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PICTURE PROJECT: AN EXPERIENCE OF ICEBREAKING AND/OR DECISION MAKING

Trudy L. Somers, Towson State University

ABSTRACT

"Picture Project" is an experiential learning event, which affords participants the opportunity to get acquainted and to make decisions. It is also readily adapted to study the effects of individual differences on a task, to demonstrate various leadership styles, and to identify and to clarify group goals or values. The exercise may be used in either university or corporate settings. Participants each contribute self-photographs, which are combined during the session into a group collage. The process may be completed in 45 to 90 minutes, depending on theoretical frameworks and debriefing levels provided.

INTRODUCTION

Experiential learning techniques have long been recognized as valid approaches to educational endeavors in which material is to be mastered at both cognitive and affective levels (Kolb, 1984). The blend of theoretical and practical knowledge is enhanced by experiential learning (Henshaw and Jackson, 1984). "Picture Project" may be incorporated into the basic process-reflection model (Harvey and Brown, 1988) to provide either a capstone experience to validate exposure to prior concepts and theories, or a frame of common experiential reference, a background, to consider communally when subsequent theoretical and conceptual materials are presented.

"Picture Project" has been used successfully for introduction and orientation, decision making, leadership, group values, and conflict resolution. The exercise also produces a solution to the professor's eternal dilemma of matching student names with student faces.

EXERCISE

Resources /Preparation

1. Participants are instructed to bring a small (2"x3") recent photograph of themselves.
2. Instructor supplies the following materials:
 - *Copy of "PICTURE PROJECT INSTRUCTIONS" for each group (or each participant)
 - *Construction paper, assorted colors
 - *Pens, Markers, Crayons (several per group)
 - *Scissors (at least 1 per group)
 - *Glue, tape (at least 1 per group)
 - *"Extras" (gold stars, stencils, stamps).

Process

1. The exercise may be preceded by relevant theory discussion. (For fifty-minute session, this should be done prior to the session.)
2. Divide participants into groups of six to nine members.
3. Distribute "PICTURE PROJECT INSTRUCTIONS" to each group. Allow five minutes for instruction clarification and questions.
4. Instruct participants that they will have 20 minutes to complete the picture and to prepare the presentation. Oversee distribution of materials.
5. Keep time, starting at 15 minutes. (The construction process tends to take longer than the time originally allocated.)
6. Have groups make presentations. Applaud after each talk. Display picture collages.
7. Process relevant theory framework. Debrief.

PICTURE PROJECT INSTRUCTIONS

1. Combine your individual photograph into a collage for your group. Any supplies you need other than your photos - construction paper, scissors, glue pens -are available from the facilitator.
2. Pick a "name" for your group. The name should be one which all members of your group find appropriate and representative. Your group will be publicly referred to by this name for the duration of the class. (This last sentence was added after several obscene monikers were selected.)
3. Your final product should include all photos, labeled with first and last names, and your group
4. A member of your group needs to give a 1-2 minute presentation to the class, displaying your "picture," introducing your group, and fielding any questions that might be asked.

VARIATIONS/CAUTIONS

"Picture Project" is versatile. If the exercise is used to illustrate decision making or problem solving, groups may be debriefed according to individual or group decision-making styles, decision making strategies, or problem solving techniques. Questions from facilitator: What other strategies could be used? What strategy worked best? worst? What is the mix of decision making styles in your group? How was your problem formulated? When leadership is the theory domain, leaders may be assigned by the facilitator or determined within the groups. If the facilitator pre-selects leaders, the process may be altered to include role-playing. Various leader behaviors may be assigned (and rehearsed), and the effectiveness of various leadership roles (styles) may be assessed. Questions from facilitator: Can you identify your leaders style (task or person)? How effective was it in terms of completing the picture and of maintaining pleasant relationships between the participants? Did the leader's behavior change over the course of the exercise? How was the group leader selected? Why were groups not led in the same way? Individual differences (i.e., Holland's Vocational Preference Profile) may be considered with collages.

The exercise may be altered. For example, time limits may be removed or altered. The process may be more explicitly divided into stages (planning, executing, presenting) with trained observers assigned. Competition/cooperation strategies for coping with scarce resources may be used as a theoretical framework if the facilitator supplies insufficient quantities of the listed resources. (This variation takes about an hour and a half and may require a strong facilitator.)

Few problems have been encountered with this exercise. If participants do not appear to take the exercise seriously enough, the facilitator should add a discussion of "apathy" to the debriefing process, rather than interfering with collage construction. If participants do not provide photographs, the groups, not the facilitator, should solve the problem. If time constraints and large participant numbers tempt the facilitator to limit presentations to only a few groups do the presentations, the urge should be resisted and group size should be increased ins Lead.

References are available from the author.