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ABSTRACT

The basic purpose of this study was to explore the effectiveness of using trained peers to lead small process groups in freshman orientation. The College and University Environment Scale (CUES) was the basic instrument used to determine whether perceptions of the college campus climate differed after an alternate freshman orientation program. Subjects were 250 college freshmen enrolled in a freshman orientation program in Oklahoma. The findings indicated that the experience of participating in a small group led by a trained peer did not change the perceptions of the freshman in such a way as to be observed on the CUES. The conclusion was reached that the attempted orientation procedures did not make a significant difference on the variables of freshman life as measured. The need to consider the results of this study with the purpose of ongoing evaluation of programs was recommended. (Author)

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PEER LED PROCESS GROUPS IN
FRESHMAN ORIENTATION

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is a report related to the USOE-funded research project being conducted at East Central State College, Ada, Oklahoma.

The experimental project has three basic functions: (1) The determination of the effect the present orientation course has upon freshman; (2) the evaluation of the effectiveness of a training program designed for upperclassmen in developing skills as group leaders; and (3) to ascertain whether the use of these peer leaders is a more effective approach in assisting students in developing competence in adjusting to college than is the information-centered, professionally taught orientation approach. Although promising similar approaches have been attempted at other colleges such as reported by Warren (1), Reiter (2), Kronovet (3), and O'Banion (4), these approaches have been either subject matter oriented, problem-centered, and/or handled by professionally trained staff; such as, counselors. This project considers a different aspect in that peers with minimal training are used in a group dynamics or process approach.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND OBJECTIVES

There is increasing evidence that there is significant waste of human resources in higher education, especially at the freshman class level (5). The high attrition rate is a commonly cited example of this problem. Other indications include campus tensions (6), an increasing incidence of reported feelings of alienation, and indecisiveness regarding appropriate and adequate academic roles.

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Even a cursory examination of the literature relating to the curriculum of secondary and higher education reveals a majority of the experiences to be oriented toward intellectual facts and information, subject matter content and understandings of things rather than toward people and understandings of self. In other words, there has been an emphasis on the cognitive domain at the expense of the affective domain. This investigation has as its overriding objective the involvement of students in a learning experience in leadership training reflecting the democratic ideal and the opportunity to provide an educational vehicle relevant in purpose to meeting the needs of today's college and university students. The specific areas investigated are the cumulative grade point at the end of the first semester, the retention data, the perceptions of the college campus atmosphere or climate, the reported acceptance of perceived self and others, the reported orientation attitude and the changes in the group leaders as a result of the training and group leading experiences.

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

Activity 1

Prior to the fall semester of 1971, upper-classmen were selected from the various departments' recommendations, the several social organizations, and other campus organizations.

Activity 2

Selection of peer group leaders from this training program was determined by the use of a scale using Acceptance of Perceived Self and Others and Rokeach's Dogmatism Scale. Those upper-classmen selected to lead groups of freshmen enrolled in an appropriate seminar course and met weekly with the director and/or co-director of the project for concurrent training, supervision, and support throughout the duration of the study.

Activity 3

A program consisting of training in small group dynamics; such as, group development, group roles, observer techniques, role playing, and other specialized procedures

were conducted prior to the beginning of the experimental period.

Activity 4

The freshmen orientation classes for fall 1971 were divided into three groups. One group serving as the control group was small in number and was randomly excused from any organized orientation program except for the administration of the evaluation instrumentation.

The second section was presented the information-centered approach via large class and video-taped lecture-discussion methods. This section of the freshmen orientation class was instructed by the regular freshmen orientation professional staff, as in previous semesters.

The third section was enrolled in freshmen orientation led by upper-classmen trained for this purpose. These groups functioned in a group dynamics fashion with no emphasis upon subject matter. The structure was such that information, facts, and subject matter was of secondary importance, not planned into the program.

Rather, these peer led groups functioned in a developmental fashion using the techniques the upper-classmen learned in the preciously described training program.

Activity 5

The leaders were randomly assigned to their groups. The freshmen were randomly assigned to either the control or to one of the experimental groups in an appropriate fashion.

Activity 6

The peer led groups met two hours weekly with the leaders for eight weeks emphasizing sensitivity to feelings, group leadership, group belongingness, and communications.

Activity 7

The evaluation procedures used to determine the effect of this study upon the freshmen included a post only administration of the College and University Environment

Scales, second edition, that has five basic scales and two new sub-scales that are validated upon recent data upon national college and university norms as well as upon norms specifically concerning small and medium sized teacher-education colleges.

Activity 8

At the end of the first semester total grade points were computed for all freshmen by the use of computer and the AOV test was used to determine the significance of difference between the experimental and control groups.

Activity 9

At the beginning of the spring semester of 1972, registration data was compared to determine the returning enrollment of the fall of 1971 freshmen by experimental and control group analysis. A Chi-square technique was used to determine the significance of difference.

FINDINGS

When the data was analyzed, one of the first variables was the cumulative grade point averages of the members of the three freshmen groups. There was no significant difference indicated among any of the two experimental groups or the control group.

