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ABSTRACT

A sociodrama workshop was used to address diversity issues on a residential college campus experiencing problems with prejudice and the acceptance of diversity. Fifteen members of the community participated and a survey was used to determine the problems. A sociodrama exercise helped members understand what it was like to be discriminated against. Based on a post-session survey, the group activities were found to be helpful in providing insight and support for those with concerns about diversity. The results suggest that sociodrama can be helpful in addressing social problems such as prejudice in a residential college community. (JDM)

Educational Methods for Addressing Diversity Issues:
The Use of Sociodramatic Techniques

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2001

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Abstract

Sociodrama is the use of the drama/action and discussion to address collective role issues in a community setting. A sociodrama session allows participants to explore different roles and status in society, explore problems, and discuss possible ways of improving the problems. The methods of sociodrama, which are similar to psychodrama, are based on the methods developed by Jacob Moreno to address social problems. Stages of sociodrama include warm-up, action, and discussion and its three goals include catharsis, insight, and role training. This particular study explored the use of a two-hour sociodrama workshop addressing diversity issues and concerns on a residential college campus that has had problems with prejudice and concerns with acceptance of diversity. The session consisted of 15 members of the college community. A survey was used to establish the problems and concerns on the campus surrounding diversity and was followed by a brief warm-up. An exercise was used to help members understand what it was like to be discriminated against and a discussion period followed. Based on post-session survey, the group was found to be helpful in providing insight, a forum, and support for those with concerns about diversity. Based on the results, it was found that sociodrama can be helpful in addressing social problems such as prejudice in a residential college community.

The Use of Sociodramatic Methods to Address Diversity Issues
on a Residential College Community

Sociodrama is another method of combining therapy and drama, but used for different reasons than psychodrama. While psychodrama addresses and acts out specific situations and scenarios of clients, sociodrama addresses community and group issues. More specifically, “While psychodrama is for private components...sociodrama is for collective role aspects that people share (Sternberg & Garcia 1989).

Moreno developed sociodrama as part of his interest in sociometry. Sociometry is the “measurement of interpersonal and inner-group choices in which one can explore people’s attraction, repulsions, and feelings of neutrality (Sternberg & Garcia 1989).” In Victorian Vienna Moreno became interested in helping young woman that had turned to prostitution as a mean for survival. He began to hold group meetings where the women could meet and discuss issues that they collectively faced, particularly how they were perceived and treated in society. In addition to sharing and discussing common problems and receiving support, Moreno would help in educating the women on things such venereal diseases and how to seek legal rights. In this project, Moreno began to develop ideas about group work and to hypothesize about the relation of collective and private roles. As Moreno became interested in changing theatre to become something effective and meaningful, he began to combine sociometry with drama. He gathered social researchers and trained them in the method of spontaneity and improvisation. He saw sociometry and sociodrama as a way of “promoting dyadic and group cohesion, which in turn influences all other aspects of group and societal life (Moreno, 1953 as cited in

Gudner & Stine- Winestock 1995).” Throughout the 1920’s, Moreno began to develop methods of sociodrama, which combines sociometry, psychology, and improvisational drama. Throughout the twentieth century, many researchers and students inspired by Moreno’s work have continued to practice and expand on his theories.

According to Rory Remer (1995), a counseling psychologist at the University of Kentucky, states the Moreno’s methods suggest three elements: choice making, warming up, and action emphasis. Much like psychodrama, sociodrama groups follow the same session structure. Every session begins with a warm-up. However, sociodrama warm-ups are usually more focused towards bonding the group as a social community of some kind or to facilitate thought towards social issues. The warm-up usually focuses the group and allows the members to decide what issues they want to address in the sociodrama. The action part of a sociodrama offers a place where employees can recreate situations that are problematic at work, volunteers can create scenes where they can cope with situations that they have faced, or students can address issues that pertain to their educational community. The action allows members to express and act out common issues within the their particular social group in a setting completely separate from the actual issues and setting. The sharing part of the sociodrama helps the group discuss the action and how they can integrate change outside the group. The session is not meant to solve problems as much as it is away of evoking positive change to building a healthier more cohesive social setting, “process, not product, is paramount sociodrama (Sernberg and Garcia 1989).”

