

## Growing With Each Other

---

PAUL R. PIERCE

LIKE DISCUSSION in medicine, sister profession of education, this article is based on systematic practice and clinical observation of that practice. The problem studied is growth in group activities. The laboratory is a metropolitan high school, a realistic world of youth living and learning. The members of the staff directing the study are trained in investigational techniques and include key teachers, a personnel specialist, a vocational counselor, a secretary with statistical training, a practicing physician, and the principal. All except the secretary have worked together over the eight and one-half years of the school's existence.

The high school forming the setting of our study follows the same provisions respecting pupil load, equipment, and teacher supply as similar institutions of the city system to which it belongs. It has an enrollment of 2,240 students. The district is industrial, but economic and foreign-language problems in the homes are decreasing. The faculty draws on

resources of the community, established educational theory, and innovating field practices and, on the basis of study and experience, develops guiding principles in each learning area.

### INTERDEPENDENT LIVING

When the school was new and student activities were being initiated, our students took pride in discussing matters without benefit of staff advice. As they sought, however, to move from discussion to action, they often found themselves facing hindering school regulations. When their plans involved action outside of the school, they frequently encountered restricting home and community practices. Numbers of them chafed at the rules of adults and considered themselves treated as "grade school children." Guided to study such situations realistically, however, students eventually adopted the policy of getting the reactions of individuals or groups concerned before making decisions on important issues or problems. They found that few individuals or groups can accomplish important things alone—that teachers, principal, and parents, too, have "bosses" and inherent limitations on their ambitions and activities. In short, they discovered that "interdependence" may be fully as important, in school or out, as "independence."

In our over-all curriculum planning, students, parents, and community lead-

---

*There is no better place to develop group interdependence and group efficiency and at the same time establish respect for the rights of individuals than in our schools. No one is in a more favorable position to accomplish these goals than teachers. Paul R. Pierce, Principal of Wells High School in Chicago, describes in this article specific examples of school practice which develop atmospheres for group growth.*

---

ers work cooperatively with teachers at each grade level, the student being the main medium between the faculty members and their community colleagues. High school youth, conventionally having no voice in formulating school policies, here plays a realistic and influential role in both planning and carrying out the school program.

The principle developed from practices of the type described is that *group activities in high school should provide experiences and growth in the interdependent living essential to a democratic order.*

#### REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

If group living in the school is to be carried over into adult life, it must be related to successful living outside the school. A marked contribution of group action in the secondary school is that it invariably raises issues and conflicts of serious civic or social import. If such problems are settled by relating them to policies and principles of American democratic procedure instead of deciding them merely on the basis of expediency, the pupils obtain a much clearer grasp of basic principles of American government than they could acquire solely from academic reading and discussion.

In establishing our student council, early student leaders and sponsors adopted the policy of making the presidents of homeroom civic clubs also the representatives of the homeroom in the council. As time passed and the work of homeroom clubs and council became more complex, the club presidents encountered conflicting representative and administrative demands on their time and services. Advised by

social studies teachers and sponsors to make use of American governmental principles covering such situations, the students found themselves studying and viewing the legislative and administrative branches and functions of our government in a new way. They are now examining the early provision of the council charter and seeking to determine, in the light of history and democratic practice, whether an individual elected for administrative purposes should also be expected to serve as a legislator.

In the pressure to get things done, administrators and teachers are likely to neglect opportunities for students to share in initiating large curriculum undertakings. Accordingly, a student planning group consisting of a representative elected by each classroom group has been established in each core-curriculum field. The representatives present to the central group resolutions initiated in their classrooms and report and promote in their classes the measures adopted by the central group and approved by the administrative office.

In this type of action, approximately 300 students each semester have experiences as members of a deliberative body and grow in their understandings of the relations of a representative to his constituency. Also, consideration of how much responsibility the central planning groups should take toward putting the policies they adopt into action has led to marked study and new conceptions of the responsibilities and limitations of the legislative bodies of the United States and other democratic countries. Cooperative undertakings of the core-field planning groups have included the establishment and upkeep of the campus

by the science group, a community youth survey by the social studies group, and an investigation of reading in school, homes, and neighborhood libraries by the planning group in English arts.

