# Leadership and Creative Expression (LCE):
Group Relations Programming at a Four Year Public University

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CSUDH

akri the a. k. rice institute for the study of social systems. Endorsed by the A.K. Rice Institute as a learning experience using Group Relations theory and practice

GREX West Coast Center of the A.K. Rice Institute for the Study of Social Systems

Introduction

- In the university setting, there is a focus on what's known as "high impact educational practices" (HIPs). These are empirically-validated educational practices shown to be beneficial for college students of diverse backgrounds (Kuh, 2008). Further, HIPs have been found to help better prepare students for citizenship in their work and relationships later on in life (Kuh, 2008), as well as promote student retention and engagement.

- HIPs depend on the particular learning characteristics of the students involved, as well as the history of the institution, and larger institutional strategic priorities at play (Kuh, 2008). Although many institutions attempt to create educational experiences that are effective, they rarely engage in systematic assessment of such practices.

- This project was designed to be consistent with the core values of our university; namely to improve student learning, engagement and retention while also proactively explore a strategic institutional partnership (with Grex, with whom the university entered into contract for these events).

- In 2016, 2018 and 2019, three Group Relations conferences (GRCs) were held on the campus of California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), a four-year public university and federally designated Hispanic Serving Institution located in south central Los Angeles.

- In 2020 (just before the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic and inspired by FÁBRICA DE ARTE, a coalition of the arts in Cuba), the first social and environmental justice application event was held (the first of AKRI's Level 4 Co-sponsorship Incubator Initiatives), continuing the series exploration of alternative forms of creative expression (i.e., role collage, mural drawing and structure building) to facilitate the primary task of member learning about leadership, authority relations, responsibility and freedom of expression and its application from a systems psychodynamic perspective.

- Contextualized in terms of both the *science* of teaching and learning and the *spirit* of work in community organizing, we present both quantitative and qualitative program outcome data to date, (i.e., learning outcomes, the relative impact of the creative elements and qualitative data from post-conference interviews analyzed in relation to emerging themes), as well as provide a video presentation of the overall program, the rationale for creative elements, and the Director's report from the 2019 GRC and the 2020 application event.
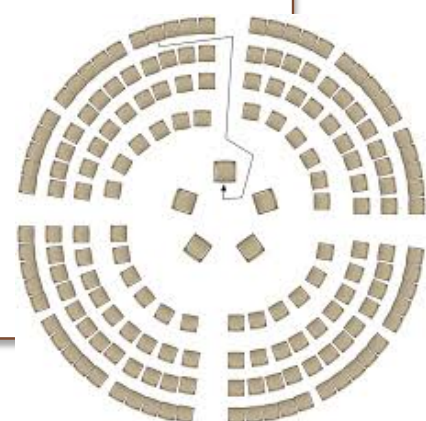
Hypotheses

It was hypothesized that:

1. Stated learning objectives would be met for the majority of participants:
- Increased leadership capacity
- Improved strategic thinking
- Increased understanding for how leadership style affects the group
- Increased understanding about how covert or subconscious forces impact individuals and groups
- Increased effectiveness in groups
- Improved recognition of the impact of differences (age, race, gender, etc.) on group collaboration
- That experience provided opportunities to apply their learning to family, school, work, and community life

2. Creative expression elements would facilitate the primary learning task for the majority of participants

3. The following themes would be frequent in semi-structured interviews: boundaries, authority, role & task

4. The majority of interviewees would describe their conference experience applicable to their outside roles related to school, work, or family life

5. Conflict or disagreement within and between groups (including member and staff groups) would be discussed in relation to the learning task.

Methods

Participants
- Approximately 189 student, alumni and community participants at least 18 years of age were recruited from CSUDH and the community at large.

GRCs (2016, 2018, 2019)
Quantitative
This research employed a within subjects pre/post design. Data were gathered through voluntary pre-post conference surveys distributed via online survey method, www.surveymonkey.com
- Only conference members who voluntarily provided consent to be in the research study completed the pre- and post-conference surveys in the context of this IRB-approved project.

