

GAMES OF RAPPORT

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Abstract

A series of board games called *Games of Rapport* are currently being developed at the University of Alberta. The first in the series: "Angels and Devils" is designed for play by residents in a nursing home environment. Results of a study involving play of "Angels and Devils" by nursing home residents is interpreted as showing that board games can be useful in communicating rehabilitative objectives and in promoting discussion of sources of conflict in the nursing home social environment. A second game in the series: "Roles", initially developed for play in a delinquent counselling centre, is now being adapted for play in nursing homes. *Games of Rapport* appear to have potential for facilitating communication in a variety of counselling and training contexts.

Résumé

A l'université de l'Alberta, on développe présentement une série de jeux de table appelés *Jeux de Rapport*. Le premier jeu de la série, intitulé Anges et Démon, se destine aux résidents d'institutions de vieillards. Une étude effectuée chez les vieillards qui auraient employé le jeu, démontre que les jeux de table sont très utiles dans la communication d'objectifs ayant trait à la réhabilitation et dans la promotion de discussions dont le but serait la recherche des origines de conflits pouvant exister dans le milieu social des institutions de vieillards. Le deuxième jeu de la série s'intitule Rôles. Bien qu'il ait été développé pour utilisation dans un centre d'orientation pour délinquents, on l'adapte présentement pour utilisation dans les institutions de vieillards. Les *Jeux de Rapport* semblent manifester une certaine capacité de faciliter la communication dans une variété de milieux ayant trait à l'orientation et à l'entraînement.

Residential care in a nursing home is rarely cited as a preferred housing arrangement for elderly individuals; however, in the case of incapacitated or at-risk individuals, such an arrangement is often the most viable alternative.

The optimal level of care to be provided by nursing home staff must necessarily be decided on an individual basis; however, research regarding factors related to resident-rated "life-satisfaction" (Tobin & Neugarten, 1961), and staff-rated "resident adjustment" (Felton & Kahauna, 1974; Wolk, 1976) has been indicative. In general, nursing homes which provide a support system, encouraging residents to maintain physical and social functions and challenging them to set realistic rehabilitative goals, are psychologically healthier than environments which provide essen-

tially custodial care (Corbin & Nelson, 1977; Rodstein, 1975).

Effective communication between individuals in the nursing home social environment may be seen as critical to the establishment and maintenance of an appropriately supportive environment. For this reason, evidence of a communication breakdown dictates immediate remedial action. Unfortunately, such evidence is much easier to obtain (Coons & Bykowski, 1975; Dowd, 1975; Posner, 1975).

In response to the apparent need for a practicable method of facilitating interpersonal communication in nursing homes, and in other environments, a series of board games are currently being developed at the University of Alberta under the generic name: *Games of Rapport*. Although not entirely new, in that simulation gaming has been introduced in a different format for both counselling and staff training purposes (Chaisson, 1977; Coons & Bykowski, 1975; Johnson & Nelson, 1978), the *Games of Rapport* are unique in some respects. They are board games which can be played without extensive pre-game preparation or expensive equipment, are not intellectually or physically taxing, and are

1. The games described were designed by T. M. Nelson and will be marketed under the copyright *Games of Rapport*: "Angels and Devils"; "Roles"; and "Owls and Weasels." For more information or for copies of the Rule Book, write to: Games of Rapport, c/o Dr. T. M. Nelson, Dept. of Psychology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta.

2. Development and implementation of the board game "Roles" etc. — acknowledge Alberta Mental Health Advisory Council.

adaptable to a variety of settings with both counselling and training application.

In designing the games in this series: "Angels and Devils" and "Roles" (described in more detail below), it was felt that advantage could be taken of the general inclination to participate more freely in game play than in directive discussions. Game play, in the form of a board game, cues social interaction while giving the interaction a non-threatening focus. In the gaming context, it was considered possible to introduce issues which are sources of conflict for the players, and to provide an atmosphere conducive to attitude expression and discussion. It was also felt that observation of the game-playing behaviour of the participants would provide insight regarding their self-perceptions and attribution patterns.

Studies conducted with the *Games of Rapport* have been primarily formative to date, with a focus on developing the games in appropriate settings. However, results from studies in two settings appear to support the potential of board games in reducing communication barriers in a counselling context (Johnson & Nelson, 1978), and in facilitating discussion among nursing home residents (Corbin & Nelson, 1977).

The finding that discussion can be facilitated among nursing home residents by this method, with reported positive effects, is particularly encouraging for two reasons. First, the negative effects of communication failure in the nursing home social environment have been well documented, and appear to be of most serious consequence for the borderline functional residents. The simple format of the *Games of Rapport* will permit their use with this population. Second, few Canadian nursing homes have clinical or counselling psychologists on staff. However, as many have well-developed in-service training programs and are initiating orientation programs for new residents and their families, discussion stimulating techniques which can rely heavily on existing social skills while providing an opportunity for learning and development may be helpful.

Positive results with Angels and Devils in the nursing home setting and with Roles in a counselling centre have encouraged continued developmental research. A study designed to develop, implement and evaluate the game Roles in the nursing home setting is currently under way. Roles will be played by residents, staff, volunteers and family of residents with an emphasis on refining the game materials; however, pre- and post-play measures are being made in an attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of Roles in revealing and altering perception of interpersonal conflicts and of one's own and other's "in-role" behaviour. The results of the evaluation phase are also expected to provide information regarding the

potential for Roles as a staff training or resident orientation device.

Games of Rapport:

Angels and Devils, a board game developed in response to a staff-perceived need to alter what were described as negative social effects of institutionalization (Corbin & Nelson, 1977), is similar in board design and rules of play to the marketed game: "Shutes and Ladders." In the place of shutes and ladders, there are designated "Devil - back - sliding" and "Angel - levitation" spaces. Movement around the board progresses according to the throw of a die. A player whose token lands on either an "Angel" or "Devil" space, draws a behavior statement card from the appropriate deck and reads the statement aloud before "back-sliding" or "levitating."

The nursing home staff provided the behaviour descriptions on which all negative and positive behavior statements were based. Resident behavior which appeared to reflect an apathetic, resistive or irresponsible attitude were defined as negative (i.e., "Devilish"); those which appeared to reflect reasonable cooperation, express autonomy, responsibility, or insistence on rights to respect and privacy were defined as positive (i.e., "Angelic").

Roles was initially developed for play with delinquent children in a counselling centre (Johnson & Nelson, 1978). Slightly more complex than Angels and Devils, Roles has separate play areas leading to a common goal on the board, and a different set of positive and negative behavior statement cards for each of four roles. In each play area there are randomly placed plus (+) and minus (-) squares. A player whose token lands on one of these spaces during game play draws a card from his own positive or negative stack, and reads it aloud. Roles can be played at increasing levels of role involvement by requiring players to attempt to justify the behavior statement from the perspective of the role, with increasing levels of negative outcome for failing to satisfy "other role" players (e.g., "Justification," "Penalties").

The behavior statements for Roles developed for play in delinquent counselling centres are appropriate for the roles: Child, Friend (of the child), Parent, and Counsellor. It is considered most useful to have players participate in both "own" and "other" roles, particularly those roles presenting conflict.

Roles as it is being adapted for nursing home play will use the game board and Rule Book previously developed. Behavior statements for the roles: Resident, Staff, Family and Volunteer, have been derived from behavior observations and interviews with members of the four groups. Some of the Resident role cards are the same as those

developed for Angels and Devils, with additions and modification as suggested in the course of playing that game.

References

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