The quality of group living in any classroom is one of our criteria for judging how effective learning can be. The individuals who collaborated in preparing this article recount some of their "discoveries" concerning the learnings of both children and teachers in group living. Ruth Cunningham is assistant professor, Teachers College, Columbia University, and research associate, Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation. Associates in the investigation described in this article are Anna Elzi, teacher, Grant Junior High School; Marie Farrell, teacher, Emerson School; James Hall, supervisor of research; and Madeline Roberts, teacher, Swansea School—all of the Denver, Colorado, public schools. The study reported here is part of a larger investigation being made by the Horace Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation.

"I LIKED THE PEOPLE in my room. I liked arithmetic, but not too much." This is Sally's view of her past year in school. Other nine- and ten-year-olds responding to the question, "What did you like about our work this year?" say:

"I liked group work (class organization in committees, clubs, and interest groups). I liked to be able to do things I wanted to do. I liked to know I was as an important a person as all the rest of the people. I liked the way we could all be able to be an officer in group work. I liked the way all of us was some kind of a leader. I liked to be able to give suggestions without everybody laughing at you."

"We learned a lot of things and how to work and play together, and live together, and take turns. I like the way we did things. I liked the chances we got to be leader."

What We've Learned

Eighth graders, telling what they have learned during the past year, report:

"By working in groups I have learned to get along better with people. I have learned more about the subject working in small groups because each person gets to do more on the project and it is more interesting."

"In studying the unit on Human Relations I have learned to improve my personality in such ways as being friendly to more people and how to get along with people. I have learned about people from other nations and how they live and work together. I have found out about how to be a better group leader and member. I’ve learned how to carry on a conversation with people I have just met and many other things."

"By working the way we have, I’ve gained many things. I’ve learned how to work in a group by being in a group as group-work. Having to speak with the mothers was a new event. Getting
the adults' side of problems helped me a lot in how they want me to behave."

People Are Important

What these youngsters are saying is that their classmates and their ways of working in group situations were of major importance to them. Individuals grow, learn, change as they react to their environment. An important aspect of that environment is people.

The way a person thinks about himself, his sense of personal worth, his emotional security, are in large measure determined by what he thinks other people think of him. He feels superior or inferior, an "insider" or an "outsider," depending on what status he thinks the group has given him.

Every teacher knows these things, of course, but evidently it is easy to overlook, or try to discount, the tremendous power of the group in the development of the individual. Many teachers, it would seem, try to operate as though they, as teachers, the course content, materials, equipment, and the four walls of the classroom were the major environmental factors which influence individuals. From the experience of teachers who have studied individuals in group settings of classrooms, it would seem that the group has more influence on the individual than any of these other factors, and often more than all the other factors combined. In other words, in studying atmospheres for learning, the group itself creating its environment cannot be overlooked.

It Doesn’t “Just Happen”

A favorable group climate doesn’t "just happen." Good group living is achieved. Moreover, it isn’t something a teacher does to children; it is something children in a group develop for themselves, with teacher guidance. It follows, then, that children need skills for group living. But, as in any learning—learning to read, for example—techniques alone, without understanding, can be futile.

There is ample evidence that even young children can become aware of group processes. Billy, a nine-year-old, reporting a playground incident, says: "We started arguing so we planned how we were going to quit arguing." These youngsters had stopped to analyze what they were doing and why; they were aware of the processes involved, they knew some techniques for examining and improving their reaction patterns.

In a discussion to analyze why they didn’t get along together so well one day, members of a fourth and fifth grade group made comments such as:

"I was sleepy."

"When I got up my brother and sister started socking me and I got mad and came to school grouchy."

Awareness that physical state or prior events may influence current behavior is quite a mature concept. Another youngster, more poetic than explicit, says:

"Some days we're out of tune like a violin."

The problem, then, is to determine how to get in tune. These same nine- and ten-year-olds made these suggestions, which they headed, "What we can do to plan together well."

Susan: Choose a good planning leader. Don't just choose the person you like best.

Ann: Give your attentions to the ones that's talking.
George: Don't be afraid to speak up. The idea you are thinking of may be the one the class will want to use.

Tom: Be sure to take everyone's ideas.

Bertha: Watch what's going on or a change might be made that you don't know about. It would make you not know what to do next.

Howard: Don't have the planning period too long.

Margaret: Yes, but before you stop be sure everyone knows how to get started on what you've planned to do.

Some adult groups might well profit from similar mature consideration of their group processes.

Teachers, Too, Need Skills

Not to be put to shame by the thoughtful analysis of youngsters, as teachers we attempted to analyze our own actions and the reaction of groups to them. We recognized that the teacher sets the tone of group living in most classrooms and that the interaction pattern he introduces is a significant factor in determining the type and quality of group response which creates the climate.

