

Why All This Talk About Workshops?

EARL C. KELLEY

EDUCATION in America has come to mean courses; the more courses, the more education. Does a new need arise? Start a course. In judging the education of an individual we rarely ask what he knows, but how many courses has he had.

To be sure, not all courses are bad. They often represent the best way of doing the particular task with which a group is confronted. When this is true, the course technique should by all means be used. The course technique is most apt to be useful on the college level where high specialization has been reached. The

contention here is only that a technique with limited uses and adaptability has become the pattern for all education.

The workshop has been invented as a device which will permit the development of the individual in intellect and personality. It is in a sense a protest against the weaknesses of the course as an educational technique which emphasizes (a) content rather than personal development, (b) non-functional content rather than functional content, and (c) compartmentalized experiences rather than integrated experiences.

Workshops are designed to aid in the *application* of knowledge rather than in the *acquisition* of knowledge. Courses are satisfactory for acquisition if we can presuppose motive or desire. Knowledge is applied in *problem* situations. In problem situations, needed knowledges are seldom all found in a single field or "course." For example, a teacher meets a problem in daily work requiring understanding of human behavior, principles of learning, the nature of the social structure, the direction of

If there is anything revolutionary about a workshop, it is simply that here at last we are making use of fundamental principles of learning which, even though recognized and well known, have often been neglected in learning situations. In this article, Earl C. Kelley, professor of secondary education at Wayne University, Detroit, Mich., discusses the workshop philosophy, examining the factors which make for learning and the mechanics of workshop operation. Mr. Kelley, with a staff from Wayne University and Detroit Public Schools, has operated an in-service workshop during the school year for the past five years.

WORKSHOPS . . . for personal growth

. . . for professional skills in working with children



From Michigan August Working Conference



From Alamance County Workshop, North Carolina

Educational Leadership

social change, effective methods of teaching, or diagnosis of pathological conditions.

The workshop provides a setting wherein a teacher can consider a problem in its entirety, not in unrelated partitions. It is the "case" method proved so effective in legal and medical training. It is a *functional* experience for teachers. It is growth in professional competency at its best.

Well-Known Principles Are Basic to the Workshop Approach

The workshop makes an effort to recognize and capitalize some simple and well-known principles involved in the learning process.

—readiness

The first of these principles is that of readiness. Learning is an experience. For any experience to be meaningful one must bring to it a background that enables one to interpret that experience. Educators have begun to question some of our educational practices in the light of what we have learned about readiness. We have become aware of the fact that not every child is able to learn to read at six years of age. We have come to question whether every ninth-grader is ready to learn algebra. Going one step further, we have begun to question whether it is possible to take a group of people with widely varying readinesses and give them mass educational experiences.

—a felt need

The second simple learning principle which the workshop tries to take into account is that one learns in a truly significant manner only when he is pursuing his own purposes. Of course, it is possible for one to memorize material in response to the purposes of another. But there is considerable doubt whether it is in any way reflected in his conduct after having

learned it. If it does not represent a felt need, it is forgotten as soon as possible.

The workshop technique was invented with the belief that people do want to learn and that people are curious. The 4-year-old wants to investigate everything. This curiosity can be preserved into adult life. In the ordinary school situation something seems to happen to the fine curiosity of the small child. Perhaps it is that children are subjected to the purposes of others, being required to learn things for which they have no need, and for which they see no use, until they become suspicious of what is likely to be put out for them to learn. This suspicion results in a lack of curiosity which does not necessarily have to come about. People can be curious; they can be avid for knowledge and for information when that knowledge and information can be made to fit their individual needs.

—democratic procedures

In addition to its attempt to meet the crude requirements of readiness and purpose, the workshop strives to meet the requirements of the democratic ideal. The ordinary course is usually authoritarian in its organization and procedure. The content and the requirements are laid out by the instructor, evaluative techniques are employed to find out whether the ordered task has been done and the sheep are separated from the goats according to these tests. It is, of course, not necessary that all courses must be authoritarian but ordinarily they are so.

The democratic or authoritarian way of life becomes apparent in the examination of one's attitude toward people. Naming a number of these attitudes will point the difference. First, we must recognize that each person in the group is an individual. Second, the individual is important. Third, since each individual is important we are

forced to believe that each individual is able to contribute. This calls for an organization where each individual will have his opportunity to participate and contribute. The fourth assumption is that every individual in the group wants to learn. We have often conducted our classes as though we have to force the pupil to learn. Of course, if we are trying to teach him something for which he is not ready and for which he cannot make a place in his experiential background or if we are trying to teach him something he does not want to learn, he may resist our efforts. But if we assure ourselves that he will have an opportunity to learn that which is important to him, then he will want to learn.

New Ways of Working—the group habit

The problem, then, which confronts one who would invent a workshop is not a simple one. He must invent an educational experience that will allow for individual differences, permit people to make contributions on the level on which they are able to make them, learn that which they are ready to learn, and pursue their own purposes.

If workshopers are to work together and profit from each other's experience it will be necessary first of all for them to get acquainted. This is not just a matter of good fellowship or of promotion of the party spirit. Human beings are social beings and one of the greatest objections to the ordinary class is that it prohibits social intercourse.

The organization must then be such that it will permit and promote discussion, not between the teacher and the student alone, but between students. This calls for learning how to take part in group discussions and to engage in group thinking. It calls for learning the technique of group thinking so that the individual becomes interested in the success of the group

rather than in what part he could play in it.

