

## Belonging in a Group

READ D. TUDDENHAM

CHILDREN WANT to be wanted by each other. As educators, we are agreed that if the adults of tomorrow are to be happy and effective citizens it is vital that the children of today enjoy emotional security and an opportunity to grow in their social relationships. Most of us will further concede that the ultimate happiness of our pupils depends far more upon ability to live and work harmoniously with those who will share their future than upon success in dealing with the present generation of adults. Children seem to recognize this fact almost intuitively in their desire to follow the gang's tastes in everything from clothing to music.

Unfortunately, some children are chronic misfits with their peers, and

the alert teacher is quick to recognize the symptoms of their maladjustment: the academically successful boy who is last to be chosen for the team; the girl who masks a reluctance to play with others by staying in at recess to "help" the teacher; the shy newcomer who prefers his own reveries to play activities. Such children need special help, but it is difficult for a teacher to supply it without a knowledge of the differing group pressures to which each child is subjected.

### *Children Have Private Lives*

The attitudes of children toward each other and toward themselves are largely inaccessible to adults. Teachers seldom have time to consider carefully the friendships and animosities, the social prestige and social aspirations of the individual child. Even were one freed from the usual teaching load, one would inevitably observe with a teacher's eyes, and many of the most revealing bits of social exchange are saved for moments when the teacher's eyes are safely focused elsewhere. Only the children themselves possess really adequate information, but how can it be obtained?

The Guidance Study<sup>1</sup> of the Uni-

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*There are walls around a youngster's world that make it extremely difficult for grown-ups to see children as other children see them. As teachers, we are inclined to appraise boys and girls in the light of their relationship to adults. That is hardly ever the criterion used by the children themselves. Determining a child's "social reputation" among his peers and, with that information as a basis, devising ways of helping "unpopular" children win friends are the objectives of a simple questionnaire worked out by the Guidance Study of the University of California Institute of Child Welfare. The nature of this device and ways of using its results are described here by Read D. Tuddenham, a member of the Institute of Child Welfare staff.*

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<sup>1</sup> Macfarlane, J. W.: "Studies in Child Guidance: I. Methodology of Data Collection and Organization," *Monog. Soc. Res. Child Develop.*, III, No. 6, Washington, D. C., National Research Council, 1938.

versity of California Institute of Child Welfare found a rather simple device to be extremely effective for this purpose. The procedure involved the administration to an entire class of a "reputation test," adapted from the well-known "Guess Who" questionnaire used by Hartshorne and May in the Character Education Inquiry, and from Tryon's<sup>2</sup> revision of their test. As a preliminary explanation, the children in the room were told that the investigator was interested in the things children did and the way they felt and that he wished to see how good they were at sizing up themselves as well as others. Next, the children were asked to name the members of the class who best fitted various brief character descriptions arranged in pairs of opposites, e. g.,

"Which children are good at games and play them well?"

"Which children aren't very good at games?"

The children were instructed to name as many boys and girls on each item as they desired and to omit items which no one seemed to fit. They were allowed to name the same child on more than one question and to name themselves. For comparative purposes, the teachers were asked to supply the same information and in the same form. In the lower grades, the test was formulated as a guessing game and the nominations recorded in a series of individual interviews. At the fifth grade level and thereafter, the questions were presented in printed booklets to be filled out as a written group exercise.

### Popularity "Stars" and Cliques

The fundamental data for a study of the social organization of the classrooms tested were obtained from responses to the concluding item, "Who is your best friend?" However, the children's responses to the other parts of the test contributed much to this analysis by revealing the prejudices and aspirations which determined individual children's friendships.

