

An Innovation in Conduct of Parent Study Groups

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This paper is written with a focus on the instructor, teacher or leader of Parent Study Groups. It is a practical demonstration of an application of the *Magic of Involvement* discussed by Cameron Meredith in the lead article in this publication. This application specifically is the utilization of educational methods basic to a modern philosophy of adult education in a Parent Study Group course.

The writer is currently teaching his third, non-credit college course in Principles of Child Raising, based on Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs' *Children: The Challenge*, at the Northern Virginia Community College in Arlington, Virginia. Each class has had some twenty parents, mostly mothers. Beginning with the first class adult education principles were utilized in the teaching process. The current course is the first full utilization of adult education principles.

What are the adult education principles? Following are seven applied in the subject courses:

1. Learning by doing.
2. Interest is essential to personal involvement.
3. The teacher, instructor, leader is a facilitator, a helper—not an authority.
4. Learning is principally from each other—from peers.
5. The small group (3 to 6 participants) offers the greatest opportunity for participative involvement. (The family is a small group.)
6. The adult should participate in the planning for his learning—he should establish his own learning objectives, his own goals.
7. The adult should evaluate himself; he is the best judge of his learning. (1)
(2)

How have these adult education principles been incorporated in the Child Raising course? Following is an enumeration of the course procedures which implement the above objectives.

1. Each student is requested to purchase not only *Children: The Challenge* (3) but also the *Study Group Leader's Manual* by Vicki Stoltz. (4) A family is in reality a small group. Each parent is a member of a family and a leader of the family group. Thus a parent can profit from a knowledge of techniques of group leadership. The *Study Group Leader's Manual* has an excellent discussion of such techniques. A parent taking this course has interest in his family; he will become involved in what is good for his family.
2. It is programmed that each student will (as homework) write out the answers to questions listed for each chapter in the Leader's Manual. This written exercise is learning by doing and facilitates involvement and also retention of material read. Some students who at first were skeptical of the value of writing out such answers towards the end of the course indicated a gratification that they had done this. They said as a result they "learned more." The principle of learning by doing is hereby demonstrated.

3. At the beginning of the first class session, as a first step, to foster interest and involvement, the students are immediately inducted into the small group process for the purpose of getting acquainted with each other. The class of 20 was divided into four small groups of five each. It is interesting to note the the conversation between students is immediate, lively and informative. Students get to know something, sometimes intimate, about each other. This is a foundation for later cooperative group work.

4. As a second step, in the first class session, the class, organized in the above-mentioned four groups, meets to determine its educational objectives—goals. Each group member participates in planning for his learning. Each group then reports its consensus objectives to the whole class and behavioral objectives for the class as a whole are then written. (5) Following is an example of such objectives established by one class.

“Behavioral Objectives”

At the tenth session of this class each student will be able to state in writing:

1. At least 3 principles of child raising stated by Dr. Dreikurs which she has recognized as related to her child's “problem” behavior.
2. At least 3 ways in which she has changed her child's behavior using Dr. Dreikurs' principles.
3. At least 3 ways recommended by Dr. Dreikurs in which she is still trying to change her child's behavior.
4. At least 3 ways, using Dr. Dreikurs' principles, she has improved her own self-control in relations with her child.
5. At least 3 instances in which her husband has cooperated with her in using Dr. Dreikurs' principles in dealing with their child.

5. A class meets for three hours once a week for ten weeks. Each three hour session is divided in half as follows:

First one hour and a half:

Small group meetings in which are discussed the contents of the assigned chapters. Questions in the Leaders Manual for which each student has written out the answers are reviewed and discussed. Students all have children under ten years of age. They form an appropriate peer group. We learn from our peers.

Second one hour and a half:

Class meets as a whole to discuss any questions a group or an individual may desire to raise. The answers come usually from the students. The instructor endeavors to supplement only when necessary.

The instructor also gives an occasional mini-lecture on Individual Psychology theory and philosophy. It is believed that parents should have some foundation in Adlerian philosophy and theory to better understand Dr. Dreikurs' principles.

For example, the article by Alfred Adler on Love in the November, 1971 issue of the *Journal of Individual Psychology* was reviewed because it is an appropriate consideration for properly raising children. Adler herein defines love as a cooperative physical and social relationship between a “twosome” for the development of a family. (6)

The Individual Psychology theory the instructor shares with the class is based upon his Schematic Diagram of Individual Psychology Theory reproduced below in Figure 1. It is felt that this effort on the part of the instructor is an example of his interest and involvement and can stimulate interest and involvement on the part of the student. It is a supplement on substance not covered in the text but about which the instructor is informed.

6. In the tenth and last class session each student writes a self-evaluation of his learning. He knows best what he has learned. This evaluation is against the behavioral objectives established in the first class session. Following are some examples of responses of students to these objectives:

“The course has made me more aware of my children as individuals.”

“We are avoiding the pitfalls of punishment and rewards and using natural and logical consequences.”

“This course has given me a new outlook and a feeling of being more able to cope with the challenge of my children.”

“I am most pleased with my progress... I apply the principle, avoid reward and punishment, and no longer spank... I know how to deal with him now.”

“Have given child responsibility for leaving on time in morning. It works! Without nagging!”

“By taking time for training I have made a trip and visits to a restaurant more enjoyable.”

“I am learning to stay out of her spats with other children even if I have to get up and leave the room.”

There are many other similar statements from class members, which reveal interest and involvement.

7. Another method used to stimulate interest, involvement and learning by doing is the class project. The end product of the class project is visualized as about 100 multiple choice statements which will cover Dr. Dreikurs' 34 principles of child raising as expounded in *Children: The Challenge*. Each student is requested to prepare one such statement, representing what he considers the most significant point, for each chapter of the text. These statements are then reviewed and discussed in each group. The group leader forwards the ones the group considers most appropriate to a three-member class editorial committee. This committee makes further review and selection and assumes responsibility for providing each class member with a typed list of the 100 final statements selected at the last class session. This entire project is done from beginning to end by class members. Below is an example of one such statement.

(c) Treating your child as an equal means: (a) sometimes giving him father's place at the head of the dinner table; (b) letting him play with fire matches because he must experience a burn before he will know enough to stop playing with matches; (c) considering him entitled to respect and dignity as a human being; (d) letting him stay up as late in the evening as his parents. (page 8, Chapter I).

Note that the page and chapter number in the example refer to *Children: The Challenge* and the correct answer is indicated as (c).

Summary

The above enumerated class operating procedures are carefully explained to the students to help them understand the reasons for these procedures. This is considered necessary and useful in enlisting the cooperation, interest and participation of the adult student. The adult functions best as a student when he is aware of the "why" of what he is asked to do.

Adult Educators have stressed the importance of educational objectives or goals in the learning process. On this matter the Educators and the Individual Psychologists have a happy meeting. While the Educators stress the significance of goal directed behavior, the Individual Psychologists emphasize the inevitability of goal directed behavior. They meet in a conviction of the importance of *what* goals an individual selects to pursue.

The more the student plans, directs, and evaluates his own learning, the more interested and involved he will become in doing. There is much evidence to support the belief that we learn best by doing. All this is also being responsible—responsible for one's own learning and conduct, which is the desirable goal of personal maturity. In the study courses the writer has taught, he has repeatedly seen mothers, for probably the first time, assume responsibility for training their children on a basis of equality. This has made him feel his efforts were well worth while.

References

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