—individual problems

The workshop has to be set up so that each individual will have an opportunity to work his own project or problem. Often it is possible for several people in the workshop to be interested in the same problem and to work together on it. It is rarely possible that the entire group can be interested in the same problem. This problem or project should be something closely related to the daily work of the workshopper. It should be something that he can use after the workshop is over. Isolating and identifying his problem often causes the student to become really aware for the first time of the problems that confront him.

Plumbing All Resources

In order for the teachers or staff members in the workshop to be as useful as possible it is necessary for them to put themselves at the disposal of the members of the group as resources. This implies meeting with the small groups that are trying to learn how to work together, engaging in many informal individual conferences, doing everything in their power to remove the barrier that usually separates students from teachers.

The members of the workshop in turn must learn to use the staff as a resource in much the same sense they use books or any other resource that is available to them. It takes time and ingenuity to break down the teaching heritage of the staff so that staff and students can work together in an informal human relationship.

—contributors

In addition to the staff it is often possible to bring in outsiders that have special contributions to make. Very often the

group as a whole requires the answer to some particular problem that someone outside the workshop is best able to make. Outside speakers should never be brought in simply because they happen to be available, but only because they are able to answer questions which have arisen in the group. The same applies to lectures by members of the staff. It may happen that some member of the staff is able to answer felt needs through a lecture. The time to have a lecture is when the group is ready for it and needs it. The length of the lecture should be the length of time it takes the individual making the lecture to make his contribution. Under the informal setup of the workshop it is never necessary for a lecturer to pad his materials. There is always something to do if time is left over.

—books

Books, like fellow students and staff, must be regarded as resources to be called upon when they are serviceable. Much is to be learned from books if the right books are read at the right time. The wrong book in the hands of an individual is as futile as any other inappropriate tool. There must, of course, be no required reading. Since no two individuals are in the same state of readiness and no two individuals have the same purposes or needs it is rarely sensible to require a whole group of people to read the same book. There is only one good reason for ever reading a book; that is to find out what is in the book. Students who approach books with this point of view get entirely new experiences from reading.

—community

In the solution of almost any problem there are resources in the community which the student should use. He should visit projects in the community that are apropos his problem. He should come to

know his community and particularly the aspects of it that apply to what he is trying to do. Insofar as it is possible he should see children in action to the extent that that applies to the particular thing that he is trying to solve. All of the resources of the community become educative when viewed as resources and when the organization of the class makes it possible for them to be used.

—writing

What writing should a workshopper do? Should he write a term paper? The rather obvious answer to this question is that he should do such writing as serves his purpose in the solution of what he is trying to do. If he is working on a project on which he needs a record, then he should write. If he can do some writing that will be of use to him after he has left the workshop and if this writing will serve the purpose of helping him to retain the values that he had at that time, then he should by all means do the writing. He should never write primarily for the teacher or the staff. Of course, if he writes something that is of value to himself it is possible that this also may be valuable to some other member of the workshop or the staff. Because he will want to make his contribution to the welfare of his group he will submit copies of what he has written to the workshop so that such use may be made of them as is possible. This should not be done, however, as proof of work done. In the spirit of mutual confidence it should be unnecessary for the student to prove that he has done a piece of work.

What Are the Gains

What are some of the outcomes that may be expected from engaging in this type of education?

First, the student should have a great deal more energy to devote to the project

of learning. This saving will come from the fact that he is not using up energy trying to get what the instructor wants him to remember on examination day. He will not be subject to the tensions that the ordinary classroom situation entails. Another source of saved energy will be that which comes from sharing responsibility with other members of the group. When one tries to bear his burdens alone they always wear in the same place and finally consume a great deal of his strength and energy. When he becomes a member of a cooperating group he assumes some of the burdens of others and others assume some of his burdens so that they wear in different places.

If there has been a saving in energy, it is only fair to assume that the student will be able to accomplish more. We can expect therefore that the sum total of learning will be greater than in the ordinary mass education situation.

The student will be surprised to discover that learning is no longer disagreeable. A common reason why learning is unnecessarily disagreeable is that people are required to learn things which they are not interested in. When one can approach a learning situation without fear of punitive evaluation and in response to his own pur-

poses, learning and going to school become a pleasure.

The student in the workshop will have an opportunity to develop socially—to grow in the direction of becoming a more social being.

He will become a contributor rather than an absorber of pre-determined knowledge. The experience of becoming a contributor brings with it the responsibility for group success and solidarity. A new sense of personal dignity and importance comes from the knowledge that one has the ability to contribute and these contributions are received as valuable by one's fellow-men.

Since the student in the workshop has been working on his own problems and has been selecting material and writing material bearing on those problems, he will come out with material that he can use in his work.

The workshop then becomes the developer of the personality of the individual engaged in it. It teaches him how to work with others, how to identify his problems, how to attack them, how to find help on them, how to attain the capacity for contributing to and absorbing from a group as well as giving him actual material to use after he has left the group.

Note to Purists

When several hundred readers of *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP* indicated the topics they wanted discussed during 1944-45, "workshops" was high on the list. As we analyzed these responses, it seemed to us that what was wanted was suggestions for ways in which groups of teachers could work together to solve common problems. This is what we have tried to provide.

The purists in educational terminology who have spent long hours carefully defining just what a workshop is and just what isn't a workshop may look askance at our use of the term in some instances. They may claim we are including situations which should be called "conferences" or "work sessions," "study groups" or something else. We shall not attempt to defend our use of "workshop" in the light of formal definitions. All we hope is that these descriptions of groups working together to solve common problems, and growing personally and professionally in the process, may be a challenge to teachers and to those responsible for pre- and in-service teacher education.—R.C.

Copyright © 1945 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.