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Use of a group work programme to improve the educational adjustment of ex-detainees

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of each student by the teacher. The intervention phase consisted of thirteen group work sessions held weekly over a period of four months. The post-testing data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews with the students and the BRS was again administered to each student and completed in respect of each student by the teacher.

2.3.3 Measures

Individual Interviews (see Appendices A and D)

The pre-test semi-structured interview schedule was developed by the researcher to obtain information on the educational history and difficulties of the student; his/her family's attitude towards attendance at the tuition project; the major problems faced by the student and his/her normal coping strategies; the detention experience and any problems it has resulted in. A list of areas to be covered was developed but the interview was conducted in a semi-structured manner. This allowed the interviewee to raise the most important difficulties in his/her life while ensuring that comparable data was obtained from all students. The broad objectives of the interviews were to obtain background information and an understanding of present problems so as to give direction to the group work intervention. Students were interviewed individually for about thirty minutes each at a mutually agreed upon time. All the interviews were conducted at the tuition project's premises over a two-week period. Interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The forthcoming group was discussed with each student and he/she was encouraged to attend.

At the post-test phase individual interviews were again conducted with each of the students to assess their responses to the group work intervention if they were in the Experimental Group or to obtain updated information about their needs if they were in the Control Group. For those who had experienced detention, more in-depth discussion of the experiences took place. The purpose of this was to enrich the data obtained during the pre-test and to ensure that the ex-detainee's second version of events corroborated the first. This seemed vital in view of the potentially contentious nature of these facts. There was a period of four months between the first and second interviews.

The post-test interview was developed by the researcher to assess perceived changes in behaviour and emotions as a result of the group work intervention;

perceptions of the value of the group personally and then more broadly for other ex-detainees, and any negative attitudes towards the group. The remainder of the interview considered the specific detention experience; emotional changes; coping strategies and fears during detention; and changes in relationships.

Behaviour Rating Scale (BRS)

The BRS was administered both before and after the group work intervention. The BRS was adapted from the Mykelbust Pupil Rating Scale (MPRS) (Mykelbust, 1981). The MPRS was developed to screen for learning disabilities and is completed by the teacher. It consists of five areas of behaviour viz. auditory comprehension, orientation, motor co-ordination, spoken language and personal-social behaviour. Within each broad area there are a number of items to be rated on a five-point scale. The rating scale yields both a verbal and a non-verbal score and has been found to have adequate validity, regardless of race or socio-economic factors (Skuy, Shmukler & Clark, 1983).

The MPRS was modified both structurally and in that it was also used as a self-rating inventory for the students. This necessitated that the language be simplified to make it clear for English second-language readers. The MPRS is directed at younger children than those in the present study so some areas were not considered crucial at this life stage.

The Mykelbust contains a total of twenty-four items, of which seventeen were retained for the purposes of this study. The two areas of exclusion were mainly in the motor co-ordination and orientation areas. Only judging time was included from orientation. All items on auditory comprehension were included as were all but one of the items, viz. new situations on the area of of personal-social behaviour.

The BRS therefore consisted of seventeen items which fell into two broad areas: cognitive/scholastic and interpersonal. Each item consisted of a five-point rating scale with one being poor functioning and five being good functioning. An example of this is Vocabulary.

1. Very poor vocabulary
2. Limited vocabulary
3. Adequate vocabulary
4. Good vocabulary
5. Excellent vocabulary.

Towards the end of the interviewing period, students were asked either individually or in small groups to complete the BRS. During the administration of the BRS the researcher remained present to answer queries and to clarify issues, e.g. students wishing to ring two statements were told that only one should be chosen.

The co-ordinating teacher in the pre-matric class was also asked to complete the BRS with respect to each of the students in the class. She was requested to complete these ratings within a two-week period. This procedure was repeated for students and teachers when the intervention was completed.

In constructing all measures, viz. pre-test interview schedule, behaviour rating scale and post-test interview schedule the researcher consulted indigenous and overseas literature regarding the effects of stress, detention and torture on the individual (Andreasen, 1980; Daly, 1980; Detainees Parents Support Committee, 1986; Foster et al, 1985; Friedman, 1988; Manson, 1986; Schmid, 1988; Somnier and Genefke, 1986; Straker, 1987).

