

# TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS AND ROLE TRAINING IN THE CLASSROOM: A PILOT STUDY

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## INTRODUCTION

The present study had its inception as a response to the question: "can concepts and techniques commonly used in clinical practice be modified and integrated into a preventative approach for small groups"? The plan was to develop and initiate a program that was community based. Not only could the services of the mental health center be expanded in an economical manner by working with groups, but also the focus would be with the preventative aspects of mental health care.

One important and often easily accessible natural environment of children is the public school classroom. The classroom is extremely important since it is not only a place where intellectual skills are developed but also an environment in which a substantial amount of social and emotional learning takes place.

The content of the pilot project focused on the study of individual personality and interpersonal interactions within the classroom. The course of study consisted of one hour sessions that spanned a twelve week period. The material presented for each session was derived as the result of the researchers integrating elements of Transactional Analysis and Role Training. The aim of the experiences was to enhance and expand social relationships by directing students in the study of their own personal make-up and the nature and quality of the interpersonal transactions in which they engaged.

## METHOD

Students from the third (N=14) and sixth (N=17) grades in one elementary school were chosen as subjects. One classroom of each grade participated in the pilot program. The other classroom at each grade level was not involved in the project and therefore functioned as a control group.

The program consisted of 12 group sessions conducted once a week in the classroom for a total of 45 minutes per meeting. The basic format for each

session consisted of a ten minute lecturette on a particular topic. A brief list of the topics covered included the following:

- a. P.A.C.
- b. transactions
- c. strokes
- d. existential positions
- e. contracts
- f. games
- g. recurrent conflict situations.

The lecturettes were followed by group discussion, role playing and role training exercises. The role performance exercises were designed for two purposes: reinforcement of the learning of concepts through concrete experiences, and providing students with a chance to learn alternate techniques for coping with problem situations. The exercises then either further illustrated material presented in the lecturette or facilitated students working on personal issues generated by the lecture or group discussion.

Initially, the program was developed for the sixth grade. It was then modified and adapted for use with the third grade. Each session was oriented toward the older elementary school child. The same session was then adjusted in an attempt to make it relevant for younger students.

## MEASUREMENT

Prior to the initiation of and at the end of the program all students were administered a sociometric test. The particular test given was a modified version of Haskell's (1972, p. 31) test with the three criteria questions reading as follows:

1. The persons I would choose to be my closest friends are:
2. The persons I would choose to do classroom work with are:
3. The persons I would choose to play with are:

The total score on each criterion was computed by tallying the number of times a student's choice was actually reciprocated. For example, if on question number one a student selected five persons and actually only three of them reciprocated (chose him) the student received a score of three. Therefore, scores represented the number of mutual choices.

Essentially, the researchers sought to improve the sociometric status of the pupils. Sociometric status was defined by the person's scores on each of the three criteria. A high score meant that an individual had many of his

choices reciprocated and thus was interpreted as indicative of high sociometric status. A low score was interpreted as low sociometric status.

It was postulated that students participating in the pilot program would have a significant increase in the number of mutual choices between test administrations while the control group would not show significant gains. Therefore, it was hypothesized that the experimental groups would yield significant increases in sociometric status as compared to the control groups.

The sociometric test results were statistically analyzed with a multivariate test, the Hotelling's  $T^2$ . It was assumed that the three criteria items were logically interrelated and a statistical test was needed that would account for interactions or correlations (covariance) between items.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the  $T^2$  for the sixth grade confirmed the hypothesis at the .10 level. The experimental group did in fact yield a significant increase in reciprocal choices across the three criteria. As a group, the sixth grade children exposed to the program did significantly increase in sociometric status as compared to the control group.

However, there was an absence of significant results with the third grade students. The lack of significant findings appeared in part to be due to difficulties in adapting and modifying a program that was originally constructed for older children. The program was not adequately geared to fit the cognitive development, emotional maturity and behavioral control level of third graders. The time factor may also account for the lack of significant findings. Perhaps conducting the sessions twice a week would increase learning. Certainly future work would be needed to further refine and develop a program that is relevant to the third grade.

Many indirectly measured qualitative changes were observed by the group leaders and reported by teachers (and some parents). The children became more direct in their communications rather than being dishonest and circuitous in making their needs and feelings known. The number of negative strokes decreased while the frequency of positive strokes increased. Students began to make formal contracts with each other. Classmates began to accept isolates and rejectees and included them in various activities. And, finally, there seemed to be a definite increase in respect for individual differences.

## CONCLUSIONS

The results of this project demonstrated that clinical concepts and techniques can be adapted for use with non-problematic children. The group methods used in this study did aid in the improvement and expansion of

social relationships. Group techniques such as these can be a part of a preventative approach to community mental health. Teachers could very easily be trained in the use of techniques similar to those developed for this pilot project and integrate them into the regular program. Such an approach may not only help prevent future disorders with children but may also help them enrich their relationships. It may also help teachers to become more aware of their own impact in the classrooms.

Educators are learning that the classroom is not only a place where cognitive abilities are developed but also an environment in which significant social and emotional learning occurs. Hopefully this study will provide some inroads into and impetus for the development of other group approaches oriented toward preventative mental health.

#### REFERENCES

- Haskell, M. *An Introduction to Socioanalysis*. Long Beach, California: California Institute of Socioanalysis, 1972.
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