Since a tabulation sheet showing each child's friendship nominations seemed confusing, a graphic "map" of the social structure was prepared for each classroom, using Moreno's sociometric technique.<sup>3</sup> Each child was assigned a number and the numbers spaced out over a page. Friendship mentions were indicated by arrows connecting the numbers which symbolized the children concerned. If child No. 1 named child No. 2 as a friend, an arrow was drawn, pointing from No. 1 to No. 2. (1.→2.) If children No. 1 and No. 2 mentioned each other, arrows, (1.←→2.) connecting the two served to indicate the reciprocated friendship.

These charts revealed marked differences in popularity among individual children. Some were veritable "stars," receiving as many as eight or ten mentions. In such commanding position, they were able to exercise considerable influence upon the acceptance of newcomers by the group. Especially in higher grades constellations of three or more children linked by reciprocated

<sup>2</sup> Tryon, C. M.: "Evaluations of Adolescent Personality by Adolescents," *Monog. Soc. Res. Child Develop.*, IV, No. 4, Washington, D. C., National Research Council, 1939.

<sup>3</sup> Moreno, J. L.: "Who Shall Survive? A New Approach to the Problem of Human Interrelations," *Nerv. Ment. Dis. Monog. Series No. 58*, Washington, D. C., Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Company, 1934.

friendships indicated the presence of clear-cut cliques. The opinions expressed by class members often indicated the attributes shared by clique participants, the attitudes of outsiders to these groups, and their rivalries with other cliques.

### *The Lonely Ones*

In contrast to these securely placed children, others received no votes at all. Some of them were found to have affiliations with children in other rooms, but a larger proportion were quite isolated. In many cases, these latter children had escaped notice because their good manners and poise in dealing with adults had given a false impression of competence and security in social relationships. Yet when their true status was brought into sharper focus by the friendship constellation charts, teachers were often able to recall instances of withdrawing behavior or compensatory aggressiveness symptomatic of their social maladjustment.

Although ours was primarily a research interest, the teachers of the classrooms concerned were quick to utilize the charts to locate children who appeared to need help. The "sociograms" proved to be of further value in suggesting the types of treatment likely to be most successful. Rearrangements of seating or the assignment of two isolated children to a joint project often helped each to gain the security of having a friend. Sometimes it was possible to have a class leader serve as guide and sponsor for a newcomer and thus facilitate the child's acceptance in the established group.

In one dramatic instance, resulting from a teacher's interest, a child moved

in a little over a year from a position of complete isolation to a secure status in which he maintained a reciprocal friendship with a class leader and was mentioned by several others. Johnny had long waged a losing competition with a younger sister for the affection and attention of his parents. He had compensated for his defeat by a sullen aggressiveness which, in turn, had induced a heavy load of hostility from his classmates. When the sister died suddenly, the teacher utilized the sympathy of two children, shown by the sociogram to be of strategic influence in the group, to induce them to be polite to Johnny and to help him fit in. They responded handsomely, and somehow contrived his election as class president.

Following these events, Johnny blossomed out from a domineering, unattractive child to a happy and respected one. He has since maintained his gains both in academic work and in status with the group. No one can assess the relative importance of the various factors at work in this metamorphosis, but it is unlikely that Johnny could have lived down his unfortunate reputation so rapidly without positive assistance.

### *Studying Group Structure*

Used to understand the social needs of a specific child, the friendship sociograms constitute a rich source of insights, without reference to any so-called norms. Indeed, in the eighty-five rooms tested by the Guidance Study, the social organization of each class proved to be so unique to the particular group that it was difficult to arrive at useful generalizations applicable to a sex or grade level. Nevertheless some general trends appeared.

Let us consider the permanence of the social structures discovered. Admittedly, children's friendships are constantly shifting; yet the basic alignments of a group seemed remarkably constant in some rooms over intervals as long as two or three years. In one class, the clique organization showed clear traces of the study committees formed two years previously by a teacher interested in homogeneous grouping. In general the same children were centers of attraction and the same children isolated on repeated testings, though the nominations made by the latter were especially likely to change as they sought affiliation with one popular child after another.