2.3.4 Intervention

Control Group and Experimental Group

Concurrently with the group work intervention programme the teachers and some of the tutors in the tuition project were involved in a skills training programme aimed at enhancing their relationship and counselling skills. A Control group of students allowed consideration of the impact of teacher intervention alone as opposed to the Experimental group's combination of student and teacher intervention.

The students were assigned to two groups partly randomly and partly on the advice of the co-ordinating teacher who recognised the importance of certain sub-groups remaining together or being separated. Once the two groups had been chosen they were randomly selected as either the Control or the Experimental group. (The Control group students received the intervention at the end of the post-testing.)

Group work programme

Thirteen group sessions were held over a period of four months. The group work was conducted by the researcher once weekly for one hour at a consistent venue. Twelve members were chosen for inclusion in the group : eight were ex-detainees and the other four had never been detained.

The broad goals of the group were for students to learn to deal with tension and stress, to improve their relationships with peers and family, and to become more able to discuss their difficulties. These goals were developed as a result of the individual interviews undertaken during the pre-test phase and the input provided by staff members at the tuition project. Goals remained flexible throughout the life of the group, so that members were able to request that the group deal with emerging needs.

Prior to the pre-testing the researcher met with the pre-matric class in the presence of the co-ordinating teacher. She clarified the phases of data gathering and intervention and the potential benefits these would have for members. Students were also told of the researcher's political position and organisational links since they may have been hesitant to participate without such information (Sacco, 1987; Straker, 1988).

The researcher adopted a permissive, accepting and non-authoritarian role in the group so as to facilitate its development (Coyle, 1945; Douglas, 1976). This was because many of the students were experienced in organisational work and in group discussion. Within this however, the researcher recognised the central role she had to play in developing good relationships between members, facilitating agreement on goals, maintaining a focus on tasks and developing new and appropriate ways of communicating. Her planned stance was non-directive. Since the major problems faced by

students were reality-based she planned to offer limited interpretations. No use of unconscious material was planned. The focus was therefore on cognitive and behavioural rather than psychodynamic techniques.

The first phase of the group concentrated on trust building. The researcher had presumed that as members had been together for some months they knew one another fairly well. This was inaccurate and members were initially overwhelmed when expected to share unrevealed aspects of themselves. By the end of the second session some degree of trust had developed in the group and members had begun to share feelings generally and specifically in relation to the detention experience. Once trust developed members took more responsibility for planning and began discussing family relationships and financial difficulties. The latter was a source of great frustration for most members since there was little they could do to alleviate the problem.

By half-way through the group, members requested a discussion around the area of stress. Many feared re-detention and needed an opportunity to talk through this. For others the stress was more immediate, in the form of financial and family problems. Others spoke of the stresses they faced as a result of their experiences in detention; e.g. inability to sleep, concentration difficulties and general unsettledness.

A final broad area was that of relationship skills. Members felt the need to improve their skills in relating heterosexually. This necessitated both values clarification around their perceptions of women and the development of specific communication skills, e.g. listening. A thorough evaluation was conducted prior to the group's ending and this information was utilised in planning for the Control Group.

Limitations inherent in the group were the venue and the available time. The physical space available was limited so that sessions were often disrupted by both noise outside and by others entering the room. Students were also often frustrated by the time limitations which prevented a particular topic being worked through to their satisfaction. (For further details see Appendix C.)

2.4 Design

This study was designed to assess the value of the group work method of intervention in assisting ex-detainees to improve their educational adjustment. The study's design is exploratory and includes both quantitative-descriptive and qualitative aspects. The study is exploratory in that little research has been conducted in this area in South Africa. The quantitative-descriptive design is used in order to ensure that high degrees of accuracy and clarity are maintained. The qualitative aspects are included to ensure that the real-life experiences of participants are reflected in this research document.

An analysis of variables was undertaken to gain an understanding of the factors influencing behaviour change or lack of change in students. A multiple group design ANCOVA was utilised in spite of the small sample size because of the random allocation of groups and the approximate equality of sample sizes. Means were computed for both student groups (Experimental and Control) and teacher ratings on the pre- and post-test. The statistical analysis was carried out by the University of the Witwatersrand Computer Centre.