However, there are three specific goals that a sociodrama tries to achieve. Like psychodrama, sociodrama should also help the members reach a catharsis. The catharsis in a sociodrama is a purging of emotions that should allow participants to vent thoughts and feelings that have gone unexpressed. The second goal is insight. A group should recognize something about the particular issues that are being addressed and the enactor should gain insight about their role within their own social group. Insight gained during the session is important for the initiation of change. The third goal of sociodrama is role training. The participants are given the opportunity to practice roles outside the actual situation. A sociodrama offers a safe environment in which members can learn how to act in unfamiliar and uncomfortable situations with the benefit of feedback and a second chance to try again.

Sociodrama is particularly useful within institutions and specific communities that consist of a diverse group of people. One institutional setting that there has been a movement to incorporate sociodramatic methods is the educational system. Sociodrama can be used to both teach and build cohesion within the classroom. One of the first places to incorporate sociodrama, sociometry and psychodrama within learning setting was Saint Elizabeth's Hospital in Washington, DC. Psychologists and researchers such as Claire Altshuler and William Picon (1980) incorporated many of Moreno's theories into a class known as the social living class. The purpose of this class was for children to learn and explore roles for situations that occur in social living. The sociodramatic sessions that took place within the class were based on the assumption that teachers and students have fixed and inflexible perceptions of each other that inhabit a trusting

relationship. For example students within the hospital saw teachers and adults as the “villain” and therefore would choose not to interact or cooperate with the hospital and educational staff. The class encourages students to role-play as doctors, teachers, etc. to learn what they do and how they might perceive things and also taught students mirror each other’s behavior so that children could see how they act from outside themselves. In addition to helping the student-teacher relationship, the social living class also helped students to learn and practice how to interact with other kids despite initial perceptions and to learn to be more sensitive to people’s feelings. What the hospital staff found was that the “social living class has shown to be a viable, well received model advancing Moreno’s vision of the integration of his methods in schooling (Altshuler & Picon 1980).” The eleven-year success of the Saint Elizabeth example was a positive implication on the use of sociodrama in educational settings.

Within the college or university setting, sociodrama can also be used to create a unified community in which students of diverse backgrounds are more likely to interact. In the 1970’s, a study was done by Getrude Maskowitz (1974) of Temple University to explore the use sociodrama and role-play in higher education. Prior to her study, although there were some done on the use of role-play in elementary and secondary education, there was little research done its use in higher education. She used role-play as a way of preparing education students and allowing them to address problems that they were having in their student teaching. She found that the students express and see one another’s problems and therefore could identify with and help each other. One example given was a male student teacher that, while demonstrating how he greeted students

outside his classroom, realized that his behavior towards females was distinctly different from how he greeted the male students. While he would talk about sports and TV with the males, he would make compliments about how the girls looked as they walked in the door. This behavior had led to several girls expressing a crush on him. The role-play was not only useful in helping him recognize the error in his behavior, but allowed him to practice equal and appropriate behavior towards both sexes and avoid a potentially dangerous situation. In addition to using it to help her students, Maskowitz also found role-play useful in helping her colleagues during teacher in-services. For example, the teachers would role play as slow students to feel what it is like to be in the students' role. Exercises such as this helped in increasing sensitivity to students of different levels of learning. Her experience of using role play in the university setting helped her reach the conclusion that role play "seems to hold a great deal of promise and is a concrete way of transferring what one knows into what one does (Maskowitz, 1974)."

Sociometry and sociodramatic methods have also been helpful in encouraging interactions between culturally diverse students in the university setting. In a study done by Dunstone and Zea (1995), they attempted to help dental students from a very culturally diverse setting to become more socially and professionally integrated. The hypothesis that Dunstone and Zea wanted to explore was that "the higher the level of academic and social integration on the part of the student, the greater the student's subsequent commitment to the institution... (1995)." The study implemented four stages of progression in social interaction including stereotypical, typical, personal, and intimate. The group first introduced each other in terms of learning basic background

information such as cultural background. The first stage was to help the each member of the group begin to look beyond gender, age, and cultural assumptions. The next stage helped students become aware of individual ways of life such as occupation, where one another lived, and how they celebrated holidays. The third stage encouraged the students to learn about each other's thoughts and feelings about specific things. During the fourth stage, the students expressed how they felt towards their interactions between their partners. The group allowed the students from diverse backgrounds a place to practice social interaction beyond their own cultural group. Although there was little effect found within the statistical data, many students and teachers reported a more unified class setting while students stated that they were more open to socially integrating themselves with those from different cultures.

