THE EFFECTS OF SERVICE ACTIVITIES ON ADOLESCENT ALIENATION

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ABSTRACT

This research evaluated the effects of involvement of adolescents in community service activities on levels of alienation. It was proposed that alienation could be reduced through the implementation of a model which utilized community service activities to facilitate adolescent access to adult society, development of responsibility, collaborative and cooperative work, and control over planning and outcomes. It is suggested that adolescent involvement in service activities can produce positive benefits, among which are reduced levels of alienation, improved school behavior, improved grade point average, and acceptance by the adult community. These findings also suggest that females respond more positively to school when allowed to problem-solve collectively and collaboratively.

Researchers have long been concerned that there is a relationship between deviant adolescent behavior and alienation (Crase, 1981). This relationship has been difficult to assess since there seem to be no follow-up studies measuring the impact of alienation on adolescents (Newman, 1981). Although there has been much speculation, it appears that studies of alienation among high school students have not only produced inconclusive results, but more important, few studies have attempted to reduce alienation in a systematic manner (Blumenkrantz & Tapp, 1977; Warner & Hanson, 1970a). The purpose of the present investigation was to reduce the levels of adolescent alienation through the involvement of students in community service activities.

Alienation seems to be an ambiguous term used by social scientists to explain the response of the individual to society. As a result, many researchers have defined alienation as multidimensional. For example, Seeman (1959) uses the dimensions of powerlessness, normlessness, isolation, meaninglessness, and self-estrangement. Dean (1961) uses the terms isolation, normlessness, and powerlessness. Newman (1981) refers to estrangement, detachment, fragmentation, and isolation. The multiplicity of terms would indicate how difficult it is to define alienation, a difficulty which may be caused by its highly individualized nature.

Traditionally, researchers have viewed alienation as occurring in a societal context (Bowles & Gintis, 1980; Fromm, 1964; Merton, 1968). This approach is closely aligned with the philosophies of Marx and Durkheim, but is not universal. Other researchers feel that alienation should be considered from both a global and individual perspective (Kanungo, 1979; Newman, 1981).

Alienation, when considered as an individual phenomenon, seems to be first experienced at a personal level, and through communication it is spread to a more global form. It follows, therefore, that if alienation is first a personal experience, then it must be situational. An alternative approach that may be considered in analyzing alienation is one that stresses both the personal and situational aspects (Payne, 1974). One reason for considering alienation from a personal and situational perspective is that it allows the segments of society to be examined. One such segment is the secondary school.

Studies of alienation among high school students have inferred the existence of alienation among high school students based on deviant adolescent behavior. On the other hand, quasi-experimental studies have documented the existence of alienation and identified subgroups of adolescents who may be alienated.

Inferential studies suggest that school-related behaviors of adolescents may be a sign of alienation. Such behaviors include widespread depression, suicide, and sexual promiscuity (Leger, 1980; Wenz, 1979; Wynne, 1980); and violence, juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, and alcoholism (Nickerson, 1978). National studies such as the Safe Schools Study (National Institute of Education, 1978) have causally tied deviant behavior to alienation. School administrators seem to follow this pattern and believe that school rebellion, truancy, failure in course work, and removal from class are manifestations of alienation (Rafky, 1979).

Inferential studies also suggest that the adolescent's school environment may be a cause of alienation (Alschuler, 1980). Such environments produce (1) lack of student responsibility (Crase, 1981; Tjosvold, 1978; Warner & Hanson, 1970b); (2) lack of involvement with the adult community (Steele, 1978); (3) lack of educational planning which deals specifically with the causes of student alienation (Mackey, 1977; Newman, 1981; Rowe, 1981; Warner & Hanson, 1970b); and (4) lack of adolescent involvement in decision making (Crase, 1981; deCharms, 1977; Lynch, 1977; Tjosvold, 1978).