- Post-conference questionnaires were administered at three separate time frames (at the conclusion of the conference, and three- and six-months after the conference) and each took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

- Surveys gathered information about basic demographics about participants as well as assessed members' learning in regard to their learning of group dynamics, their experience of the creative elements in relation to traditional GRC events, university and civic engagement, experience with diverse populations, and application of learning outcomes in real world contexts.

Qualitative
- Thematically coded transcripts of three post-conference interviews were examined by two independent raters.

- In total, interviews included 13 interviewees (7 females and 6 males).

- To ensure coding and theme identification consistency between raters, a codebook was created with a description of each code, an operational definition and example quote from the data.

- The final coding book consisted of 23 codes in total (e.g., Conflict, Pulled/Pushed Into Role).

- Codes were clustered into 13 overall themes (e.g., Role, Authority) aligned with the conceptual framework of Group Relations theory and practice.

GRCs (2016, 2018, 2019) and Application Event (2020)
- Anonymous post-event surveys were also administered to examine learning outcomes.

Results

Most Prevalent Conference Themes

Learning Objectives Response Rate across three conferences (2016, 2018, 2019) ~ 65% Response Rate for 2020 application event ~ 30%	% "agreed or strongly agreed" it was met	
	GRCs only	Application Event (n = 21)
Develop **leadership capacity**	79% (n = 103)	100%
Improve **strategic thinking**	90% (n = 102)	71%
Understand how **leadership style** affects group	91% (n = 103)	81%
Understand more covert or **subconscious forces** impacting individuals and groups	85% (n = 103)	62%
Increase **effectiveness** in groups	90% (n = 103)	62%
Recognize **impact of differences** on group collaboration	91% (n = 103)	52%
Provide opportunities to **apply the learning** to family, school, work and community life	91% (n = 102)	81%

Results (continued)

Results across three GRCs (2016, 2018, 2019) only

High Impact Practice (HIP)	RR across three conferences ~ 25%	
.... brought faculty and students together in a context that promoted **critical inquiry and collaborative learning.**	68%	28
...provided space outside the classroom for students to integrate knowledge/experience by **dealing with "bigger questions"** that have **real-life application.**	79%	28
...offered experiential learning opportunities to **explore differences between people** with respect to culture and life experience (including racial, ethnic and gender inequality).	86%	28

Statement	% "agreed" or "strongly agreed"	n
Artistic expression can be a leadership act	61%	28
Creative expression enhances the process of learning about the unconscious of group life.	64%	28
Creative expression could be used as a nonviolent way of questioning authority.	71%	28
Creative expression could be used for societal change.	61%	28