CHAPTER 3 - RESULTS

3.1 Summary of descriptive data from the interviews

This section is based on the data obtained from interviews conducted both at the pre-intervention and post-intervention stages. More detailed information is contained in Appendix E.

Of the sixteen ex-detainees interviewed ten (63%) lived away from home. In some cases this was due to the extensive distance between their homes and the tuition project. Often, however, students had been refused re-admission to Department of Education and Training schools or feared living in their family homes because of alleged police harassment. Living away from home resulted in both financial and emotional difficulties for students. They were often saddened by the burden they placed on their families as a result of their political involvement. Many felt unable to discuss their difficulties with their parents and turned instead to co-members of organisations, professional helpers or non-related adults.

Prior to their detention eight (50%) of the students had experienced stress in the form of police harassment, detention of a family member or living away from home. The detention was reported to take place in a wide variety of settings ranging from public areas to hiding places. The students were detained for periods ranging from two weeks to a year. Six (38%) had been detained on more than one occasion.

Detention conditions varied since some students were held in police stations and others in prisons; some received visits from family members while others were held in solitary confinement, some were held in one place throughout while others were moved a number of times. Lack of visits and solitary confinement were significant factors in increasing the detainee's fear, sadness and sense of isolation. All of the students indicated that they were questioned on at least one occasion while half were instructed to write a confession statement.

Six (38%) students were held in solitary confinement for periods ranging from fourteen days to eight months. (One student was held in solitary

confinement for twenty months in terms of Security legislation rather than State of Emergency regulations.) Students reported feelings of extreme stress when held alone.

Allegations of torture were made by nine (56%) of those interviewed. For the purpose of this study torture was defined as the deliberate infliction of physical or mental pain on a person to force him/her to give information, to make a confession, or simply to intimidate him/her to give information (Drawn from the Declaration of Tokyo, 1975). The extensive range of torture techniques allegedly used included beatings, being kicked, suffocation, provocation by warders and electric shocks. (For a more detailed description, see Appendix E.)

Once students were released they continued to suffer a range of difficulties. Some were unable to return home while most lived in constant fear of redetention. Parents usually took a definite stand on their children's activities. Some parents rejected the students because of their activities while many came to accept their children's political convictions and activities. The researcher gained the impression that students whose families supported their viewpoints were less anxious and conflicted than those whose families disapproved. Friendships were also influenced by the students' detention since many had to live away from home while some were isolated because people feared being associated with them.

Half the students reported difficulty in concentrating while many others experienced problems with sleeping: either struggling to sleep or sleeping excessively. Six (38%) students faced criminal charges subsequent to their detention but in the majority of cases the charges were later dropped. (Precise figures cannot be given since not all cases were finally resolved at post-testing.) Available figures indicate that only two (13%) students had been convicted on any charge.

During the period of detention students coped by structuring both their time, and activities, through using personal relationships and through family visits. Exercise, education and cultural activities were usually planned for on a regular basis when students were held in group cells. Coping strategies were, obviously less well developed when the student was held alone.

Many students commented that detention had strengthened their political resolve. This resolve must however be seen in the light of the very real emotional, medical and practical problems the students generally had to cope with on their release. A number are likely to require professional assistance for months, and even years to come.

3.2 Initial ratings by teacher and students of Experimental and Control Group subjects on the Behaviour Rating Scale

For the purposes of analysis the Behaviour Rating Scale was divided into two areas around which the items appeared to group. This accords to some extent with the Mykelbust Pupil Rating Scale which is divided into a Verbal component which considers language and understanding; and a Nonverbal component which includes orientation, motor co-ordination and social aspects. The first category of the BRS was the Scholastic/ Cognitive which included word meanings, instructions, information, time, vocabulary, grammar, word recall, repeating an experience, ideas, attention, organisation and completing work assignments. The second broad category was Interpersonal and included class discussion, co-operation, other students, responsibility and tactfulness. The results obtained from teacher and student ratings are presented in Table I, overleaf.

As the Table shows, the teacher's initial (pre-test) ratings of Control (C) and Experimental (E) group subjects revealed a mean score of 3,13 and 3,48 respectively. The E group's mean score was 2,94 while the C group's mean score was 2,62. There were no significant differences between the E and C groups' ratings of themselves.