To address these issues, various researchers have suggested that (1) adolescents be given a wider latitude of responsibility (Crase, 1981); (2) adolescents be incorporated into the adult community and be allowed to participate in adult society on an equal basis (Steele, 1978);

(3) schools and other adult institutions share decision-making responsibilities with adolescents (Tjosvold, 1978); and (4) opportunities be provided to increase levels of student participation (D'Amico, 1980).

Other studies have attempted to increase participation, involve adolescents with adults, and increase student decision making. However, these studies did not use alienation as a dependent variable. A Flint, Michigan, study encouraging student participation and involvement with adults reported decreases in vandalism and crime in schools (Steele, 1978). The Prince George's County school system in Maryland involved students in hall patrols, advisory councils, and peer counseling. It was reported that these role changes seemed to improve student attitudes toward school (Moorefield, 1977). It has also been demonstrated that participation, involvement with adults in community service activities, and integration with adult society were effective in altering patterns of adolescent behavior (Hansen, 1978; Huling, 1980; Mackey, 1978; Steele, 1978; Van Pattern, 1977).

Unlike inferential studies, quasi-experimental studies have generally measured alienation within the school setting (Mackey, 1978; Moyer & Motta, 1982; Warner & Hanson, 1970a) and attempted to determine which subgroups of adolescents are alienated (Mackey, 1978; Rafalides & Hoy, 1971).

Researchers seemed to have been more concerned with the degree to which alienation exists than with whom it exists (Kanungo, 1979). These studies, although conflicting at times, present a composite: adolescents in the school setting feel powerless (Rafalides & Hoy, 1971); there is a relationship between alienation and the way one feels about oneself (Warner & Hanson, 1970a); and a poor relationship with a peer group may cause a sense of isolation (Wenz, 1979).

There is conflicting evidence as to the relationship between size of the school and levels of alienation. Huling (1980) would not consider measuring alienation in large schools because he claimed that large schools are de facto impersonal, dehumanizing, and lacking in opportunities for student participation. Yet Grabe (1981) reported that small schools are more alienating than large schools since small schools force marginal students to participate.

Results have been inconclusive in determining which subgroups of adolescents are alienated. Some investigators claim that highly alienated adolescents are from affluent backgrounds, and that the least alienated are the poor (Leger, 1980; Lynch, 1977; Wynne, 1978). Affluence seems to create an environment wherein adolescents are deprived of goals, drive, motivation, and meaning, which may be reflected in poor grades and failure to participate in school or community activities (Marker & Mehlinger, 1974). Some educators claim that there

is a relationship between levels of alienation and discipline problems (National Institute of Education, 1978). However, this has not been substantiated (Moyer & Motta, 1982). Other studies suggest that alienated youth are from the middle class rather than either extreme (Mackey, 1978). And yet others claim that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, especially black adolescents, are the most highly alienated (Jones, 1977). Still others feel that the existence of alienation affects all adolescents. It is apparent that research on alienation may have failed to consistently identify alienated subpopulations.

When one considers the variety of potentially alienating circumstances, such as adolescent rebellion and broken teenage romances, it can be suggested that these factors are so widespread that they may be normal. The possibility then exists that there is a generic relationship between alienation and contemporary adolescence, and that this may be a normal growth condition (Wenz, 1979).

In summary, although the quasi-experimental studies do not suggest methods for reducing alienation, they have provided documentation that alienation exists among adolescents. However, the inferential studies suggest that student involvement in community service activities may reduce levels of alienation by providing young people with opportunities to participate in the adult community. Since previous models centered on participation, community service, small group interaction, and access to significant adults as a means of reducing deviant behaviors, it was projected that a similar model might be successful in reducing alienation.

This model was designed to encourage adolescent participation in community service activities with access to significant adults. The model's intent was to alter traditional school environments to allow opportunities for adolescents to operate as adults by planning, developing, and implementing a service project. This model had not been previously employed to specifically reduce levels of alienation.