Specific exercises can also be useful in groups based on action methods. In a Brazilian University, Monteiro and de Carvalho (1990) used several types of exercises to help their students in role-play and in action. One exercise used that was designed by Moreno was "living newspaper." This exercise involves showing newspaper articles to the group members and the group acting out the news. During this group a newspaper was presented to the group that evoked much discomfort. Most of the articles within the paper dealt with the political upheaval that had recently occurred where Brazil had transferred from a dictatorship to a democracy. The reason that this was a difficult scenario to address was that the citizens were very adamantly split on their feelings around the situation. However, the group did eventually begin to act out and discuss the articles on the political situation and were able to begin to understand each other's point

of view. The study found that many of the students were able to work out conflicts and accept one another despite their different views and many of the students commented that the sociodrama group should be part of the curriculum (Monteiro & de Carvalho 1990).

Outside the classroom sociodrama can also be helpful in addressing community issues and social problems, particularly those surrounding ignorance to those from other backgrounds. As a colleague of Moreno's said in response towards Moreno's original paper, community based group can address the fact that "we do classify people on a very crude basis, without any very definite underlying goal except a purely practical one (White 1933)." Sternberg and Gracia (1989) dedicate a section of their book, *Sociodrama: Who's in your shoes*, on the use sociodrama in addressing prejudice and ignorance. Groups can be helpful both in crisis situations and in setting where tensions consistently exist. The group should first be introduced to factual information if it is a situation where the members are unaware of the information. Then the group should be lead to think about how they and their community look at diversity or contribute to prejudice. Particularly, the group should learn to recognize and gain insight on stereotypes and hoe prejudice feels. Another important piece to a group that Sternberg and Garcia emphasizes is that there are many different kinds of prejudices towards a variety of people based on things like race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, illness, and many more that we rarely think of existing. One example of an exercise that was given in the book involves prejudice towards AIDS patients. In this example group, participants would explore their feeling towards AIDS patient, particularly their assumptions and any discomfort. Exercises could help people understand what it is like

to have the disease, to know what is like to tell others, and to deal with stereotypes.

Another example of given was to help people understand what it is like to be a woman getting an abortion. The exercise involved having people “walk in” to an abortion clinic while people shouted hurtful remarks and having members explore what it is like to make the decision to have an abortion. This role-play would allow people whom are not open to abortion rights at least understand what a woman in that position may go through. The goal of groups that address social issues or prejudice is that the members will gain insight on the issues, learn from each other, change their own negative behavior, and incorporate what they learn from the group to how they interact in the community.

This study looked at the use of sociodrama to address issues involving diversity on a residential college campus. The campus where this study took place is primarily made of white American students. Although there are several groups celebrating different cultures, races, religions, and sexual orientation, there have been some concerns about acceptance and interaction of different aspects of diversity. This problem has been exhibited from several incidences of verbal abuse of students because of their race and two hate crimes involving homosexual students in the past three years. In addition conducting a two-hour sociodrama workshop focusing on diversity, the study included a survey to establish the group members’ perceptions of diversity acceptance and interaction and the campus. The goals of this study was to look what concerns that students, faculty, and staff have involving diversity, what it is like to be treated differently based on perceptions and stereotypes through activities, to openly share and

address the issues, and come up with ideas for improvement within the campus community.

Method

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of thirteen students, one faculty member, and one staff member from a residential liberal arts college. Of the students there were four freshman, four sophomores, four juniors, and one senior. There were nine females and six males in the group. Two participants were African American, two were of Indian descent, and eleven were Caucasian.

Apparatus

This study utilized two surveys. The first survey was an 18-item questionnaire on opinions of, encounters, and involvement with diversity issues on campus. The second survey was a quality of program survey consisting of 11 questions. The “Labels” exercise from the book *Sociodrama: Who's in your shoes* (Sterberg & Garcia 1989) was used as the model for the group activity.

