

Integration of Undergraduate and Graduate Education and Training in Group Dynamics and Psychodrama

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ABSTRACT. This paper discusses the integration of an undergraduate course in Group and Family Functioning with a graduate course in Facilitation in Group and Family Functioning. A description of the undergraduate course shows the use of sociometry in making small group selections and the use of psychodrama, sociodrama, and role play, along with group dynamics, to learn content. The description of the graduate course discusses how leaders are trained in group methods, their own group-learning process, and how supervision of their leadership of the undergraduate course is provided. Descriptions of the evaluation methods for each course and conclusions about the value of integrating graduate and undergraduate courses in group dynamics are presented.

THE USE OF PSYCHODRAMA or its methods in the teaching of individual, family, or group dynamics courses has been sparsely reported in the literature (Kranz & Huston, 1984; Naar 1974; Treadwell & Kumar, 1982; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Kranz & Houser, 1988). As more and more educators are exposed to the process of psychodrama, it is or will be used increasingly as a means of providing both a theoretical and experiential means of acquiring education and training in psychotherapeutic models and methods. An undergraduate course entitled Dynamics of Group and Family Functioning has been taught at The University of Guelph for the past 10 years, and a graduate course, Facilitation in Group and Family Functioning, has been taught for the past 6 years. This article describes the integration of these two courses and the use made of sociometry, psychodrama methods, and group dynamics.

Undergraduate Course Description

Dynamics of Group and Family Functioning is taught within the Department of Family Studies in the fourth year of the undergraduate curric-

ulum. This is a course designed to enable the student near the completion of his or her undergraduate education to examine self-development at the personal and professional level as well as to learn a systematic approach to family functioning and group-dynamics. It is a large class, ranging from 80 to 100 students. The class meets for 13 weeks during the fall semester, and the content of the class is designed to reflect both family and group concepts. The warming-up process to any learning event is the focus of the first class; this is followed by an examination of the experiential learning cycle and learning styles (Kolb, 1976). The third session focuses upon a systematic understanding of family and group dynamics (Satir, 1988; Jones, Barnlund, & Haiman, 1980). The following eight sessions are devoted to eight systemic issues: boundaries, power, feelings, communication, negotiation, task performance, contextual issues (space, time, and energy), and self-concept. The twelfth session deals with wholeness, integration, and authenticity of self in system. The final session has to do with endings.

The class meets for content input for 1½ hours in the evening. It is divided into two sections with half meeting for a 2-hour group experience following the input section and half having a 2-hour experience of group the following morning. During the class period, content is demonstrated through such action methods as role playing families for an understanding of systemic interaction; demonstration of boundaries showing those that are enmeshed, disengaged, or differentiated (Minuchin, 1974); power role plays, demonstrated by using different height factors; creating families with different communication styles (Satir, 1988); role playing negotiation, decision making, and problem-solving and action choices, and styles of ending or saying goodbye. Each class has a role play or mini-psychodrama to facilitate visual learning as well as cognitive learning. Members of the class are used in various roles and an effort is made to use different members throughout the time of the course.

For the first 3 weeks of the course, I meet with all the members in the evening section and the morning section. During that time, a number of interaction methods are used to help the group get to know one another, which lead to making sociometric choices at the end of the third week. Methods used include milling silently, making visual, auditory, and kinesthetic contact with each other as they learn names, and working in dyads, triads, and quadrads with structured exercises. Each student completes the Learning Style Inventory (Kolb, 1976). The students are then separated into groups according to learning style to discuss assets and liabilities with others. The students also report their sibling position and participate in a number of action sociograms before they complete a structured sociometric test. The six potential group leaders are introduced at the second ses-

sion. They have each made a list of characteristics descriptive of self, and these are put on long sheets of paper and hung on the wall. A game similar to the TV show "The Price Is Right" is played with four members of the class selected to make up team A and four for team B. The rest of the class cheers each team on as each tries to organize the leaders according to listed characteristics. This is a high-energy time and encourages the concept of learning as fun. After the leaders have been placed, they take time to introduce themselves and expand upon their background.

At the end of the third session, the students complete a sociometric test. The criteria are related to membership in a small learning group that will use psychodrama and action methods for making the content being taught in the course something personal. They are asked to select their first and second choice of class member with whom they want to share, their first and second negative choice, first and second positive leader, and first and second negative leader. The students decide which of the above factors are primary for them and list their primary learning style. The class is then divided into groups of eight, according to the sociometry. The use of primary criteria for placement in group is over 90%.

The small groups meet for a period of 9 weeks, with each group having a leader who is a graduate student in the Marriage and Family Therapy Program. Each 2-hour session begins with warm ups initially conducted by the leader. By the third session, however, this exercise becomes the function of two of the members, who design starters according to the group's topic of focus. Following the warm up, the group may move into role playing, sculpting, doing family reconstruction, psychodrama, sociodrama, and other action methods of learning. Each session concludes with a warm down or sharing segment that may be followed by instrumental evaluation methods that give feedback on the session or verbal processing. Students maintain group dynamics process journals, in which they follow designated guidelines for completion. Beyond this, they maintain a personal growth journal in which they reflect upon their family of origin dynamics, current systems and their role within these, and personal insights. They are encouraged to describe behavioral change that has resulted from their awareness and growth through the groups.