There were no significant differences in the way in which previously detained and never detained students rated themselves overall so all the subjects and their data were included for analysis (n=21).

Table I : Pre-test ratings of teacher and students' expressed as mean scores

Item		Experimental Group		Control Group	
		Student $\bar{x}$	Teacher $\bar{x}$	Student $\bar{x}$	Teacher $\bar{x}$
Scholastic/Cognitive					
Word meanings	(1)	2,10	3,50	2,36	3,18
Instructions	(2)	3,40	3,60	2,54	3,00
Information	(4)	3,30	3,70	1,63	3,18
Time	(5)	2,70	2,90	2,45	2,90
Vocabulary	(6)	2,60	3,40	2,00	3,19
Grammar	(7)	2,30	3,30	2,00	2,54
Word Recall	(8)	3,10	3.40	2,45	2,90
Repeating Experience	(9)	2,90	3,80	2,36	3,27
Ideas	(10)	3,10	3,70	2,63	3,09
Attention	(12)	2,80	3,20	2,27	2,72
Organisation	(13)	2,60	3,40	2,72	3,27
Completing Work	(16)	3,30	3,60	3,63	3,27
Mean		2,85	3,45	2,42	3,04
Interpersonal					
Class Discussion	(3)	2,80	3,90	2,45	3,45
Co-operation	(11)	3,70	3,90	2,54	3,90
Other Students	(14)	2,60	3,50	2,90	3.45
Responsibility	(15)	3,00	3,00	3,54	2,80
Tactfulness	(17)	3,80	3,40	4,09	3,36
Mean		3,18	3,54	3,10	3,39
Overall Mean		2,94	3,48	2,62	3,13

E n = 10

C n = 11

Table I also indicates that the students consistently rated themselves lower than the teacher rated them. For the E group this applied on fifteen of the seventeen items while for the C group it applied on fourteen of the items. The largest consistent difference in ratings occurred around class discussions (Item No. 3). Once again the teacher rated students more positively than they rated themselves.

There were significant differences in the way the students in both the E and C groups rated themselves on the Scholastic/Cognitive variable as compared to the way the teacher rated them (Student mean = 2,63; Teacher mean = 3,24; $F(3;38)$ 15,44; $p < 0,05$). No significant differences between E and C groups and teacher ratings emerged for the Interpersonal variable. On both the Scholastic/Cognitive and Interpersonal areas there were no significant differences between the E and C groups as they rated themselves.

3.3 Comparison of Experimental and Control Group ratings following intervention

This section identifies changes which occurred in either self ratings by E and C groups or ratings of E and C groups by the teacher, following intervention. Table II provides the mean scores on each item, on the sub-totals for the scholastic/cognitive and interpersonal areas and an overall mean for each rater (either student or teacher).

Table II/..

Table II - Post-test ratings by teacher and students expresses as mean scores

Item		Experimental Group		Control Group	
		Student $\bar{x}$	Teacher $\bar{x}$	Student $\bar{x}$	Teacher $\bar{x}$
Scholastic/Cognitive					
Word Meanings	(1)	2,80	3,40	2,45	2,81
Instructions	(2)	3,00	3,30	3,09	2,63
Information	(4)	2,60	3,40	2,54	2,72
Time	(5)	2,50	2,70	3,09	2,54
Vocabulary	(6)	2,40	3,40	2,18	3,00
Grammar	(7)	2,70	2,90	2,27	2,36
Work Recall	(8)	2,60	3,30	2,72	2,90
Repeating Experience	(9)	2,50	3,50	2,09	3,00
Ideas	(10)	2,80	3,60	2,63	2,90
Attention	(12)	2,80	2,80	2,54	2,63
Organisation	(13)	3,30	3,00	3,09	2,63
Completing Work	(16)	3,80	3,30	3,54	3,09
Mean		2,81	3,21	2,68	2,76
Interpersonal					
Class Discussions	(3)	2,70	3,30	2,90	2,90
Co-operation	(11)	3,00	3,70	3,36	3,63
Other students	(14)	2,80	3,20	2,40	3,18
Responsibility	(15)	3,20	2,80	2,81	2,80
Tactfulness	(17)	4,20	3,30	3,45	3.45
Mean		3,18	3,26	2,98	3,19
Overall Mean		2,90	3,20	2,70	2,88

E n = 10

C n = 11

As the Table shows, the mean scores of E and C, following intervention, did not appear different. An ANCOVA revealed no significant differences on the overall behaviour rating scale mean in the way the teacher rated E as compared to C, or in the way E and C rated themselves.

