

## "Me" to "We"

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DOROTHY OLDENDORF

GEORGE, a 4-year-old in a pre-kindergarten school, was overheard expressing his developing concept of fairness in play to a fellow playmate, "We take turns in here, Billy. We take turns, see, me first and you next!" Billy, at this point, did not contest the explanation of how we play, and I am sure that with added experience George will soon learn that fair play does not always mean "me first, and you next."

If we would help youngsters live together, we must become acquainted with a child's slant on life. Turning from George and Billy, let us look at another situation. A new member had joined a group of children who had already lived together three years. The new child was suffering from a lack of proper experiences of living with other children her own age. The entire group was definitely conscious of the interruption this child brought to their well-established group life. The child showed marked improvement in her social

behavior after living several months with a teacher and a group of children who were willing to help her. An 8-year-old youngster from the group confidentially expressed his satisfaction with their efforts by remarking to the kindergarten teacher, "We sure have had a lot of trouble with Ruth, but at last I think we are getting her decent." To get a child decent to live with is an adequate concept of good social adjustment as understood by children at this age.

The answers given by fifth and sixth grade children when asked how they had learned to live together cooperatively should give us some insight into our job of planning proper school experiences for them. "Just being with one another, we learn to get along" is one child's way of describing how it happens. Another child was not satisfied with this simple explanation and so he added, "Some schools have got it, and others don't. If the school is run on a fair basis instead of having to do just what the teacher says, children learn to cooperate with the teacher and with everybody else." Following this comment the entire group agreed, "The school must give everybody a chance to do something and not be a school for just a few of the kids."

"The Student Council helps us to know what we are doing and keeps us informed about the school. If we are doing all right, then everybody is happy

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*On paper, the changing of "me" to "we" is absurdly simple. In terms of human philosophies and responses, the transition is much more difficult. Dorothy Oldendorf, Principal of Harper School, Wilmette, Ill., discusses for us the ways children react to one another and to a school program and points out the necessity for a teacher to understand this response if she is to build an enthusiasm for working together among her students.*

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about it; if we have been wrong, we try to change."

### *Getting Along With Each Other*

"We learn teamwork when we do things together, like playing games. The boys play baseball and football, and they have learned to get along together."

"It seems to me," added another, "the supervised after-school activities have helped me a lot. There we have some big children, and we have to look out for the little children."

If these youngsters are right in saying we learn "teamwork" when we do things together, then how much time do we want to spend in supervised activities during our school day which will provide these opportunities of learning to live together cooperatively?

The time of crisis we are living in today makes it more difficult to think clearly about that which we want to accomplish in group life with children. However, it seems imperative at such a time that we increase our efforts to find ways to help children understand and feel the importance of certain good principles of living, if we are to have good life for the group.

We must earnestly strive through our group living to give to children a feeling for the necessity of sharing the responsibilities of group life if they are to share in the benefits. We need to find ways to help children understand that freedom for the individual comes only when we have genuine consideration of the rights and the obligations of every member of the group. These larger aims of education will come only when we are willing to definitely plan a program to accomplish them.

Children need a program of balanced activities for right social growth. The exact manner in which we shall handle such periods in our daily program can not be described in any blanket form. Each individual teacher, with the help of her group of children, must work out a plan which appropriately meets the day-by-day needs of the group. This planning with children what shall be done in various real situations which confront the teacher and the children is one of the more effective ways of helping children learn to live together. The expert guidance of the teacher will be needed to insure proper distribution of time for the various activities engaged in by the group. The proportion of time spent in work, play, or rest should be determined through a knowledge of the importance of each of these activities to the particular stage of development at the different age levels.

### *Planning for Life Situations*

The pre-kindergarten and kindergarten rooms in our schools should be so set up with proper play equipment that the young child is provided every opportunity to experiment first alone and then with others. Social behavior for this age child is stimulated by the reactions of one individual to another. Guidance from the adult is most essential for the satisfactory growth of the attitudes of the 4- and 5-year-olds as they work at their play.

The writer recently observed two 4-year-olds pursue a single activity for a twenty-five-minute period. These two children were testing their newly discovered skill in balance and coordination as they ran up the incline of one plank and down the decline of another.

