

# A Parent Study Group for College Students

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College courses usually precede working in the field. It would follow then, that learning to deal with children constructively should happen before those children are born. Besides, the philosophy presented in the text used in Parent Study Groups (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1974) is so universal it shouldn't be limited only to parents. Consequently, when I was asked to offer a tutorial class for nineteen second semester freshmen, I chose this subject.

A Tutorial at Ramapo College is a loosely constructed class that meets once a week for an hour. Students are given an informal group experience around a theme. There is no prescribed curriculum and the instructor chooses the subject matter. Along with the opportunity to work together, it is hoped that the students will develop friendships, a sense of community, and a liaison with the instructor. Tutorials have been done around career planning, running a food co-op, values clarification, and so on.

Leading a child study group with nineteen unmarried non-parents, none over the age of twenty-two presents some unique problems. Inasmuch as my hidden agenda (often shared) was a study of democratic action with all important others, roommates, family, friends and lovers, I felt there was enough relevant material available to tie the book into their interpersonal needs. I hoped there would be self-understanding of their own life styles, as well as others, the importance of family constellations, and especially, their own right of choice. I planned to bring in some assertiveness training (Smith, 1975) organization development, (Warner, Hornstein, 1972), conflict resolution (Soltz, 1967), and so on. I wanted to point out the similarities of all the groups we belong to; family, peer, and market or work place.

My only stated expectation was that they read the text. Participation in class discussion was sincerely to be wished for, but it wouldn't be judged for marks which was pass/fail.

I did pass an attendance sheet around each week, which is not required for any class at Ramapo. This gave a minimal structure to a non-exam course.

The first full session was used for a Birth Order Exercise. The students were instructed to get into groups of oldest, middle, youngest, and only chil-

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dren and make up a composite picture of each group. There was much interest in the similarities that cut across lines of sex and socio-economic status. One middle child complained that this group was not representative of him. Questioning produced the information that his oldest sibling had Down Syndrome. We worked this out by putting him with the oldest group. It became clear that by accepting the responsibilities of caring for his brother he took on the attributes of an oldest sibling. This helped clarify birth orders to the class. I often use this exercise as a warm up in group work, and again, it helped make the students a more cohesive group.

When we got into the readings from the text there was a constant struggle between the desire of the students to talk about the book as remote and in a third-party way, and my need to make it relevant. Inasmuch as the book always reassures me that I have basic rights as a human being I decided they might understand the text more fully if I tied it in with actual assertiveness training.

Assertiveness is democratic behavior. It assumes that each person in a transaction has the basic right to judge their own behavior and to accept the logical, natural consequences of that act. It implies self ownership and responsibility. No one else can tell them what that responsibility should be. However, each person has the right to change his mind, make mistakes, or even be imperfect. It's even alright not to care.

We did this by acting out actual incidents that the students brought in. The cast included the protagonist with a coach and an antagonist. In this way, we could see how the student handled the situation, first by himself, then possibly using the advice of an objective coach.

The protagonist had the opportunity to rework the scene until he felt satisfied. The student audience was also permitted to make suggestions. The emphasis was slightly different from most Parent Study Groups. We often dealt with parents' unrealistic expectations, rather than difficulties experienced with children. The final message, dealing with individual rights and democracy, was the same.

We stressed a rule of thumb to determine that assertive behavior had been used. If the student was still thinking about his response or behavior, if there was still a need to justify or leftover bad feelings then the behavior was not assertive. Incidentally, assertive behavior is no guarantee that the desired results will happen, but it gives the assurance that the protagonist has done what he can.

At about this point, one of the students expressed disappointment with the text. He felt it was too idealized and pat, and if he were to accept it he would not have his turn, as he had always expected, to dominate when he had children. The others laughed but many agreed with him. Democratic

action then, is a sometimes thing to these young people. In this they shared the feelings of those oriental women of the past who accepted domination and even degradation from their husbands' mothers with the pleasurable conviction that they themselves would some day rule, perhaps despotically, over their own daughters-in-law.

I had been aware of the similarities between democracy in the work place and within the family group. I was particularly taken by the various theories which seem to be lifted whole from pure Adlerian philosophy. It seemed to once again reinforce Joseph Wilder's statement. (Ellenberger 1970, p. 641) "I realize that most observations and ideas of Alfred Adler have subtly and quietly permeated modern psychological thinking to such a degree that the proper question is not whether one is an Adlerian, but how much of an Adlerian one is."

Organization Development is just such a theory. Used in industry, it is growing principle and practice to help humanize the organization and have it function with concern for the worker and with greater productivity.

Organization Development is by definition the process of planned change within the organization in which the norms and standards of the organization are studied; dysfunctional ones are changed, discarded, etc. First there is diagnosis and then planned intervention.

Planned intervention consists of data collecting with feedback and team-building. The identified problems are analyzed, there is a search for probable causes and the generating of possible solutions. Sharing is emphasized.

Organization Development suggests that people can enjoy their life's task. But cooperation and trust must extend throughout the organization. If those with the most power don't cooperate and have trust, a type of paternalism arises.

McGregor's (1960) theory X and Y are basic tenants of Organizational Development.

*McGregor's Theory X* - Traditional view of direction and control (pp. 33-34).