Learning by Event: Please indicate the extent which the event contributed to your learning	% "a great deal" or "a very great deal"	n
Small Study Group	72%	25
Large Study Group	64%	25
Review and Application Group	76%	25
Role Collage	32%	25
Mural Drawing	36%	25
Structure Building	40%	24
Institutional Event	72%	25
Conference Discussion	68%	25
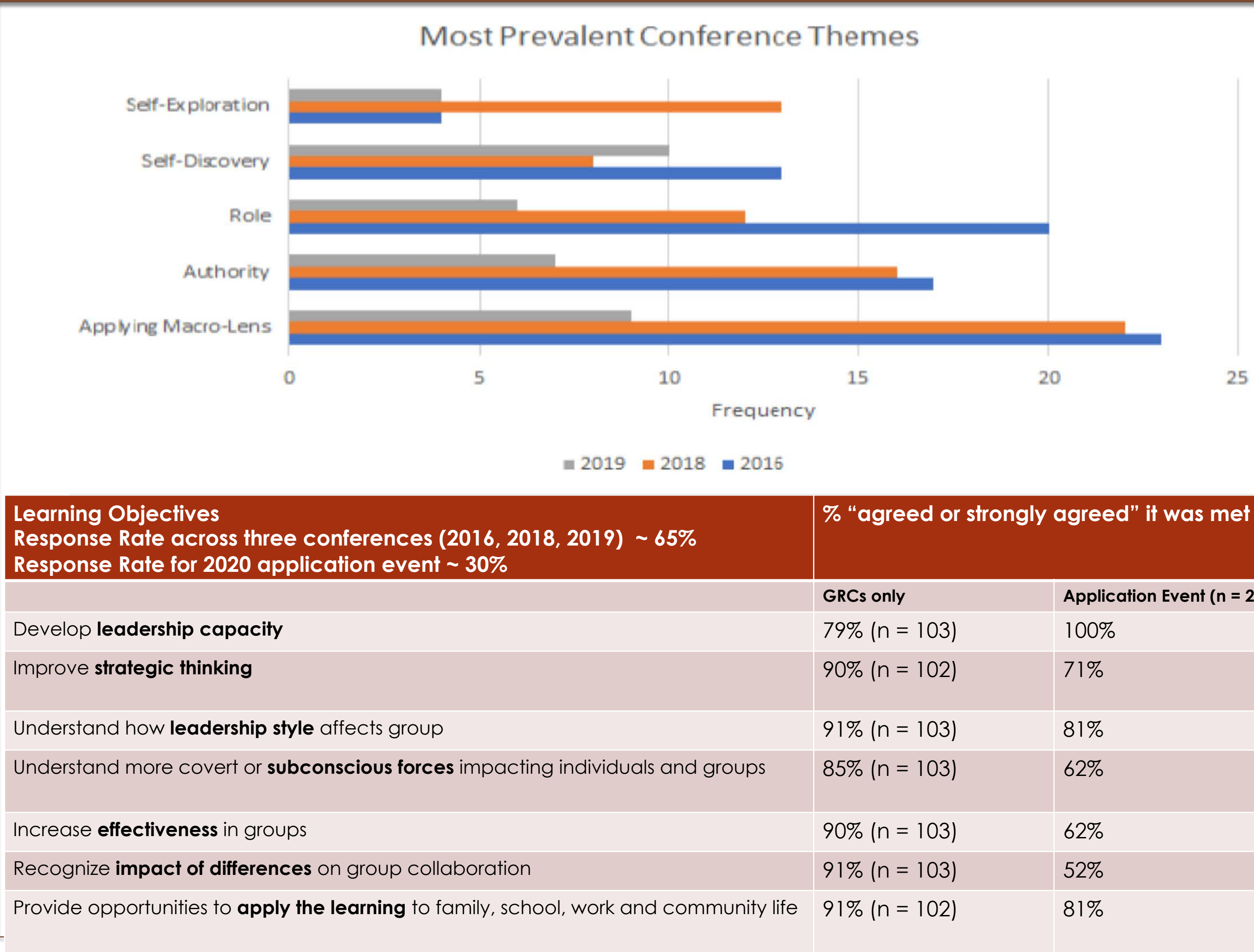
Discussion & Future Directions

- Hypothesis 1 was supported as the majority of program participants felt that learning objectives (LOs) were met and that the GRCs were high impact educational practices. LOs were higher within the traditional conference design compared to the application event with the exception of one: developing leadership capacity. The lowest rated LO within the application event was: understanding subconscious forces. Therefore, there may be curriculum design utility in having members attend a traditional GRC before entering an application event.

- Hypothesis 2 was partially supported by the majority of participants expressing agreement with statements of relevance for the creative expression elements. However, participants rated traditional (versus creative expression) conference events higher with respect to their utility in facilitating their learning. That said, creative expression events were found to be useful for a subset of participants, and this may reflect individual differences in learning. Future research might want to examine characteristics of the learner in relation to creative or other nontraditional elements in conference design.

- Hypotheses 3 through 5 were partially supporting, as five central themes emerged from the transcriptions of the post-conference interviews: (1) Self-Exploration, (2) Self-Discovery, (3) Role, (4) Authority, and (5) Applying Macro-Lens. Consistent with our hypothesis, the most prevalent themes were related to subjects of Authority and Role application of the conference to outside experiences. Additionally, prevalent themes were related to participants experiences of Self-Discovery and Self-Exploration as they relate to role adoption and leadership qualities. Although there was a small sample size in the study, the qualitative analytic method developed could be expanded and applied in future analyses.

- We plan to further analyze the data from pre and post survey responses as it relates to the outcomes of student, alumni and civic engagement as well as experience with diverse populations. Future research should include larger sample sizes and qualitative analysis with inter-rater reliability calculations to ensure accuracy and standardization. Ultimately, we aim to develop investigative methods which can thematically link conference events and experiences to the larger sociocultural climate (i.e., conference as a microcosm).