Our first step was an attempt to identify the specific control devices used by teachers. We were amazed to discover the range of devices used, some of them unconsciously. The following are examples of the twenty-two types of devices we identified:

- **Imposing own authority** *(I won't have that!)*
- **Pointing to consequences** *(If you do that you'll get hurt)*
- **Using threats or appeals to:**
  - **Morals** *(Good boys, nice boys, don't do that)*
  - **Age status** *(Big boys don't do that)*
  - **Sex status** *(Don't be a ‘sissy,’ or a ‘Tom-boy’)*
  - **Group status** *(Other boys and girls won't like you)*

**Offering bribes** *(I'll give you a good grade)*

**Offering suggestion** *(Why not try it this way?)*

**Posing a problem** *(What should we do?)*

**Suggesting that the group look at itself to evaluate process and progress** *(Are we doing it the best way?)*

We found it enlightening to check our actions as to range and type of device used, and to employ the list as a check sheet when visiting other classrooms. In one situation, for example, in a junior high school classroom during three periods only two devices were used: (a) bribes and threats having to do with grades or academic success or failure; and (b) isolating the individual from the group, physically (go stand in the hall) or psychologically (you're not to say anything more this period). Moreover, it seemed likely that the youngsters didn't "give a hoot" about whether they received good grades or bad, passed or failed, and that they rather welcomed the opportunity to be isolated from the group.

Observations such as this helped us to realize that, although a study of range and types of devices may be interesting, much more significant is a study of the appropriateness of the teacher's action to the group and the situation. It is this aspect to which we have given major emphasis in our subsequent study.³

³ The full report of the study, *Understanding Group Behavior of Boys and Girls,* will come from the press in the spring of 1948.
It's a Big Problem

As we studied control devices and their appropriateness, we began to recognize that in the way a teacher operates there is something bigger and more important than his isolated actions. We became aware of various types of interaction patterns. We knew of studies of Lewin, Lippitt, and White, describing reactions of groups to “autocratic,” “laissez faire,” and “democratic” situations. The report of this study helped us to identify types of interaction, but our ability to classify interaction patterns came only after considerable study of groups in our own and a number of other classrooms. Having hypothesized five types, we tested them in further observations, and, although we found numerous subtle variations, we decided these five could stand as workable, recognizable classifications. Moreover, the relation of the pattern to the group reaction was sufficiently recurrent for us to make statements of relationship with considerable confidence.

Adult rule, pupil obedience. We find that pupils tend to react with docile acceptance if the expectation of the group is autocracy, or with violent aggression, which leads to increased adult rule, if the group has ideas about its self-management. Incidentally, having a student chairman or using other so-called democratic forms is no guarantee that adult rule is not in operation. It is possible for a teacher to delegate authority to a student or a committee, yet maintain a rigid obedience pattern.

Planless “catch as catch can” control. We didn’t find many examples of this pattern except for brief periods or on playgrounds or in extra-curricular activities. The reaction was inevitably confusion, insecurity, and keen competition for power among group members, or between the group and the teacher.

Teacher planning with individuals. The group reaction to such a pattern seems to depend on the teacher’s rapport with the group, but obviously such practice limits interaction. It is interesting to note that there are some teachers using this pattern who sincerely believe they are employing group planning and democratic forms when actually they are doing no more than allowing some play of individual initiative while curtailing group action.

Adult directed group planning. This pattern allows interaction within bounds set by the adult. It is a frequent and perhaps necessary pattern when dealing with very young children or with pupils who are just learning the skills of interaction. Ideally, we believe teachers using this pattern will increase progressively the areas of interaction and self-management as the group matures and acquires skills. Unfortunately, however, there are teachers who seem content that they are being “democratic” when they continue to allow but limited scope for interaction; or they fear the consequences of increasing self-control areas. In other words, they don’t quite trust the group process.

Group self-management through group planning. This, we believe, is the ideal in democratic group living. The group, as a group, accepts or develops
its goals, plans its means to attain these goals, and cooperates in achieving them. It is unrealistic, however, to attempt complete and unlimited self-management with immature children and with groups which lack skills. It may actually be damaging to the group to attempt to use complete self-control until it has learned some skills of group interaction through practicing them in limited areas. Only as the group learns to find security in its own skills and in group goals is it possible to shift from adult-given security to group-given security. We have ample evidence, however, that this security and skill can be achieved, that groups can learn, with wise teacher leadership, to manage themselves in ever-widening and more complex situations.

We found that many teachers use most or all of these patterns at one time or another. In fact, the teachers who, observers agreed, were the most “democratic,” tended to use the widest range of patterns. As in our study of devices, we have decided that it is of major importance that a teacher learn to judge when each pattern is appropriate. But that is a long story—too long to tell here.

The Climate Makes the Difference

Of this we are convinced: the climate in which a group lives determines how it lives and what it learns. But the group itself (and don’t forget the teacher is a group member, too) determines to a large extent the type of climate in which it lives. Thus, knowing how to create favorable group climate is a major job of teachers and other group members. It requires skills and an awareness of group processes. But—and this is important—such skills and awareness can be achieved. It’s up to us as teachers to see to it that they are achieved. It can be done!

In April—

Readers of Educational Leadership will wish to draw the attention of their administrators to the forthcoming April issue. It will deal with the responsibility of administration in providing a good instructional program and has a series of articles of particular pertinence to the administrator. A further description will be found on the table of contents page. Copies of this April issue may be ordered for 50 cents per single issue from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C.