3.4 Qualitative evaluations of the group work intervention

Comments in this regard were drawn from the post-testing and from the final group session. The group was viewed as positive by members although they made suggestions for improvements. The members felt that each session had been too short to allow time to discuss issues thoroughly. The time difficulty resulted in new areas being introduced before issues were fully resolved. Areas of discussion which were highly valued included family and heterosexual relationships, problems flowing from detention and the budgeting skills they learned.

Members felt that the group provided them with a support system which helped them to deal with the stress in their life. All Experimental group members felt that they had benefited from being in the group. Particularly for those who had been detained the group provided an opportunity to talk about the detention. One student commented that the group had helped him recognise his vulnerability to redetention and he had therefore faced up to this reality.

Most members commented on the deeper relationships they had formed as a result of the group. This was particularly evident with previously isolated members. It provided, according to one member the opportunity for people to see beyond their initial like or dislike of members. It helped draw people together around their experiences. For those who had not been detained it provided an opportunity to hear about detention and its impact on people. One member commented that there is a danger that ex-detainees may discriminate against those who have not been detained. The group assisted in developing a better understanding between group members. It was helpful for members to hear of the problems experienced by others as this made them feel less ashamed of themselves and their difficulties. Some members were also able to recognise how others in the group had learned from their experiences.

The area in which the group was less helpful was around improving their finances. Most members felt that their problems in this regard had not been solved although a number had benefited from the opportunity to improve their budgeting skills.

A number of ex-detainees commented on how the group had helped them deal with their problem of becoming angry quickly. One member commented that his angry and worried feelings sometimes inhibited his participation in the group. Other students felt that they became depressed when they were unable to share their thoughts and feelings with the group. Overall, therefore, verbal feedback was positive and consistent regarding the usefulness of the group for members.

The findings on the BSR are therefore not significantly favourable towards the group work intervention. The interviews and final group evaluation, however, indicate that the group was valuable for members.

CHAPTER 4 - DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The research report set out to ascertain whether and in what form group work intervention programmes could be developed to help ex-detainees to cope more adequately in the educational setting. It also set out to consider the differences in the ways students rated themselves and were rated by the teacher before and after intervention. Although the quantitative findings have been largely inconclusive the descriptive data and the intervention have provided a rich source of information about the experiences, needs and problems of young ex-detainees.

A picture has emerged of a group of young people struggling not only with their personal growth but also with the attempt to reconcile their political convictions, family responsibilities and individual desires in a coherent manner. The finding that students viewed themselves more negatively than they were viewed by the teacher, particularly in the area of scholastic/ cognitive functioning is an interesting one. It is possible that the teacher's more positive view is inaccurate and that the student's perceptions of self were more realistic. However, in view of the teacher's overall perspective of the group and her extensive teaching experience it is an unlikely explanation.

More probable is that the students' self perceptions reflect a poor self concept and therefore an inaccurate picture of their abilities. Many of the students had experienced ongoing disruption of their lives and studies and may have felt hopeless about the future and their success within it. Smith (1988) also noted that symptoms of depression and anxiety were high in a sample of black adolescents interviewed by Haasbroek.

It is possible therefore that township conditions play a potent role in increasing the stress experienced by young black South Africans. The group interviewed for this study represented an interesting grouping in that many had held leadership positions in organisations and were used to responsibility. In spite of this they rated themselves poorer than the teacher. It is possible that the years of schooling under the Department of Education and Training has resulted in their developing negative perceptions of their

ability to progress and achieve. The South African Institute of Race Relations (1989) points out that while ninety-two per cent of white South African matriculation students who sat the examinations passed matric in 1986, only fifty per cent African students were able to. The students' perceptions are therefore valid in the light of the harsh realities which face them.