Their play spirit kept within satisfactory bounds until actual physical fatigue brought undue emotional excitement. It was then necessary for the adult to suggest a change of activity before the tendency to push brought unhappiness to either of them. The test of the appropriateness of our program and the total school environment for children of 4 or 5 years is probably measured in proportion to the amount of adult intervention we find necessary to control their activities. Frustrations in our group life are undoubtedly produced when the adult finds it necessary to interrupt children's play with "don't's" and "can't's." Good attitudes never grow out of an environment which is upsetting to the individuals as they try to live together.

We must sincerely question the causes if we are not happy with the quality of living that goes on day by day for young children. Expert guidance, proper materials and equipment, and plenty of floor space are definite essentials for a program of good social development for children.

#### *Facts Are Not Learned Apart From Attitudes*

The first grade program in schools which are sincerely concerned with social development will not be planned as a sudden departure from all we hold important for the kindergarten age level. It will rather denote a recognition of gradual growth which must be met by a program that is broader and more challenging for this age child. Too often we as school people fail to continue to offer a well-balanced program when we find children ready to add academic achievement as a part of their total de-

velopment. It must be remembered that skills and facts are not mastered apart from attitudes, understandings, meanings, and ideas. The school environment which denies the importance of emotional and social growth by failing to include activities for such development produces unhealthy attitudes toward all learning situations. We should ask ourselves what conditions bring about such comments as "I am glad to help you, because I won't have to do my geography today." "We have finished our social studies a month earlier than the other fifth grade this year." "I hate music but I like to sing." "Watch out, here comes the teacher." Children will not learn to live cooperatively in a set-up that brings forth such expressions.

#### *Things That Really Count . . .*

Throughout the entire elementary school program we must continue to provide adequate work times, planning periods and opportunities for discussion. The very essence of good group life depends upon children feeling their own purposes to grow and to learn, rather than a mere conforming to the wishes of an adult.

We will need planning periods for the individual as well as for the group if we are to give these purposes to children. Work times with a variety of tasks for children to do individually, or in small groups, will provide opportunities for things to happen which really count. Good adult guidance will bring about discussion times which will give children opportunities to feel group approval or disapproval to acts which they understand.

Recreation or play periods are very often ideal times to help children ap-

preciate the "give and take" necessary to acceptable life with the group. To exercise good sportsmanship when it is needed on a ball team is to show an understanding of the concept of fair play. To be willing to take turns with the kick-ball if there is but one available shows some ability to share. Children need frequent opportunities to talk over their playground problems and then to establish better play times for their group. Through the wise guidance of the teachers who are willing

to give the time to help with these important problems of daily living, children will gain understanding of the attitudes necessary for group living.

It should be stated that if we are to become effective teachers of ways by which children learn to live cooperatively with one another, we must strive to establish with fellow staff members, parents, and children a school atmosphere which is charged with the same principles of good living we want for children.

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## A PARENT LOOKS AT GROUP PROCESSES

MELVA E. HIATT

MORE PROMPTLY than usual, Jimmy came bounding into the kitchen. "Mother, Tony wants to know if he can stay for lunch? His mother is airplane spotting."

On that day the baby had a cold, I had a cold, and it was with a sigh of relief that less than three hours before I had eased myself back into the pillows after the morning chores, realizing that a little heat and five minutes' preparation would convert the remains of last

night's dinner into a hot lunch for Jimmy.

However, rallying quickly despite bathrobe, bedroom slippers, and hair curlers, my response to Jimmy was an enthusiastic affirmative, although I hesitated to expose anyone to my cold. But Jimmy tossed off that objection lightly, saying that Tony was just getting over a cold. Tony responded with a convincing sniffle and cough.

It had not occurred to Jimmy that with the family ill there might have been a better time to act on his parents' suggestion that he bring children home more often rather than play so much away from home. But the luncheon was a huge success, as spontaneous things usually are. Tony, a British subject, born and, except for the past year, reared in India, gave the party a delightful flavor with his English accent,

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*An appreciative mother writes of how a sixth grade teacher awakened in her students a lively enthusiasm for group action which overflowed into the community. Melva E. Hiatt leads a busy life in Bethesda, Md., looking after her two boys—Jimmy, aged 11, and 18-months-old Freddy—and sharing whole-heartedly in school, church, and community activities.*

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