Methods

Advertising, e-mail and fliers were used to attract the campus community to participate in a sociodrama exercise and discussion that would explore campus diversity issues and concerns. Fifteen people volunteered to participate in the group. Upon entrance of the session, each participant was handed the diversity questionnaire and asked

to complete it. Once the pre-session surveys were completed and the group was established, an introduction and ice breaker were used as a group warm-up. The members were asked to say their name and what kind of animal they would be and why. After each member was introduced, the exercise was begun. A structured exercise was chosen over a completely group run and completely spontaneous one due to the fact that it was a short one-session workshop and because of the lack of a certified sociodramatist. The “Labels” exercise involved each member receiving a sticky tab with a specific label that told the rest of the group how to treat them. The member was told not to look at the tab. The labels included “hate me”, “fear me”, “agree with me”, “adore me”, and a variety of others. Each member was then asked to walk around the circle and try to talk to each member while showing each person his or her label. The group was told to respond to the person based on what the label told them to do. Once each person had gone, they were asked to guess what label they had and how it felt to be treated in that particular way. Following the exercise, some questions were proposed linking the exercise to diversity on campus. The group then engaged in a discussion of diversity issues, which was monitored by the group leader. A second activity was planned to follow but, because of time constraints, it was omitted from the session. The quality of session surveys were then handed out and collected within a week. The data was then entered into SPSS for analysis.

Results

Pre-Session

The results of the pre-session survey found that, based on the participants, the concern about diversity on campus exists and for valid reasons. Thirteen people, 87 %, stated that the campus was only a little open to diversity (Table 1). . In terms of specific aspects of diversity, 10 people, 67%, stated that the campus is only a little open to race. Nine people, 60%, of the participants said that the campus is open to different religions while one participant stated the campus was “not at all” open to all regions. In terms of sexual orientation, seven people, 47%, stated that campus is “not at all” accepting, while seven participants, 47%, stated the campus is “a little” open. Seven people, 47%, stated that the campus was “a little” open to mental and physical exceptionality while the other eight participants, 54% stated that the campus is either “adequately” or “very much so” open. Only two people, 13%, stated that the campus was “a little” open to gender, while thirteen participants, 87%, said that the campus is either “adequately” or “very much so” open. In terms of incidents, nine participants, 60%, stated that they had been the victims of discrimination on campus (Table 2). Seven people, 47%, stated that they had been the victim of verbal attacks on campus based on an aspect of diversity, while 2 participants, 13%, stated that they been physically attacked based on an aspect of diversity (Table 3). Seven People, 47%, stated that there was a very good chance of hate crimes on campus, two people, 13%, stated that there was an “adequate” chance, five, 33%, said there a was little chance, and one, 7%, said there was no chance at all. When the participants were asked if there was enough action taken on campus to address diversity issues, four

people, 27%, said “not at all”, seven, 47%, said “a little”, three, 20%, said that there was “adequate” action taken, and one, 7%, said there was “very much” action taken.

Post-Session

According to the thirteen survey completed, the session was generally helpful in addressing diversity issues on campus. Four people, 33%, said that the group was very helpful, while six participants, 50%, said the experience was pretty helpful (Table 4). Five people, 42%, said that the session gave them better insight on diversity issues on campus, three people, 25% said that it gave them a fair amount of insight, and 4 people, 33%, said they had a little more insight (Table 5). Eight participants, 67%, sated that the activity was very helpful, three people, 25% said that it was fairly helpful, and one person, 8%, said it was a little helpful (Table 6). Six people, 50%, said the discussions were very helpful, five people, 42% said they were pretty helpful, and one person, 8%, said they were a little helpful (Table 7). When asked if the group leader was supportive, 11 participants, 92% said “very much so” and one person, 8%, said that the leader was pretty supportive. Eight people, 67% said that the leader was very helpful, three people, 25% said the leader was pretty helpful, while one person said the leader was a little helpful. Six participants, 50%, stated that sociodrama could be very helpful in addressing social problems, 4 people, 33% said it could be pretty helpful, and two people stated that it could be a little helpful. Seven participants, 58%, said that they would highly recommend a group like this to others, three people, 25, said they would recommend it “pretty much so”, while two people, 17% said they would recommend the group a little (Table 8).

Discussion

This study, for the most part, met the original expectations and goals. The pre-sessions survey indicated that there was a general concern about diversity issues on campus and that there were incidents to support these concerns. Many of the participants did feel that the campus was not very open to diversity in general and in terms of sexual orientation, race, religion, and exceptionality. It was also evident that there is a need for more measures to address diversity issues at the college. The fact that about half of the group had been the victim of verbal abuse based on an aspect of diversity and half had been discriminated against on campus is a supporting argument that prejudice and ignorance is a problem at the college. Although the number was small, the fact that two students had been physically attacked based on an aspect of diversity is also very alarming. Based on the sample group surveys, it was supported that the chosen that this particular campus does face problems with integration and acceptance of those from different backgrounds or lifestyles.