It is particularly interesting that perceptions of the scholastic/cognitive functioning and not the interpersonal functioning of students led to the discrepancy between teacher and student ratings. It is possible that the students, having experienced educational and other disruption, have difficulty in evaluating their performance adequately. It is also possible that the stressors in their lives have blunted their cognitive functioning causing them to believe that they operate at levels below their true potential. This is interesting in the light of a comment made by one of the students in which he noted that he had a good memory prior to his detentions but now struggled to remember. His and others' ratings of self may be a reflection of what they believe they are at present compared to what they were in the past. This hypothesis cannot be tested through this study. It would however be valuable to look at a comparative group of students who have not experienced significant stress to ascertain whether there is a significant difference between their self ratings and the ratings of them by their teachers.

The fact that no significant differences emerged between ex-detainees and non-detainees is interesting. It is likely that the non-detainee group was not representative of a broader sample since a number of the members had experienced severe stress. The group was also too small to enable any valid conclusions to be drawn. On the other hand it indicates that the broad symptoms and difficulties reported by stressed students will be similar regardless of the nature of the stressor. The kind of intervention programme undertaken here would therefore have value for a wider range of stressed students than just ex-detainees. It would be valuable for this to be tested.

The qualitative comments made by students about the group provide interesting insights into the value of this group for students. As noted in Chapter 3 many commented that their relationships with one another had become deeper

and closer as a result of the group work process. In the light of Haasbroek's findings (Smith, 1988) that young black people had serious difficulties in trusting others, this feedback is encouraging. For those in the group the experience provided the opportunity to replace a sense of isolation with renewed relationships with others. For those whose emotional difficulties prevented full participation, there was a deepened sense of alienation and depression. It is possible that the group experience may not be valuable for such individuals since it may be too threatening and overwhelming. Alternative resources are therefore required since group work cannot meet the needs of all.

It is also possible that the researcher developed preconceived ideas about individual members through her role as data gatherer. This may have inhibited her subsequent ability to intervene effectively through the group work process. Although this is a potential problem this researcher is of the opinion that her dual role enriched her intervention for most of the students.

It is possible that significant change would have been noted in the Experimental Group had there been an increased number of group meetings. This is a complex problem since most work with ex-detainees has been once-off although fairly intense. There are serious logistical and other difficulties involved in working with ex-detainees over a period of time. The indications are that they require intense and ongoing help particularly because in almost all instances they return to the stressful situation without any opportunity for recovery.

This issue requires that those working through the single interview evaluate the impact they make through this. This writer is not suggesting that such intervention should be discontinued because it is inadequate but, rather, that the needs still existing be defined and some attempt be made to meet them through community organisations. It may be more helpful for social service professionals to provide such organisations with the skills to support the severely-stressed than to attempt to meet such immense needs ourselves. The writer notes that some attempt are already being made to do this.

It is apparent that there may have been research limitations within the design chosen. Interview schedules allow for interviewer bias and behaviour rating scales may not cover the complexities and subtleties of the individual. The use of a variety of methods in such a new area, will, it is hoped, encourage further work.

As a consequence of the data obtained and the intervention carried out the researcher would see the following changes which should be made to an intervention programme of this kind. The structure of the programme must be specific and clear so that students are not forced to deal with too much uncertainty. This should not preclude the group leader from dealing with immediate needs as they emerge. Stress and methods of coping with it should form a core part of the work done with members. The reason for this is two-fold: firstly, it assists members to deal with the practical realities of their lives and secondly, it helps them gain a sense of mastery and hope for the future. Adequate time must be made available for group sessions although members must also be encouraged to maintain concentration on a particular topic so that it might be resolved. The group leader should ideally be knowledgeable about the related community resources (medical, financial, psychological) so that students requiring other help might be appropriately referred.

Since teachers form such an important resource it is essential that they receive either formal training in counselling skills or less formal assistance when this is required. Dealing with such stressed young people places severe strain on teachers and they need structured opportunities to deal with their own feelings and plan more appropriate responding techniques. As noted above, in Chapter 2, a programme of teacher and tutor training in counselling skills was undertaken at the tuition project while the group work intervention was in progress.

Although large numbers of detainees are no longer being held, it is clear from this research that the need for help is among the stressed and that detention is only one form of stress which the young people of the townships face each day of their lives. As professional caregivers we must reach out to these young adults if they are to develop their full potential.

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