METHOD

Out of an original pool of 105 ninth-grade students, the first 25 volunteers were selected as participants. A control group of 25 subjects was randomly selected from the 55 remaining volunteers. The test group was composed of 16 females and 9 males. The control group was composed of 17 females and 8 males.

The members of the treatment group were told that they were to independently develop a community service project that might be used as a model for other communities. These students were organized into small groups by four volunteer faculty members and the project director. The groups were directed by a student steering committee. Occasionally, in order to make major decisions, the small groups were combined into one large group. This facilitated autonomous student control. Students, with limited adult assistance, planned, developed, and implemented a community service project. Adults who were involved attempted to encourage and improve such skills as decision making, problem solving, assertiveness, and self-confidence.

All ninth-grade students were administered the Dean Alienation Scale three times—once, prior to the onset of the treatment (pre), again after a 10-week treatment period (post), and a third time, 10 weeks later (post/post). Treatment group members met a minimum of twice a week for 10 weeks. At the conclusion of the initial 10-week treatment period, the actions of the participants altered the study design. Twelve students, 9 females and 3 males, wanted to continue on their own without the direction of the investigator. The remainder of the initial treatment group terminated involvement. Thus, there were three groups: students who continued with the project, students who terminated involvement after 10 weeks, and the control group.

Two sets of data were collected at pre, post, and post/post: (1) results from the Dean Alienation Scale; and (2) attendance, taken from Massachusetts registers; discipline, based on teacher referral of students to the office; and grade point average, based upon student grades at the end of each 10-week period.

The Dean Alienation Scale is a 24-item questionnaire, scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale, which measures total alienation, isolation, normlessness, and powerlessness. The scores on each were combined to produce a total alienation score. Dean (1961) reports the reliability for the scale as: alienation = .78, powerlessness = .78, normlessness = .78 and social isolation = .83. The Dean scale has been used by previous researchers to measure the existence of alienation in the secondary school setting. Some researchers have used it to correlate levels of adolescent alienation with such measures as grade point average (Moyer & Motta, 1982; Warner & Hanson, 1970a), self-esteem (Warner & Hanson, 1970a), student attendance and discipline (Moyer & Motta, 1982), and anxiety (Warner & Hanson, 1970a).

RESULTS

A one-way analysis of variance of repeated measures was performed with the independent variables being students who were involved with the project for 20 weeks (test group one), students who terminated

involvement with the project after 10 weeks (test group two), and the control group. The dependent measures were the dimensions of the Dean Alienation Scale, total alienation, isolation, normlessness and powerlessness, discipline, attendance, and grade point average.

The observed results indicated that there were significant differences between test group one (those students who continued with the project for 20 weeks) and the control group. Test group one subjects had significantly reduced levels of total alienation $(F(1,33) = 4.83, p < .05)$, and the dimension of isolation $(F(1,33) = 8.19, p < .01)$. Additionally, all students in both test groups had significantly reduced levels of discipline problems during the initial treatment period as compared to the control group $(F(4,86) = 6.23, p < .001)$. The dependent measures of normlessness, powerlessness, grade point average, and attendance were not significantly reduced. Students in test group two did not have significantly reduced levels of alienation, absenteeism, or improved grade point average. Simple effects (t tests) for test group one were significant at the post/post test for total alienation and isolation and at the post-test for discipline.

Figure 1 indicates that both test groups demonstrated a decrease in total alienation over the initial 10 weeks of the study. However, once the 10-week treatment was completed, those students who terminated involvement had increased alienation levels which were similar to the control group. Those students who continued to participate stabilized the gains they had made during the initial 10-week period (see Table 1).

This significant difference in total alienation scores may be the result of several factors. Among them, continued involvement with a community service project gave students more responsibility and positive community feedback. Additional factors concern the school environment. The school presented the usual alienating situations found in bureaucratic organizations: impersonalization, some uncaring individuals, and peer pressure. The students, as in many other schools, were segregated by age and allowed only limited adult contact. Involvement in the model presented the students with caring, significant adults, opportunity to circumvent red tape, and time to interact positively with peers.

