



Courtesy Glencoe (Ill.) Schools

I receive great satisfaction from children at school

Learning to work together is the keynote of successful teacher relationships. It is essential that ideas be shared and given a chance to grow in varied and numerous contacts with other persons whose confirmations or oppositions can aid in filling the prescription for wholesome mental health. Some of the methods to be followed are outlined by Ruth G. Strickland, School of Education, Indiana University, who says—

Cooperation Is Contagious

Ruth G. Strickland

MANY ADMINISTRATORS, teachers, and supervisors who staff the schools in this critical period recognize their responsibility to help children develop skill in working together so that they will be able to engage in cooperative action both in their personal living and in the broader and more abstract areas of international relations. They also recognize the fact that, though the understanding of what needs to be done and the will to do may be present, they lack ready-made techniques for accomplishment. In contrast, the majority of people now holding school positions are the product of elementary and secondary school programs in which competition received more emphasis than cooperation and in which conformity was more highly valued than individuality in thinking and contribution. Colleges which trained

teachers were of the same sort; it has been and still is the pattern of education in many schools.

School people cannot be said to be less adept at working together than are other groups in the population. The present generation of workers in all fields was molded by similar influences and shows the ineptness of inexperience at critical points. The difference in the problem lies in the fact that teachers have the responsibility for developing in others abilities which they may not themselves possess in sufficiently high degrees to give them the sense of adequacy which results in confidence and courage.

Training-ground for Child Guidance

Group work by teachers and administrators can be used as laboratory experience for the



Cincinnati Enquirer

Teachers need time for play

study and practice of democratic methods and as a training-ground for the development of techniques to be used with children. Children need years of guided experience in human relationships in order to develop skill in working together and understanding the values and satisfactions that lie in cooperative action. Their need for skillful guidance challenges even the master teacher. Problems of relationships that arise because of the hierarchical arrangement of school positions melt away when administrators, supervisors, and teachers work together as learners with a common purpose. Democratic groups can achieve what authoritarian leadership rarely attempts—the development of each individual through the cooperative effort of all.

Group work may be the outgrowth of requests of teachers for group action but more often the group is called together by a person who holds a position of leadership. In either case the quality of initial response is determined by the care with which plans and preparations have been made. The comfort and convenience of the group requires consideration in selecting time and place. Tea may be served to relieve fatigue at the end of the school day, to break formality and loosen tongues in friendly conversation.

Leadership Emerges From Self-Study

Democratic group work tends to start with self-exploration in order to become acquainted with the thinking and interests of the members, to locate special aptitudes and potential contributions, and to give leadership an opportunity to emerge. This exploratory period brings to light many problems

which concern group members and which may be worthy of study and action. All schools abound in problems which teachers feel need solution in order to increase their own happiness and efficiency. It is the task of leadership to stimulate interaction and to provide opportunity for everyone to contribute, not just the few whose thinking can be relied upon to fit into a planned pattern which the leader hopes to carry through. Such questions as: What are our problems? What help can we give each other? How can we best work together to enrich our offering to children? usually bring response from at least a few teachers. The sincerity of the leader's interest and appreciation encourages others to respond.

School systems are administered, guided, and taught by people who are distinct individuals. Each person is as completely a product of his natural aptitudes, his environmental influences, and his past experiences as are the children whom he teaches. The combination of influences has shaped some into fearless, aggressive leaders, some into passive followers; some have developed colorful, vital personalities and others drab, uninteresting ones; some have become creative, thoughtful workers who are constantly studying, weighing and evaluating their own contributions to improve them while others are hewing close to the line of requirement or habit and are insecure and uncomfortable in any area in which the pathway is not well trodden and clearly marked. These are the extremes, to be sure, but every school system has some of each of them as well as many of the shades and variations that lie between. Individual differences in teachers make it difficult to set group work in motion but they add challenge, stimulation, and enrichment when they are recognized, appreciated, and utilized.

When Minds Meet

Unless group work is the outgrowth of requests by teachers for group action on a specific problem, it is well to postpone the selection of a problem until discussion points toward agreement; until there is evidence of the meeting of minds. The goal toward which the leader strives is consensus of opinion to avoid a situation in which a majority drags along an unconvinced or disinterested minority. If consensus appears impossible to attain

and voting is at last resorted to, dissenters should feel free to break away for a time to form their own group and test their own plan. This is rarely necessary unless discussion of problems is cut off too soon, because even those who tend to disagree usually reach the point of suggesting that the group try out the plan before condemning it.

