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ABSTRACT

To determine if a relationship exists between peer selection and success in the basic oral interpretation class, 98 subjects from eight introductory classes of oral interpretation were asked during a testing period to rank each other on the criterion of "Who would you like to work with on the next project in this class?" The ranking was facilitated by having each class member's name typed on a note card, and the subjects were asked to stack the cards in rank order. The ranking took place four weeks before the end of the semester so the development of social interaction from the beginning of the semester would be stabilized. Results showed that a significant relationship exists between peer group rank and course grade if the interaction between the structure is at a high level. (SW)

PEER SELECTION AND SUCCESS IN THE BEGINNING ORAL INTERPRETATION COURSE

by

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Understanding the success or failure of a student in an Oral Interpretation class depends upon many factors. One of the important variables is the social interaction between the students in each class. The amount of reinforcement, either positive or negative, received by a student from his peers would seem to be a powerful influence. The purpose of this study is to clarify part of the complex social interaction that influences a student's success or failure in the first Oral Interpretation class.

The use of peer selection, which includes peer ranks, ratings, and nominations to understand social behavior, has become a promising measuring instrument. The number of successful studies with peer selection has created much interest in several disciplines. The studies with leadership in the military have proven extremely valuable. Hollander,[1]

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[1] E. P. Hollander, Leaders, Groups, and Influence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

Ricciuti,[2] Dugan,[3] McClure and Dailey,[4] and Halpin[5] are most noteworthy. A recent study by Mayfield demonstrated the usefulness of peer nominations in business, when a reasonable rate of successful insurance salesmen were selected by their peers while still in training.[6] Other past research indicating a relationship between peer selection and future success include Mayfield,[7] Grande,[8] Roadman,[9] and Weitz.[10] Hence, in both leadership and occupational success, peer selection has proven to be highly related. In higher education Titus,[11] in his study with college freshmen, found significant correlations between peer nominations and grade point average.

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[2] H.N. Ricciuti, "Ratings of Leadership Potential at the United States Naval Academy and Subsequent Officer Performance," Journal of Applied Psychology, 39 (1955), 194-199.

[3] R. D. Dugan, "Comparison of Evaluation of B-29 Crews in Training and in Combat," American Psychologist, 8 (1953), 343-344.

[4] George E. McClure and J. T. Dailey, "Research on Criteria of Officer Effectiveness," USAF HRRS Research Bulletin, 51-8 (May 1951), 4-18.

[5] Arnold U. Halpin, "The Leadership Behavior and Combat Performance of Airplane Commanders," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 41 (1949), 19-22.

[6] Eugene C. Mayfield, "Value of Peer Nominations in Predicting Life Insurance Sales Performance," Journal of Applied Psychology, 56 (August 1972), 319-323.

[7] Eugene C. Mayfield, "Management Selection--Buddy Nominations Revisited," Personnel Psychology, 23 (1970), 377-391.

[8] Paul P. Grande, "The Use of Self and Peer Ratings in a Peace Corps Training Program," The Vocational Guidance Quarterly, 14 (1966), 245.

[9] Harry E. Roadman, "An Industrial Use of Peer Ratings," Journal of Applied Psychology, 48 (1964), 211-214.

[10] J. Weitz, "Selecting Supervisors with Peer Ratings," Personnel Psychology, 11 (1958), 25-38.

[11] H. Edwin Titus, "The Use of Peer Nominations as a Predictor of Academic Success in College," The Journal of Experimental Education, 37 (Summer 1969), 63-66.

Similar correlations were discovered by Wiggins, Blackburn and Hackman at the graduate level.[12] These studies indicate that peer selection in the college environment is related to the success of the students.

A study by Eisenman and Robinson found a significant correlation between peer ratings and creativity, indicating the possiblity that peer selection in the humanities may be used to better understand the success and failure of students.[13] The development of creativity, or at least the cultivation of existing talent, could be linked with the communication between students in Oral Interpretation classes. The commonly used dependency rationale seems to apply in this case; it is reasoned that students in the classroom are dependent to some degree upon each other when making such decisions as what selections to read, determination of how the instructor will react, and how other students will view a particular reading or its interpretation. From this rationale and past research, it would seem that peer selection and success in an Oral Interpretation class should be closely related. The objective of this study, then, becomes: to determine if a relationship exists between peer selection and success in the basic Oral Interpretation class.

PROCEDURES

Eight introductory classes of Oral Interpretation provided the 98 subjects used in the fall of 1972. The population of the eight classes

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[12]Nancy Wiggins, Margaret Blackburn and J. Richard Hackman, "Prediction of First Year Graduate Success in Psychology: Peer Ratings," The Journal of Education Research, 63 (October 1969), 81-85.

[13]Russell Eisenman and Nancy Robinson, "Peer-, Self-, and Test Ratings of Creativity," Psychological Reports, 23 (1968), 471-474.

seemed typical for the basic Oral Interpretation course, with the majority of students comprised of freshmen or sophomores. Most of the subjects were English, Speech, Drama, or Education majors; and, of course, there were about 20 per cent more females than males. During the testing period, each individual per class was asked to rank the other members of the class on the criterion of "Who would you like to work with on the next project in this class?" The ranking was facilitated by having each class member's name typed on a note card, and the subjects were asked to stack the cards in rank order. The ranking in the eight classes took place four weeks before the end of the semester. This time period was chosen so the development of social interaction from the beginning of the semester would be stabilized, and yet enough time would remain in the semester to provide realism for the peer ranking.