*The representative character of American democracy should be lived and learned through civic and social group action in high school.*

#### GROWTH OF PERSONALITY

The laboratory procedures of our core-classrooms are extended through groups formed of classes at the same grade level. A group of this kind may consist of four teachers, one each in the fields of social studies, English, science, and art, and pupils of their four home-room divisions, or it may contain a smaller or larger number of teachers and their divisions. Each teacher has the others' homeroom divisions for classroom instruction, and schedules are arranged so that teachers and their groups have classes, lunch, study sessions, and auditorium arts simultaneously. Thus, teachers and students can get together for planning and conducting large-group sessions, including parent teas, visual programs, lectures, and field trips.

The greatest growth in the arrangement described undoubtedly results from the sharing of interests and experiences. Pupils get to meet teachers under informal and friendly circumstance. They encounter many new points of view freely and frankly expressed by both pupils and teachers. They grow in tolerance, in the spirit of giving as well as receiving, and in suspending judgments until all evidence on an issue has been submitted. They see the necessity for developing them-

selves in certain aspects of personality and refraining from overdevelopment in other aspects more to their liking.

*Well-rounded growth of student personality should be attained through classroom and extra-class group activities.*

#### EFFICIENCY OF GROUP ACTION

A tendency exists to adjust conduct, attendance, or learning problems of pupils without consulting all people having a vital connection with the case. Principals and personnel workers sometimes avoid the group conference in a mistaken hope of expediting matters or out of reluctance to interrupt other activities of teachers. Though the conference, like other democratic processes, appears time-consuming and difficult, it is economical and effective in the end.

Our group procedures have proved helpful in conduct cases where the offender does not reveal himself, and other students feel bound in honor not to expose him. Our most difficult case of this nature was solved through group conferences in which principal and teachers discussed the ethical aspects of the problem with the pupils concerned but left them alone from time to time to discuss the issues by themselves. Between meetings, the students individually sought opinions of teachers and other adult friends. The solution which the student group finally arrived at met the full approval of the staff and reflected credit on all the students involved, including the offender.

*Group procedure should be used to solve social problems in high school, not only because it is more satisfying, but also because it is more efficient than authoritarian methods.*

## INDIVIDUALS AND MINORITIES

Perhaps our most difficult problem in group activities has been to deal tangibly and fairly with individual and minority rights in relation to the will of the majority. The problem has been twofold: to guide the majority to respect the rights and opinions of minorities, and to encourage individuals and small groups to work for their ideals as well as their rights, without regard to criticism or unpopularity.

The town-hall type of assembly proved our most effective source for initiating learnings respecting majority and minority relationships. An extended period of patient effort on the part of teachers and student leaders was required before students generally ventured to discuss questions from the floor of the assembly. Most of the early speakers appeared to court what they judged to be majority sentiment, and members of majorities were prone to heckle speakers who opposed the main tide of student opinion. Chairmen were guided to insist on a respectful hearing of all points of view. Teachers and principal had to train themselves, too, to stand fast when student speakers attacked school policies—an ordeal for the faculty, but a factor very conducive, nevertheless, to free speech in assembly.

The next stage of growth in recognition of individual and minority rights was acquired by students and staff members in a teachers' meeting to which student groups (usually a minority)

were invited for the presentation of youth's points of view. The young people were so anxious to please—or fearful of displeasing—us that they expressed views only on school regulations, ways of study, and the like. When they were finally persuaded to express views on vital youth interests, such as getting a job, achieving popularity, or relationships with the opposite sex, faculty members, including the principal, had to restrain themselves from attempting unduly to get the students to express, or conform to, their adult points of view. Gradually, however, a frank, give-and-take relationship was achieved between adults and youth. A not unimportant outcome was that the spirit of these joint sessions was carried into classrooms where a more formal atmosphere had prevailed.

*The rights of individuals and minorities should be practiced and learned through high school group living.*

Practices and principles dealing with five aspects of growing in a group have been presented in the foregoing pages. These aspects may be summarized as "interdependence," "representative democracy," "well-rounded development," "group efficiency," and "individual rights." The list is not intended to be inclusive; group action undoubtedly involves other areas of growth. To identify those and develop related practices and principles is the work of high schools and their staffs. In no other place, and by no other workers can it be better accomplished.

### We Are Extendable

In the days when men are being expended that democracy may be saved, public education must be extended that a saved democracy may be nurtured and improved.—*New York State Education*, October, 1943.

Copyright © 1944 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.