The isolation component of the Dean Alienation Scale measured student's sense of social isolation. It measured isolation through student response to statements such as: (1) I sometimes feel all alone in the world; (2) I don't get invited out by friends as often as I'd really like; (3) Most people today seldom feel lonely; and (4) Real friends are as easy as ever to find.

The decrease in isolation may have been a result of student involvement in small groups (see Figure 2 and Table 2). The small groups
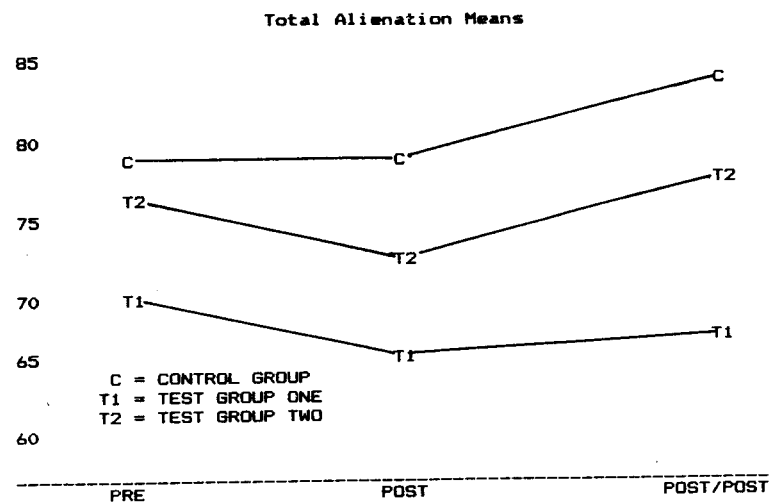

Figure 1

Total Alienation Means

C = CONTROL GROUP
T1 = TEST GROUP ONE
T2 = TEST GROUP TWO

Table 1

Total Alienation: Means and Standard Deviation

GROUP	PRE		POST		POST/POST	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Test One (12)	70.3	7.3	65.8	9.6	66.5	8.1
Test Two (13)	75.9	11.2	73.1	14.2	77.4	18.1
Control (25)	77.5	12.4	77.5	13.0	81.0	14.8

were composed of six to eight students and were arranged to involve all students. Each small group was assigned specific tasks which seemed to unite the small groups, produce intergroup cooperation, and create new friendships. Since adult involvement was limited to an adviser role by the model, students had to involve each other in problem-solving situations. These situations created new relationships. Test group one seemed to maintain these new relationships during the post to post/post period. Additionally, a positive response by the community, nonparticipating students, and faculty seemed to reinforce the group's feeling of accomplishment, which in turn may have resulted in an increased sense of camaraderie.

A reduction in discipline referrals of students who participated in the project was significant at the post-test (see Figure 3 and Table 3).
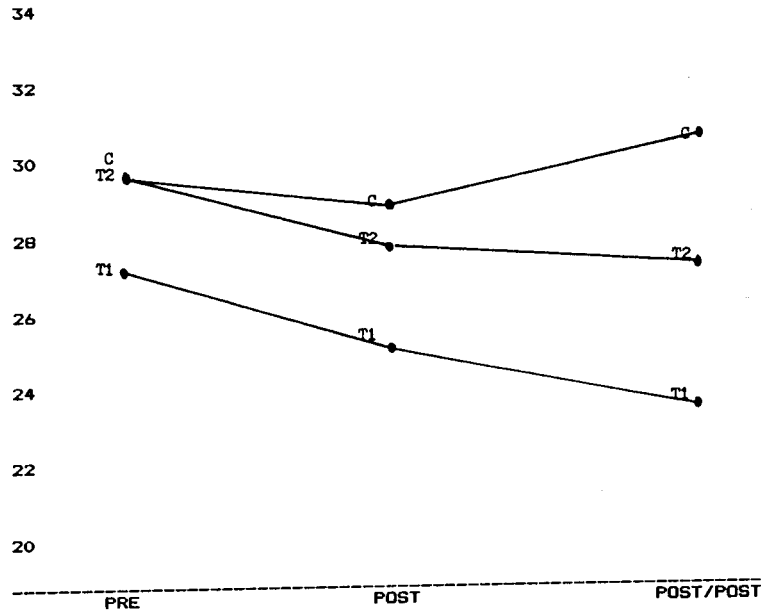
Figure 2