Evaluation

The Department of Family Studies uses formal evaluation procedures at the end of each course. Students complete a 6-item form with a ranking from A to E in terms of quality of learning, course meeting expectations, and their satisfaction with the course, the instructor, the methods used in teaching, and their overall learning. This course has consistently had rank-

ings in the 60% to 70% A range, 20% to 25% B, and only 5% to 6% below. This would indicate that the majority of students find the course highly satisfying. Comments in the personal journal include: "For the first time in four years, I knew everyone in my class"; "I wish I had [had] this course earlier as it had such a positive impact on my understanding who I am in relationships"; "the action learning made the class come alive—at first I was afraid of involvement but I soon got over this and liked the active method of learning"; "concepts are so much clearer when you see them demonstrated, and this made it easy for us to show our own family patterns in the group and know what we were doing." Faculty members who teach a course in which students are involved in community placements indicate that students who have been through this course have much higher levels of self-confidence when going to placement than those who have not. As a result of this feedback, the course has now been made a prerequisite to the community-placement course.

Graduate Course Description

Facilitation in Group and Family Functioning is taught in the graduate program in marriage and family therapy. Each year, six students are admitted into the 2-year MFT program. In the first semester, they are involved in the group practicum. They spend 3 hours in the theory portion of the course that looks at various models of group dynamics, leadership, content-focused groups, and outcome studies. Much of this content is taught through use of action methods or simulations. Beyond this, the six members are involved in their own group process. Team building occurs first, followed by a focus upon group dynamics and skill building while the group deals with personal and relationship issues. Psychodrama is the primary learning method. Starting in the fourth week of the course, each trainee becomes the leader of one of the dynamic learning groups for the undergraduate course. At a 2½ hour group supervision session, the leaders present critical issues within their groups, demonstrate techniques that went well, stuck points, etc. The group sessions are videotaped so that segments of the videotapes may be observed for feedback and recommendation. Frequently, a reenactment of a session will take place to provide the trainee a chance to implement a direction in which he or she might have gone, following supervision feedback. The students, following guidelines provided them, maintain a process record of their group session, including a critical evaluation of their group leadership during the session. They also maintain a personal-growth journal that integrates material from the course, supervision session, and the personal group context. The students also design a short-term group that they will be providing to community

clients at some point during their 2-year trainee program, for instance, a sexual-abuse survivors group, a group for children of divorce, a group for young widows, marriage enrichment groups, and parent-child management groups.

Evaluation

Many of the individuals who enter the graduate program in marriage and family therapy have worked in agency contexts before coming to the university. They have often, with little training or conceptualization, had to lead groups. Taking the course enables them to become aware of what they did not know and what they might have done differently. Others who have had no group experience find it very valuable in understanding group dynamics and psychodrama and gaining a range of methods for leading groups. The personal group enables the trainees to develop a cohort "family" that will be of significant value to them through the remaining years of the program. The formal evaluations returned by the students rank the criteria within the A and B levels on the 5-point scale.

A major learning result from the introduction of action methods during this first semester before the trainees begin to see individuals, couples, or families is the students' becoming comfortable with the active use of self in therapy and more spontaneous and creative in the use of their therapy context. During the next practicums, which are family focused, these trainees easily move into sculpting, empty chairs, use of play, role playing, and psychodrama. Action and verbal methods of therapy are easily integrated, and there is much more differential use of self, more selection of creative interventions, and more ease of adaptation when experimenting with the learning of new theory models for service delivery.

Conclusions

The integration of the training of graduate students in group and family facilitation with an undergraduate course in group and family functioning produces opportunities for significant learning for both populations. It would not be possible to conduct an undergraduate course in group dynamics without the use of leaders other than the instructor. Use of graduate students who are in the process of learning psychodrama and group-process skills enables the instructor to structure the undergraduate course with an experiential learning component. With the undergraduate course as a laboratory for the graduate program, the supervisor (who is also the instructor of the undergraduate course) can facilitate learning of group dynamics and psychodrama and its methods because all trainees are working

with a similar type of group. The content within the group sessions is relatively structured, however, and a range of creative methods can be used to process that material. This enables trainees to use their own creative style and to learn from each other as they watch tapes or hear feedback of process and dynamics. Graduate students with minimal therapeutic experience also find that working with undergraduate students is not as threatening as being immediately assigned to work with a population of clients who are coming to the agency to resolve specific issues that get in the way of their functioning. This is not to say that the issues that the undergraduates present in the group are not significant. Although, for the most part, the issues are serious, powerful, and very important to the individual presenting, we do assume that the students are able to function within relatively normal limits. This enables the graduate trainee to take more risks in using creative methods within the group. Moving from a warm up into a mini-psychodrama becomes less threatening with this population than with a clinic population. If something becomes too unsettling, the supervisor has direct access to feedback from undergraduate students through their journals or through verbal sharing, which is not possible with clinic populations.

I am preparing to teach the undergraduate class for the 11th year. Even though much of the content may be the same, I never tire of teaching this course because each class provides a new context created from the life stories of the individuals within it. At the graduate level, we keep finding new components to add to the process in order to control outcome studies and facilitate learning. I find it exciting to experience trainees' discovery of psychodrama, action methods, role playing, and sociometry. Most trainees come into psychotherapy training with the concept that intervention is essentially verbal, taking place from a seated position. As one trainee stated, "This course has enabled me to see the value of listening for action words during sessions, energizing the therapeutic system through action methods. Seeing in action past and future behaviors is often worth a thousand words." This trainee was unknowingly echoing Moreno's view of transforming words into action as the critical change component.

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