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Effects of Adlerian Parent Consultation on the Academic Achievement of Kindergarten Children*

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Dreikurs and his associates (1958; 1964) suggested the application of Adlerian psychological methods as a preventive intervention for use by parents. Dreikurs and Soltz (1964) summarized the rationale for the use of Adlerian methods as follows: "...children can no longer be forced into compliance; they must be stimulated and encouraged into voluntarily taking their part in the maintenance of order. We need new principles of child-raising to replace the obsolete ones" (p. 10). Furthermore, Dreikurs (1958) indicated that a parent has a great deal of influence upon a child's attitude toward achievement.

Several researchers examined the effectiveness of Adlerian parent consultation sessions (De Laurier, 1975; Frazier & Matthes, 1975; Freeman, 1975; Vandette, 1964). Since it appears that these previous studies of effects of Adlerian parent training on the achievement of participants' children did not include adjustment for differences in I.Q. and I.Q. is generally acknowledged to account for a substantial part of the total variance of school achievement, the present study was initiated to remedy this flaw.

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Specifically, the purpose of this investigation was to determine whether Adlerian parent consultation group training and a control condition have differential effects on I.Q.-adjusted reading recognition achievement, spelling achievement and general information achievement of kindergarten children.

Method

Subjects

The sample for this investigation was drawn from 86 volunteer parents and their 43 children enrolled in the Campus Kindergarten at the University of Southern Mississippi. Sixty parents (and their 30 children) were randomly selected from the above group; then 30 parents (and their 15 children) were assigned to each group, an experimental and a control. The children of the two groups were approximately equal with respect to chronological age, parent's socio-economic status and sex. All children were Caucasian and their parents were middle to upper middle class. The mean I.Q. for the experimental group was 114; for the control group is was 116.

Procedure

Consultant leaders for the parent consultation training sessions were graduate student psychologists who were enrolled in a course in mental health consultation. In addition to consultant training, the graduate student psychologists were trained in Adlerian methods and in a system of observing parents at home (Randolph, 1978) to determine whether parents actually implemented the methods learned. Observation training was continued until paired-observer agreement reached at least 95%.

Experimental group parents attended six weekly consultation training sessions of at least two hours each. Each week, several of the Adlerian principles for living with children (Dreikurs & Soltz, 1964) were

presented, discussed and practiced via parent role-playing. Beginning with the second session, observations of the parents' implementation of Adlerian methods at home were also presented to the parents by the consultants, followed by a discussion. Also, during the fourth session, the parents were shown a film of Rudolf Dreikurs demonstrating the application of Adlerian methods (American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1969).

Instrumentation

The Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT) and the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) were administered to both experimental and control group children on a posttest only basis. Several researchers reported data supporting the validity (Burns, Peterson and Bauer, 1974; Dunn and Markwardt, 1970) and reliability (French, 1972) of the PIAT. The PIAT was developed by Dunn and Markwardt (1970) as a wide-range screening measure of achievement for ages 4-18 years. The subtests contain 84 items each, except reading comprehension, which contains 66 items.

Several researchers also reported data supporting the validity (Dunn, 1965; Raskin, Stuart & Black, 1974) and reliability (Dunn, 1965) of the PPVT. The PPVT was developed by Dunn (1965) to provide an individual intelligence quotient for subjects ranging from 2 1/2 to 18 years of age. The test is available in Form A and Form B, with each form containing 150 number plates made up of line drawings preceded by three example plates.

Home Observation

As a validity check to determine whether parents did, in fact, implement Adlerian methods in the home, trained raters observed once per week in each experimental group home to determine whether parents met certain minimum "performance standards." The observation procedure utilized was outlined in a

previous article (Randolph, 1978). Observations revealed that the parents met the minimum four-to-one ratios required for each of the following bipolar sets of responses: encouragement/discouragement, withdrawal/surrender, and consequence/punishment.

Results

Posttest means, adjusted means and F-Ratios for three academic achievement criteria are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Means and F-Ratios
for General Information, Spelling,
and Reading Recognition Achievement

Variable	Group	Posttest Mean	Adjusted Posttest Mean	F-Ratio
General Information	Experimental	22.07	22.33	.40
	Control	20.73	20.47	
Spelling	Experimental	18.00	18.11	2.74
	Control	15.53	15.42	
Reading Recognition	Experimental	18.27	18.41	1.78
	Control	16.00	15.86	

The F-Ratios obtained for General Information, Spelling and Reading Recognition were all nonsignificant (d.f. = 1, 28).

Discussion

The findings of this investigation do not appear to support the use of Adlerian parent consultation for increasing achievement scores. Further, these findings seem to concur with those of Frazier and Matthes (1975) and De Laurier (1975).

Several plausible rival hypotheses might explain the results of the present study and imply directions for the implementation of future studies. Multiple-treatment interference is a possible threat to the validity of the research findings. The experimental and control groups were virtually bombarded with a myriad of novel experiences as a result of the child enrolling in the kindergarten program at the University. Thus the "treatment" and control conditions may have been only one of many novel experiences for the children and their parents.

While the criterion measures selected for this study were included on the basis of a priori value judgments, they may not have been the singularly most appropriate devices. Since Adlerian principles are teleoanalytic (teleos being Greek for causality from the future, or one's goal), a pre-post administration of a goals inventory may have been a more appropriate, sensitive criterion from which to assess the effectiveness of the treatment.

Selection biases may represent another threat to the validity of the study. Parents were invited to participate; it seems plausible that parents who are most effective/successful with their children would feel less reason to view discussions of child-rearing as threatening, and therefore be more likely to volunteer to participate in Adlerian sessions. Similarly, the children of these middle-class, volunteer parents appear to have been functioning at high levels of achievement and discipline at the beginning of the study; thus it may have been unreasonable to expect them to show a great deal of improvement.

The use of (a) middle class parents and (b) children who are generally not seen as manifesting learning or disciplinary problems seems to characterize most of the other Adlerian studies reported in the literature. Before more substantial conclusions may be made regarding the effectiveness of Adlerian parent consultation, it is recommended that additional studies be done which utilize children who are identified as frequently presenting discipline and learning problems in the school and home. Finally, future studies should include consultation with parents who represent all segments of the socioeconomic spectrum.

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