During the spring 1972 semester the enrollment records were checked to determine the enrollment of the three groups. There was no significant difference in the enrollment of the members of the three groups.

The perceptions of the college campus atmosphere was determined by the reports marked on the CUES (College and University Environment Scale). Upon analysis comparing the reports of the three groups, one scale revealed significant differences among the sub-scales.

On the Propriety Scale, significant difference was obtained between the traditional orientation class and the small process groups, in favor of the traditional orientation class ($F = 3.43; .025 ; p .05$).

CONCLUSIONS

1. When compared to the control group the data indicate that neither the traditional orientation class or the small process groups have a significant impact of freshmen grades or re-enrollment for the second semester.
2. Further analysis of the data reveals one area of significant difference of perception of college and campus. The traditional orientation class scored higher on the Propriety Scale of the CUES.

Evidently the goals of that class to communicate the functions, rules, and regulations of the college were reported.

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ATTITUDINAL CHANGES RELATED TO
HELPING AND/OR BEING HELPED IN
SMALL PROCESS FRESHMAN ORIENTATION GROUPS
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This portion of the study deals with attitudinal changes on the part of the freshman in small process orientation groups and these changes in the leaders or facilitators of the groups. Berger's Acceptance of Perceived Self and Others and Reiter's Orientation Attitude Scale were administered to the freshman at the end of the eight-week orientation semester. The research design involved random selection of the experimental, traditional, and control groups, with testing at the end of the orientation class only. A pre-post design was not used because of the short time involved and the possible directional effects of testing in such a short period. also, it was anticipated that students would become satiated with so much testing over such a short period of time.

A pre-post design was used on the leaders with the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale and the Rokeach Dogmatism Scale. These instruments were used in the selection process as well as in evaluation changes.

FINDINGS

An analysis of variance technique was used on the Berger total scale ($F = 0.431$), expressed acceptance of others ($F = 0.0816$), and acceptance of perceived self ($F = 0.3564$), for the experimental, ($N = 74$), traditional, ($N = 143$), and control ($N = 36$) groups. This means that no significant changes occurred which were measured by the Berger Scale.

An analysis of variance technique was also used on the Reiter Orientation Attitude Scale relative to the experimental, traditional and control groups. An F ratio of 4.1879 was obtained which is significant at the .05 level. A t -test revealed a significant difference between experimental and control groups in favor of the control group.

Analysis of variance was also computed on the six sub-scales of the Reiter. Three of these sub-scales yielded significant variance. On the dependency sub-scale, an F ratio of 5.5535 was obtained which is significant at the .005 level. Through the use of the t-test, a significant difference was revealed between the experimental and traditional groups in favor of the traditional group. Also, a t-test revealed a significant difference between experimental and control groups in favor of the control group.

On the maturity sub-scale of the Reiter, an F ratio of 5.1335 was obtained which is significant at the .01 level. When t-tests were computed a significant difference between experimental and control groups in favor of the control group and a significant difference between traditional and control groups in favor of the control group were obtained.

The intensity sub-scale of the Reiter revealed a variance significant near the .05 level (F= 3.03). Again t-tests revealed difference between the experimental and control group in favor of the control group.

Three of the Reiter Sub-scales did not reveal significant variance. These include conformity (F= 0.9635), learning (F= 1.1132) and social activity (F= 0.9598).

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

These data suggest that no significant changes occurred in the self-concept of either the helped or helpers. The short period of time for the orientation course and the fact that it was required probably account for this finding. The surprising finding regarding the freshman involves the Reiter Orientation Attitude Scale. This suggests that the individuals who have no freshman orientation course are more mature, more independent and have more intense relationships, than individuals in either small group peer led program or in the large teacher led class. There is a finding in psychotherapy research that therapy with an inexperienced counselor may result in the individual getting worse rather than better. It is likely that the brief training program for

leaders was insufficient to produce a group leader capable of facilitating a group process that would result in positive changes. Also, it is possible that the time was so short that there was time enough to raise questions but not enough time to resolve them. It is possible that the negative changes reflect temporary regression. Also, there is a possible explanation in the learning principle of expectancy. Students in an orientation course may expect their teachers or group leaders to do something to them to make them adjust to college which might tend to delay their adjustment. Students not in an orientation class might rely more on themselves to become oriented which is what the present data suggest.

The present data indicate that the group leaders became more open as a result of their experiences. They did have more group experiences than the freshman and an opportunity to participate in "open groups" which should account for their changes toward a less dogmatic and more open approach.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The present data suggest that students who do not attend freshman orientation classes are more mature, less dependent, and have more intense interpersonal relationships than individuals who are exposed to either peer-led small process groups or traditional freshman orientation classes.
2. Leaders in small groups seem to become less dogmatic and more open as a result of training and experiences in small groups.

Reiter Orientation Scale--Intensity Subscale

Treatment Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
Experimental (N=74)	19.53	3.74
Traditional (N=143)	19.44	3.95
Control (N=36)	21.17	3.54

F Ratio = 3.03 P = .05

t-tests (1) significant difference between experimental and control groups in favor of control group. (2) significant difference between traditional and control groups in favor of control group.