The significance of receiving no friendship nominations seemed to increase with the grade level of the child concerned. In the first and second grades, the children made rather few nominations and tended to name one or two "stars" to the exclusion of virtually everyone else. In higher grades, more mentions were made and they were distributed more nearly evenly, clique groupings tending to supplant the earlier "star" type of organization. In consequence, the proportion of children receiving no votes declined from 40 per cent in grade I to 25 per cent in grade VI. The status of an isolated child in the intermediate grades was usually found to result more from a definitely unfavorable reputation than from there being simply too few nominations "to go around." Little importance could be attached to an absent child's isolation in the class, for, even in the sixth grade, half of this group were named by no one. Apparently, children's memories for absent friends are very short.

Votes for members of the opposite sex were rare between grades II and V, but at all levels boys named girls as friends twice as often as girls named boys. On the other hand, girls gave more nominations to members of their own sex and formed more complex cliques than did boys. The girls who mentioned boys as friends were often tom-boys who were dissatisfied with a feminine role. Many of the boys who named girls were children who lacked the athletic skill prerequisite to acceptance by other boys and who therefore sought, usually unsuccessfully, to establish affiliations with girls. One child showed this trend clearly. Himself isolated at all levels studied, he named one boy as a friend in grade III, four boys and a girl in grade V, and two boys and four girls in grade VI.

#### *Using the "Reputation Test"*

The teacher considering adopting a technique similar to one described here may well inquire as to its limitations. It is possible to obtain the friendship nominations and to work up the results with a minimum of time and effort. The concurrent administration of a lengthy reputation test would not ordinarily be feasible without a research staff to handle the bulk of data involved. Preliminary experiments have indicated that a shortened test of three or four pairs of items can supply valuable material on the attitudes underlying the sociometric pattern. M. H. Elliott<sup>4</sup> has found that the friendship item given by itself can be very useful to teachers.

Before undertaking our investigation,

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<sup>4</sup> Elliott, M. H.: "Patterns of Friendship in the Classroom," *Progressive Education*, November, 1941.

we had feared that the test might be disturbing to the children and that asking them to pass formal judgments upon each other might foster a critical attitude which would be fundamentally undesirable. This issue, however, scarcely applies to the friendship item. And, even with reference to the potentially more disturbing reputation questions, the problem was less serious than we had anticipated. Obviously there were limits of expediency as to what questions might be asked. For example, we felt safe in inquiring, "Who are the children everyone seems to like?" but softened its antonym to read, "Who are the ones nobody seems to care much about?" Nevertheless, the children were astonishingly frank in expressing their opinions, and, if assured their judgments would be held in confidence, they showed little hesitancy in expressing them. Apparently the test did not demand new evaluations but rather tapped attitudes which had long since been

formed in the give-and-take of daily contact.

In almost all cases the children took the test without observable upset, though there were a very few (a fraction of 1 per cent), all in middle and upper class schools, who demurred. These children were in all cases unpopular and fearful of their own standing. At high school levels, where status considerations, club membership, etc., become matters of uneasy concern for most adolescents, the test might prove disturbing to a larger proportion. But at the grammar school level, the rewards to be derived from a carefully constructed and wisely administered test seem to outweigh by far the possible disadvantages. Most important of all is the fact that, if the results are put to practical use in improving the social adjustment and happiness of unpopular children, even the most protective parent or school administrator is unlikely to offer serious objection.

### **Your Help Is Requested**

As members of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development know, *Building America* is prepared under the direction of a committee of the Department. *Building America* is a series of pictorial study units on modern problems, one unit being published each month, October through May. The committee, with Paul Hanna as chairman, is now making plans for next year's units. We want these units to meet the needs in classrooms. Your help is requested. Please let us have your suggestion for *ten* areas for study in which *Building America* can be of most help in your school as classroom material for high school students. Your suggestions will be used as a basis for the eight areas to be developed in the issues for next year. Issues for 1943-44 are as follows:

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