When consensus has been reached with regard to a problem it may still need clarification and definite statement. It is impossible for a group to work together harmoniously and with satisfying results unless each member has a clear concept of the problem to be solved and the goals sought.

Exploring resources and methods of attaining the goals follows logically. Here resources of talent, special knowledge or experience, or special interests may come to light within the group. The leader has the responsibility at all times to study individuals, to diagnose their needs as well as to locate their special abilities. Methods of studying adults do not differ greatly from methods of studying children. The fact that adults have developed more techniques for covering and hiding their real feelings and thoughts may make it more difficult to get under the surface and to know the real person, but friendliness, consideration, and appreciation usually win in time. Group stimulation may bring to light individual resources which the leader has been unable to discover. Obviously, resources other than people need to be studied, but if the group is concerned with learning to work together, the human resources are especially important.

Steps Toward Cooperation

The methods selected for attaining the goals may call for subdivision of the group but by this time leadership will be in evidence. Each individual is encouraged to find his niche—to select the part of the total job that he can do best, that he wishes to experiment with, or through which he wishes to grow.

If planning and organizing for work are to be successful, each individual must feel free to be himself without need for defense or apology, to express opinions, and to add his own thinking to the total pattern. In any group there may be some who tend to remain silent during group discussion only to do their talking afterward among classroom

neighbors and special friends. Such a problem calls for further study on the part of the group leader to find some point of contact, some evidence of potential contribution which could be called for by the group. Cooperation is contagious when it gets underway, and a reluctant individual, finding himself moving upstream with his colleagues, frequently becomes interested in spite of himself and begins to push forward under his own power.

Carrying through group plans calls for constant thought for the good of the group. Chairmen and representatives have an obligation to tap the thinking and opinions of group members at frequent intervals to assure real representation. Gathering up the ends and organizing the product into usable form is the final step.

Evaluation is Important

Evaluation follows normally at the close of any project but if learning to work together is of major concern to the group, then evaluation is carried on continually. At each meeting and during the course of meetings the group pauses to ask itself: Where are we now? How are we progressing? Why did we encounter this obstacle? What did we do that brought us to this point? How can we



*Courtesy Omaha (Nebr.) Schools
A hobby is one outlet*



Ins Photo

Learning through living with children

revise our procedure to improve the quality of our working together? Evaluation in this case is twofold: it includes evaluation of the task accepted—the problem and its solution—and also evaluation of all elements of the process of cooperative action from the selection of the problem through its evaluation, to determine what has been learned and what can be applied in school living.

Some types of problems provide easier starting points for cooperative work than others. If teachers are unaccustomed to democratic procedures and fearful that expressions of opinion and questions may be counted against them, afraid that they are being rated during the course of the work, it is wholesome to turn attention away from the teacher and teaching and center it upon the children and their growth and learning. Improving understanding of children automatically results in teaching that is done with little wear

and tear upon anyone. Discussion of the needs of children and sharing the results of individual study helps to clear points of philosophy and deepen sympathetic concern and eagerness to serve. Emphasis upon long-term goals rather than immediate ones also tends to result in growth in techniques for working together.

Individual Differences Are Important

Cooperative action involves appreciation of people and acceptance of their individual differences. It calls for something finer than tolerance—understanding and consideration. It involves the search for aptitudes and abilities and utilizing them for the common good. Competition and comparison in schools breed professional fears, jealousies, and a sense of inadequacy which may result in domination of children and efforts to drive them to accomplishment which is neither suitable nor necessary for them. Group work which provides for free discussion and interchange of opinion and ideas, the acceptance of common goals, and cooperative action tends to build confidence and the will to grow and learn. It results in a sense of belonging, of being a contributor to something bigger than one's self and one's small daily concerns. The person who feels competent and adequate has no need to cling to arbitrary standards and goals of attainment for children. He can spend his energy in studying them and meeting their developmental needs.

The understanding of democratic procedures which teachers gain through group experience can be carried over into work with children. Children do not know, merely as a by-product of growth and maturity, how to live and work together in groups; they have to learn to do so. Teachers should find it easier to turn their classrooms into laboratories for the practice of wholesome democratic group living when they are experiencing the satisfaction of such living on their own professional level.

WITHIN A FEW WEEKS all members will be sent blanks on which to indicate their preferences for themes for **EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP** for the 1946-47 issues. We hope a large percentage of the membership will offer suggestions for the forthcoming Journals.

Copyright © 1946 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.