Isolation Means

Table 2

Isolation: Means and Standard Deviations

GROUP	PRE MEAN	S.D.	POST MEAN	S.D.	POST/POST MEAN	S.D.
Test one (12)	27.2	4.8	25.0	4.2	23.9	4.8
Test two (13)	29.8	5.1	27.8	6.2	27.4	8.3
Control (25)	29.8	5.7	28.7	7.2	30.9	6.5

During the initial 10 weeks of the study, students in both test groups did not have any disciplinary referrals. This contrasted with a normal referral rate among members of the control group. During the post-treatment period, both test groups exhibited a discipline referral rate similar to that of the control group.

This decrease in discipline problems may have been the result of significant adult involvement or was the result of student involvement
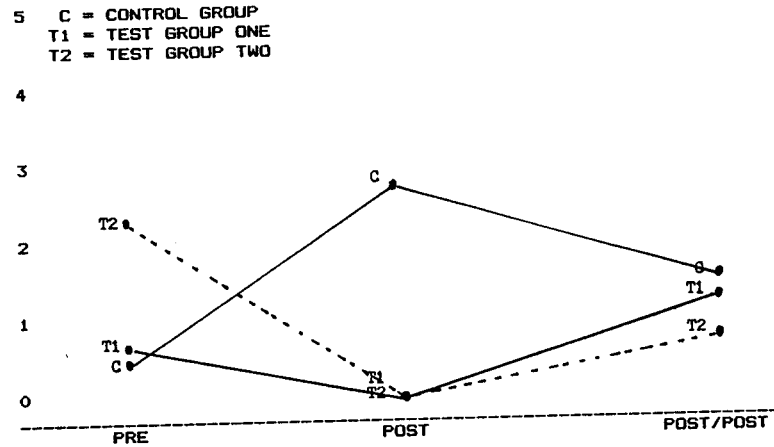
Figure 3

Discipline Referral Means

Table 3

Discipline: Means and Standard Deviations

GROUP	PRE Mean	S.D.	POST Mean	S.D.	POST/POST Mean	S.D.
Test One (12)	.83	1.7	0	0	1.2	2.8
Test Two (13)	2.2	4.4	0	0	.83	1.5
Control (25)	.80	2.4	2.8	4.2	1.7	2.3

in small groups. There is evidence to suggest that small-group involvement can be a potent factor in improving student behavior (Maynard, 1977; McGrath & Altman, 1966). However, when one considers that the positive effect on levels of discipline problems occurred when a significant adult was present and returned to normal levels when adult interaction was removed, one can infer that the participation of the adult was more important than student involvement in small groups. It should be noted that adults who were involved played passive roles and did not react in a threatening way. This unexpected finding should be investigated further.

The significant adult in this case was the school principal. The success of this study in reducing discipline problems suggests that school

administrators might consider increased administrative involvement with students and involvement of students in activities which enhance the students' sense of responsibility and importance. Thus, alienation may be more situational than at first theorized, and that individuals respond differently to their environments (Kanungo, 1979).

These results suggest that previous studies which stressed participation in service activities may have had an effect on alienation. However, these studies focused on areas other than alienation, such as discipline and attendance. Although this study and others indicate that there does not seem to be a correlation between discipline and alienation (Moyer & Motta, 1982), it is interesting to note that in attempting to reduce alienation, the level of discipline was similarly reduced. Perhaps student involvement in service activities similtaneously affects both alienation and discipline.

