1982 by Yanagidaira, S.. According to supervisor of

the Japanese version of STEP, Minami, H. (1982), STEP must be useful to the Japanese because a democratic relationship between parents and children is also desirable for Japanese families in modern days. He wrote that replacing reward and punishment discipline and making children autonomous and responsible for their own attitudes is innovative in Japanese child rearing. Minami has explained that the reason why he did not modify case studies and examples used in the program is that there is no fundamental difference in the problems between American and Japanese parent-child relationships.

The effectiveness of the STEP program for Japanese parents has been evaluated by Tanaka, M. (1986). Tanaka analyzed the questionnaires on parental attitudes given to 116 Japanese parents (107 mothers and 9 fathers) who participated in the STEP courses in 1984. She found out that there were positive changes in parental attitudes after the subjects took STEP. She also found that there were no significant differences in these changes according to the subjects' sex, age and number of children. Kawabata, T (1987) introduced STEP to camp counselors and suggested that STEP can be useful for camp counselor training.

4. Introducing STEP to Japanese female college students

STEP was introduced to 107 Japanese female college students by the writer in 1987. The students were second year students in the department of early childhood education in a junior college, and the program was introduced as part of the educational psychology course. There are several reasons why the writer introduced this program to them. One is that STEP has already been introduced to Japanese mothers and has been proved to be effective by Tanaka (1986). The second reason is that parent education programs have been used as preparatory programs for young people to become good parents. The third reason is STEP is said to be applicable not only to the parent-child relationship but also to other interpersonal relationships. Therefore, I assumed that the student in the early childhood education department who experience teaching practice at early childhood educational institutions would be interested in this program and learn something from it. These turned out to be valid assumptions.

The class met once a week for 13 weeks and the each class lasted for 1 hour and 50 minutes. The arrangement of the course was as follows.

week 1: The purposes of this course and introduction to STEP

weeks 2~10: practising STEP program

week 11: course evaluation and feedback

weeks 12 and 13: lectures on parent education

The students were divided into small groups of 4 or 5 members. The students took turns as group leader to facilitate and organize group discussion. The writer served as a time keeper and co-ordinator of the whole program. During weeks 2 to 10 the students took a comprehension test on each chapter of the STEP textbook at the beginning of the class and filled out the feedback sheet after the class.

A single-group pre-test-post-test design was used to measure the effectiveness of the program. Questionnaires on parental attitudes of the students were measured by a 5-point(+2; strongly agree, +1; agree, 0; uncertain, -1; disagree, -2; strongly disagree), 10-item, Likert-type interval scale before and after the program. This is a condensed version of SPAS (STEP Parent Assessment Scale). Seven open-ended questions about their impressions of STEP were asked after the program.

The data of 104 subjects were valid for analysis. The mean scores of parenting attitudes before and after the program were statistically tested by t-test. The result of the t-test showed that there were significant differences between the mean scores (before: mean=2.33 (Standard Deviation=3.05); after: mean=6.91 (Standard Deviation=3.81), t-score=14.08, 103df (degree of freedom), $p<.0001$). The result means that the probability that this analysis is false is less than .01%.

The range of the score discrepancy in each student was from -4 to +14. Ninety-five student changed their attitudes in a positive direction (i.e. -4 to 0 or 2 to 5), while only 5 changed in a negative direction (i.e. 5 to 2 or -1 to -5). Four did not change their attitudes.

In the results of the open-ended questions about STEP, the writer found some implications.

- 1) STEP gave the students opportunities to think about their own families and re-consider their relationship with their parents.
- 2) STEP would be useful in providing the students with some idea of how to deal with difficult children when they work in early childhood educational institutions.
- 3) The students sometimes expressed an unfamiliarity with the examples used in STEP because of differences in cultures and customs.
- 4) Most of the student thought of STEP as interesting and useful, and many of them were very much affected by STEP and hoped to make use of it in both in their future families and in their careers as early childhood care takers.

5. Conclusion

Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (STEP) has been proved to be effective for Japanese female college students. There is a possibility that the program can be used to improve teacher-student relationship in Japanese early childhood educational institutions. Also, the program gave the students a chance to build better relationships with their parents. Although there were many differences in culture and customs between the United States and Japan, the two cultures share the basic problems of parent-child relationships. However, some of the examples and case studies used in the program should be changed to more culturally appropriate ones in order to be accepted more easily by the Japanese.

Appendix

Condensed version of SPAS (STEP Parenting Assessment Scale)

- *1. Parents should remind children not to forget their homework.
2. Parents should not be emotional in verbal arguments with children.
3. Effective communication with children requires certain skills and knowledge.
4. Giving rewards teaches children to respect pay-offs for co-operation.
5. Children's messy rooms are not parents' responsibility.
- *6. Parents should make children eat all of their food.
7. Physical punishment should not be used on children.
- *8. Children learn better when their mistakes are pointed out.
9. Parental pity tells children that they are incapable.
10. It is important to determine the ownership of problems that arise between parents and children to which side they belong.

(* are reverse questions which mean that +2 becomes -2, +1 becomes -1, -1 becomes +1, and -2 becomes +2 when they are calculated.)

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