The use of sociodrama and discussion to address diversity issues was generally seen as effective and helpful. Most participants felt that session was an either very or pretty helpful and insightful experience. Although the group was very uncomfortable being labeled at times, they were able to experience what it is like for someone to be treated a certain way based on something other than their personality. The activity was particularly hard for those given a negative label such as “hate me” or “fear me”, but there was also some discomfort for those whom were overly respected. The group also had

difficulty in treating people a certain way and it made them uncomfortable that such treatment of people did really exist. One comment written on the post-session survey was “The group work/activity was amazingly effective in showing others what it is like to be discriminated against on the basis of stereotypes and prejudices.” Several members also stated that they thought sociodramatic activities should be implanted in the curriculum or during orientation. The questions about how the participants felt about the activity were extremely effective in facilitating a discussion about members’ concerns about the campus community, personal experiences, and thoughts of how things can change. While some participants had never experienced such treatment from the community, others’ could relate and give them more insight on how it feels to be discriminated against. Furthermore, group members whom were aware of discrimination and prejudices on campus became aware of challenges other groups face that they were not aware of.

While the group was generally effective in helping the participants learn what it is like to be judged based on labels or stereotypes, there are certain measures that should be taken to improve future groups. One thing that would help is having more people that better represent the entire campus. For the most part, the participants were somewhat involved in a diversity group or had some experience with prejudice on campus. As one participant stated, “you see the same faces at any form involving diversity.” It would be interesting to look at the effect of sociodrama with those unaware of diversity issues. In addition there should be more time allotted for the session. There was a second enactment planned after the discussion, but because of the intensity and length of the

discussion, there was no time for it. Longer session or more than one session would allow for more sociodramatic activities involving spontaneity and role training. However, scheduling sessions to be longer or for there to be more sessions can be challenging because on conflicts with other activities and schoolwork. Many participants needed to leave early for other commitments, therefore taking away from the overall effectiveness of the session. An effective remedy may be to incorporate sessions within classes such as Sociology, Anthropology, education courses, or other course that may include diversity or to implement sessions with new student orientation. This allows allotted time for the activities in which the students are more obligated to be involved in and the goals of the group would reach more of the college population.

Overall, this study supports the use of sociodrama and discussion to address diversity issues on a residential campus that has a need for diversity awareness and better action to prevent acts of prejudice. Through action and discussion, the campus community can become more aware of existing problems, better understand how it feels to be discriminated against, and to explore possible ways of improving the problem.

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Tables

Table 1: how open do you feel the campus is to diversity

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid not at all	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
a little	13	86.7	86.7	93.3
adequately	1	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	
Total	15	100.0		

Table 2: have you ever been the victim of discrimination campus

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid no	6	40.0	40.0	40.0
yes	9	60.0	60.0	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	
Total	15	100.0		

Table 3: have you ever been verbally attacked on campus based on an aspect of diversity

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid no	8	53.3	53.3	53.3
yes	7	46.7	46.7	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	
Total	15	100.0		

have you ever been physically attacked on campus based on an aspect of diversity

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid no	13	86.7	86.7	86.7
yes	2	13.3	13.3	100.0
Total	15	100.0	100.0	
Total	15	100.0		

Table 4: overall, was this experience helpful

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	a little	2	16.7	16.7	16.7
	pretty much so	6	50.0	50.0	66.7
	very much so	4	33.3	33.3	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Total		12	100.0		

Table 5: did the meeting give you better insight on diversity issues on campus

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	a little	4	33.3	33.3	33.3
	pretty much so	3	25.0	25.0	58.3
	very much so	5	41.7	41.7	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Total		12	100.0		

Table 6: was the activity helpful

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	a little	1	8.3	8.3	8.3
	pretty much so	3	25.0	25.0	33.3
	very much so	8	66.7	66.7	100.0
	Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Total		12	100.0		

Table 7: were the discussions helpful to you

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid a little	1	8.3	8.3	8.3
pretty much so	5	41.7	41.7	50.0
very much so	6	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Total	12	100.0		

Table 8: would you recommend a group like this to others

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid a little	2	16.7	16.7	16.7
pretty much so	3	25.0	25.0	41.7
very much so	7	58.3	58.3	100.0
Total	12	100.0	100.0	
Total	12	100.0		



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