1. The average human being has an inherent dislike of work and will avoid it if he can.

2. Because of this human characteristic of dislike of work most people must be coerced, controlled, directed, threatened with punishment to get them to put forth adequate effort towards achievement of organizational objectives.

3. The average human prefers to be directed, wishes to avoid responsibility, has relatively little ambition and wants security above all.

*Theory Y* - The integration of the individual and organizational goals (pp. 47-48)

1. The expenditure of physical and mental effort in work is as natural as play or rest.

2. External controls and the threat of punishment aren't the only means for bringing about effort towards organizational objectives. Man will exercise self-direction and self-control in the service of objectives to which he is committed.

3. Commitment to objectives is a function of the rewards associated with their achievement.

4. The average human learns, under proper conditions, not only to accept but to seek responsibility.

5. The capacity to exercise a relatively high degree of imagination, ingenuity and creativity in the solution of organizational problems is widely, not narrowly, distributed in the population.

6. Under the conditions of modern industrial life, the intellectual potentialities of the average human are only partially utilized.

The assumption of Theory Y implies that unless integration (worker and organization) is achieved, the organization will suffer. I included these theories because they illustrated the spirit of the text. Either Adler or Dreikurs could have written them, tying them in to social interest and the life task of work. I felt they were as valid for the democratic family, or a dorm situation as they are for a business organization.

I pointed out that this small introduction to Organization Development was of interest to both Business Administration majors who might be considering personnel management as well as those psychology or sociology students who invariably want to know what else they can do with their majors.

Management by objectives (MBO) (Odiorne, 1969) is a formula used for the reasonable and logical process of making decisions. Whether for the individual, or the family council or in industry, the process would be the same.

First, define the goal; what would you like to have happen? Next find out who and what is involved. Now, in light of the goal, and who and what must be dealt with; what are some of the possible options? This could be a brainstorming session because finally, it will be necessary to decide what is reason-

ably possible. Volunteering a recalcitrant roommate for the next moon flight would certainly remove him, but it's a fairly low option. When the direction is decided upon, make sure there is little or no deviation.

It takes time to be logical and orderly, but there are satisfying results that can be important and lasting. The peer group person, or parent who follows these steps can get the task accomplished in a democratic fashion.

In dealing with cooperation, courage and "Shooing Flies" (p. 172), we took this passage from the text. "So many times a parent feels that the words themselves will have a punitive effect. When the child still fails to respond the parent usually manages a strategic retreat, leaving the child the unrestrained, uninhibited and uneducated victor. Nothing has been accomplished towards training the child in cooperation." (p. 167).

In order to make this passage more meaningful to the students, I used three illustrations from my counseling cases. This captured their imagination because it felt "real":

1. A woman is concerned that even if she agrees to work only three days a week during the summer, her boss will "make" her work five days a week when he needs her.

2. A woman lends her car to anyone who asks for it, even though she knows her parents have warned her about insurance problems, etc.

3. A woman feels taken advantage of by her roommates who borrow her clothes.

In each case, these women, like Dreikurs' parents, hope others will LISTEN (to something) but that no further action or resolve will be needed on their part. Dreikurs says, "Whenever the child's desire or request is contrary to order or to the demands of the situation, then we must have the courage to stick to the "no" that expresses our own best judgment." (p. 180)

We used "Ten Commandments for Resolving Conflict Resolutions" (Soltz, 1967, p. 88, 89). I suggested that one way of "beating the system" was by using the system. I hoped to show that by being angry and alienated one could be self defeating. One woman gave us an excellent example of the penalties for not working within the system.

Her car had actually had mechanical difficulties while she was driving in the fast lane and slowed to 15 M.P.H. The line of traffic in the slower lane was solid she felt she wasn't able to move over. Suddenly a man in an unmarked car started to tailgate and blow his horn. Frightened, she ignored him and finally got off the highway and headed for her home. He followed her,

motioning for her to stop. She didn't. When she reached her driveway, he parked his car behind hers so she couldn't drive out.

They both got out of their cars and he said he was an off duty policeman. He flashed a badge but didn't actually let her see it. He proceeded to write her a ticket. She made an obscene finger gesture at him and he said, "Now you're really going to get in trouble for being discourteous to an officer." She felt she never had the chance to explain what happened to her car. In court she angrily tried to explain (and complain) about what had happened, but she incensed the judge and received the heavy penalty.

We acted out her scenerio, and her fellow students were very sympathetic. Finally using the Ten Commandments and with suggestions from the class, we redid the scene.

We could easily see that by losing her temper, she lost her point. It became clear that she tried to win not an agreement, but the argument and especially with such an authority figure as the judge. She might have apologized when she was wrong. She had not acknowledged the officer's statement of fact. Most of the group saw the difference, but the woman still felt wronged.

If the goal of the tutorial is to address the problem of attrition, and help connect students to the College, shall they not learn to live democratically and comfortably within themselves? Shall they not feel confident in their right to make choices and have the courage to be imperfect.

My class found themselves making friends with one another, certainly a basic requirement in being connected to the College. Occasionally, they invited other students to drop in. And, of course, they promised they would keep their books and use them, should they ever become parents.

### References

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