After the peer ranks were acquired from the subjects, they were summed for each individual, and an overall peer ranking was established for each subject within the particular class. When the semester was completed, the individual grades were used as the measure of class success. To facilitate a degree measure, the total points accumulated by the student at the end of the class were summed and ranked. Thus, the two sets of ranked data, peer group ranks and grade ranks, were ready for analysis. A Spearman RHO was calculated to answer the question of the relationship between peer rank and the success in each class.[14]

RESULTS

The results indicated significant correlations in five of the eight classes. (See Table 1) Two of the correlations reached the .01 level,

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[14] George A. Ferguson, Statistical Analysis in Psychology and Education (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971), pp. 305-308.

and three attained the .05 level of significance. Because of the three low correlations, the results appeared confusing and indicated that the relationship between peer rank and grade was not generalizable to all classes tested. To clarify the confusion, the rationale was re-examined, since the obvious variable--size of class--did not seem to relate to the three low correlations. It became apparent that the variable with the highest probability to reduce the correlations was the level of interaction between the students. If a reduced amount of communication flowed between the students, then the dependency factor would not be high. In other words, each student would be making decisions related to the class based on his own perspective of the information received, and would not

Table 1

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN PEER GROUP RANK AND FINAL GRADE RANK

CLASS	n	CORRELATION
1	10	.61*
2	13	.32
3	11	.19
4	9	.75*
5	13	.21
6	15	.68**
7	11	.62*
8	16	.76**

**Significant at .01 level

* Significant at .05 level

depend upon his classmates to provide additional information. Thus, a post hoc hypothesis was created; the classes with the lowest interaction level would also be the classes that had the lowest correlations between peer group rank and grade rank. If the interaction level was low, the peer group ranks would be somewhat random, since stable ranks would depend upon a certain amount of information communicated among the students. To test the post hoc hypothesis, the instructors (not knowing the results) were asked, after the semester was terminated, to rank their classes on the amount of interaction occurring within each class. Also, on a 1-10 scale (10 being the highest) the instructors were asked to judge the amount of interaction in each class compared to other basic Oral Interpretation classes they had taught.

As can be seen in Table 2, the classes with the lowest correlations were ranked the lowest by the instructors on the interaction variable, and lowest in comparison with other Oral Interpretation classes taught. The instructors also indicated that in two of the three low correlated groups, they observed at least one social isolate, as compared with no isolates in the highly correlated groups. The results of the study now became clearer and a conclusion could be reached. A significant relationship exists between peer group rank and course grade if the interaction between the students is at a high level.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that in Oral Interpretation classes, instructors should take into account the social interaction between students for two reasons. First, social acceptance is related

Table 2

INSTRUCTOR'S RANK OF CLASS INTERACTION LEVEL

	CLASS	n	RANK	COMPARISON TO OTHER CLASSES TAUGHT	CORRELATION
Instructor 1	1	10	2	7	.61
	2	13	4	6	.32
	3	11	3	6	.19
	4	9	1	9	.75
Instructor 2	5	13	4	3	.21
	6	15	2	6	.68
	7	11	3	5	.62
	8	16	1	9	.76

to the success of each individual if the class interacts within at a high level. The instructor who is aware of this relationship can take positive action to encourage the student that is having difficulty in the class to communicate and develop improved social relationships with his classmates. This should, according to the findings of this study, improve his chance for success in the class. Secondly, the importance of developing interaction between the students has been agreed upon by teachers for some time, and this study provides support for that tenet. In cases where low interaction seemed to occur, isolates developed and the relationship between peer and grade was reduced; this simply adds up

to a less predictable class for the instructor to deal with. Also, a higher degree of uncertainty for the instructors and students would seem to exist. If uncertainty is at a higher level where poor interaction is occurring, then a conclusion of insufficient learning certainly would seem valid.

The results of the study seem to provide some directions for the practical application of peer group rank in the classroom. If, after further testing, peer group rank and course grade proved to be reliable, it would seem that student grading could be used effectively. By using student grading for all or part of the final grade, the interaction level in the class should be heightened because of increased dependency upon the student's classmates. Also, the use of peer group rank would give the instructor a complete map of the social relationships taking place in the class; and some difficulties in the class could be forecasted. An example would be to determine early in the semester who the social isolates are; then enough time would remain in the term for the instructor and student to work toward a more acceptable social position for the isolated student. In general, it seems that peer group selection, in any form, provides the instructor with evaluation other than performance and test grades, which could be added to information available and used at the instructor's discretion.

Further research needs to be conducted in the area of peer selection and Oral Interpretation. Several variations of it (the present study) would seem to be needed, including the determination of variables that develop the high interaction in Oral Interpretation classes, and, conversely,

the variables which detract from high class interaction. The methodological development of the peer group selection also needs to be studied with Oral Interpretation classes. Longitudinal studies tapping peer group selection at various times during the semester, and the relationship to course grade per time need to be investigated. When and with what effect peer group selection takes place should answer many questions in regard to the social interaction development of Oral Interpretation classes. Finally, determination of the social reaction differences between Oral Interpretation classes and other courses could be accomplished with peer group selection. The results would be invaluable for the Oral Interpretation instructor in light of the differences in content and teaching methods used in Oral Interpretation classes.