The results also suggest a long-term effect on alienation. Although there were no significant findings at the post-test, when the data were analyzed from pre to post to post/post, there were significant decreases in levels of total alienation and isolation. This effect was not found for powerlessness or normlessness. Simple effects analysis at the post-test indicated that total alienation, isolation, and powerlessness scores might be headed in the correct direction. Analysis at the post/post test confirmed this trend for total alienation and isolation. This long-term trend was evident in the 12 students (test group one) who remained with the project. One has to consider the influence of continued involvement with the development of the project as a possible cause. Another indication of the long-term effect may be evidenced by the group's future plans. Their desire to remain actively engaged suggests that participation in the model had positive effects beyond the reduction of alienation.

The study also found no correlation between alienation and grade point average. This was not surprising in that previous researchers reached similar conclusions (Moyer & Motta, 1982; Warner & Hanson, 1970a). This would contradict the "hunch" of many educators who assume that students who receive low grades must be alienated or that those students who feel pressured to excel must be alienated.

An unexpected finding was in the effect of the study on bright females. It had been expected that the results would not be affected by the sex of the student. This was not the case. Females composed the majority of the students who continued work with the project. They had high grade point averages (mean = 3.99) and a mean IQ of 112. These nine females seemed to be significantly affected by the treatment as reflected in the scores on total alienation and isolation when contrasted with the control group females. There were no significant differences between males or between females and males.

The decrease in total alienation among females was affected by isolation scores. As with the other dimensions of the Dean Alienation Scale, isolation impacted on the total alienation score—the score decreased throughout the 20-week study. At the same time there was an increase in isolation among control-group females, which can be attributed to a number of factors; among them, the small group interaction, frequent meetings, and common cause allowed for a greater bonding and sense of camaraderie among those students who continued with the project. Control group females did not have this opportunity.

This model may have provided these motivated and intelligent females with the opportunity to fulfill some unmet need in terms of cooperative work and noncompetitive problem solving. This may be an indication that school environments may be geared to meet the needs of males and thus be a cause of alienation among bright females. On one hand, bright females are told to compete with their peers and on the other, they are told to work cooperatively.

SUMMARY

This study suggests that involvement of adolescents in the development, implementation, and participation in community service activities may significantly reduce levels of alienation. Additionally, this type of involvement may result in reduced discipline problems. By eliminating restraints and encouraging adolescents to assume more responsible roles, a more cooperative relationship also may be developed between adolescents and adults.

In addition to developing a cooperative relationship with adults, it was apparent that students who were involved in the study developed confidence in functioning without adult assistance. However, the students seemed to need an adult who would assist them in focusing their energy and circumventing red tape. Many in traditional systems are still unwilling to allow students access to the adult community. Repression of attempts to access may create environments where individuals feel alienated.

These findings suggest that school administrators and classroom teachers can use this model to reduce levels of alienation and deviant student behavior. It seemed apparent that the interaction of a nonthreatening, significant adult with students in a small group situation was responsible for the reduction in discipline problems. If this is the case, then a similar model can be employed within the classroom, at grade level or with an entire school. The risks inherent in using this model seem minimal. Although loss of academic time was a criticism of faculty members at the study's onset, a slight though not significant

increase in grade point average by both test groups indicates that this fear was not well-founded.

If further research can continue to indicate a relationship between student involvement in service activities and reducing alienation, it may be necessary for educators to rethink some basic educational concepts. For example, there may be curricula implications. Further, schools may have to review the role of bright females in the school setting since involving bright females in service activities in the adult community seems to serve as a motivating factor in decreasing alienation and isolation, improving academic growth, and creating a more positive environment in which females are allowed to mature. Further research which controls for IQ among females may allow scholars to better understand the needs of this valuable resource.

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