

values they thought came from their work. The rest of the class presented a few of the individual studies and discussed some of the group problems. A final question period was used by the parents to discuss the problem of labor rather than the method used.

The class agreed that sharing was an additional worthwhile experience. Parents expressed interest in their studies and decided there was no indoctrination but good critical thinking. Other students in this curricular group heard of the program, and the juniors asked the freshmen to repeat it for them.

Essentials of Method

This unit of work illustrates some of the essentials of the teaching of controversial issues.

- ▶ Problems selected were real to the students, not imposed upon them by the teacher. It seems better if the students participate in the selection of the problems studied.
- ▶ Problems selected were accepted by the students, their advisers, their parents, and

the community as ones which are proper for mature study and discussion.

- ▶ The method of study was an approved problem-solving procedure. The objective was to develop critical thinking, not to support or attack a "case."
- ▶ The teacher was not the authority; authority was derived from data and their validity. The teacher's particular function was assumed to be the direction of study and research, rather than positing final answers.
- ▶ Wherever possible, points of view were expressed by the proposers: the CIO digest of the Nathan Report, interviews with NAM officials, reading of the CIO News and NAM pamphlets.
- ▶ The teacher sought to have the students understand and be able to defend their procedure in problem solving. The responsibility for analysis was theirs, not the teacher's.
- ▶ Criteria for the selection and criticism of data and conclusions were developed by the group, not imposed upon them by the teacher. The class judged whether it had considered and dealt with all pertinent viewpoints in order that its decisions might be fair.

What Can We Do About It? _____

LORETTA E. KLEE

Two junior high school social studies classes and their instructors cooperatively explore some local controversial problems and gain insight into the functions of a city government while mapping out practical steps to follow in city improvement. Loretta E. Klee participated in this five-week project as director of social studies in the Ithaca, New York public schools.

WHAT is the most serious problem facing Ithaca and what can we do about it? This highly controversial

problem was presented to the seventy-seven "citizens of Highville" by their recently elected "mayor."

A Miniature City Government

Ninth grade students in the Ithaca public schools usually spend about ten weeks in "Becoming Acquainted with Our Government—Municipal, State, and National."¹ Generalized understandings and suggestive methods of attaining them are discussed by all social studies teachers in curriculum conferences well in advance of the introduction of the unit of study. To complement this faculty pre-planning the students in each class talk over with their instructors some of the purposes of the area of study and their suggestions for learning experiences in accomplishing their purposes.

Last fall two ninth grade classes, which met at the same hour, decided that they would like to work together as citizens of Highville to carry on first-hand experiences in learning about some of the problems of municipal government. They recognized that by combining the classes a greater variety of learning experiences would be possible because of the broad range of capabilities and interest represented in the larger group.

In accordance with their own ideas the students elected their officials—paralleling those in the local, city administration. Considerable time and careful planning had preceded the election. The students had referred to manuals and reports of the various branches of the municipal government. They had interviewed busy officials in their offices. The Mayor had come to the school to talk over with them the nature and importance of his services to the

people of Ithaca and the qualifications for the office he held. The two classes were ready and eager to tackle the question, "What is the most serious problem facing Ithaca and what can we do about it?"

Investigation Uncovers Problems

Because they had worked hard to obtain much needed information, and because they had carefully chosen their officials (matching qualifications against known characteristics of class members) these ninth grade pupils wanted to officiate in a real sense as officers and citizens of Highville. They felt they should investigate, through their Council, some of the most important problems facing the people of Ithaca—that is, the out-of-school community.

The ninth grade mayor suggested that the citizens of Highville search through the local newspapers for clues as to serious issues facing the people. The object of this search was to locate one or two really important problems so that the Council members and appropriate committees might formulate plans for dealing effectively with them.

These students found that even the identification of problems can demand considerable study and investigation. Their efforts took them far beyond the local newspaper. Reading was supplemented by talking-it-over around many family dinner tables. Neighbors were consulted for their opinions. After several days of this preliminary investigation the pupils decided to poll the Highville citizens in order to determine their opinions.

A tabulation revealed the following diversity of ideas as to "the most serious problem facing Ithaca":

¹ Ninth Grade Course of Study in Social Studies, Board of Education, Ithaca, N.Y.

PROBLEM	NUMBER OF VOTES
Inadequate housing	15
Traffic problems	14
Inadequate recreation facilities.....	9
Civic irresponsibility	9
Inadequate hospital facilities.....	7
Inadequate police force.....	6
Juvenile offenders	6
Garbage disposal	3
Alcoholism	2
Condition of streets.....	2
Drainage system	2
Gossip and unfriendliness.....	2

These, then, were the problems which, according to the class, were most important. The second part of the question must now be given attention, "What can we do about each problem?"

Whose Job Is It?

"Which city official would be responsible for each of these problems?" queried an active Highville citizen.

The problems were carefully described and then analyzed so that the students might determine which department of the local city government would most likely exercise control over them. In several cases the classification was not easily accomplished. Some were clearly not governmental problems at all but matters for the people themselves to be concerned about.

"No one person in the government, nor even any group of persons in the City Council, should have to be responsible for any of these questions," suggested one girl. "All of the people should do something about them because everybody is affected by them." They agreed unanimously that in their ninth grade city all the citizens as well as the chosen officials should be actively concerned with the improvement of their community.

Committees of boys and girls who had suggested each of the problems were organized. They were instructed by their mayor to search out all information available to them about their problem and possible solutions, analyze their information, and organize it in writing. Committees would then meet with the Council to present the findings.

As a first step in finding more information about and possible solutions for these problems, the groups met simultaneously in different parts of the social studies classrooms during the scheduled periods. Questions raised in each committee meeting included:

What is the main trouble with our traffic system?

Why are there so many snarls at the main intersections?

Would more traffic officers help?

Could we get them?

Should traffic lights be timed differently? How?

Should trucks and buses be re-routed? Where?

New Avenues Are Opened

Several class periods spent in the type of discussion cited convinced the students that they did not have within themselves—or within the school building—the facilities for finding the answers to their questions. However, the first important steps had been taken—problems had been identified and thoroughly talked over so that they realized there was probably no one right answer to any of them. They found there are usually more than two sides to controversial issues; *there are many sides*.

They recognized, too, that they were not sufficient in and of themselves to

cope with them adequately. They must refer to other persons who, by experience and training, were better fitted to offer background material and possible solutions.

To obtain accurate, first-hand information about their problems the students went directly to persons in Ithaca who could give them authoritative data. Careful preparation preceded visits to the Chief of Police, the City Hospital Head Nurse, the City Attorney, the Youth Commission Director, and others. There was instruction, with student demonstrations, of such techniques as arranging for interviews, preparing questions to be asked, courtesies during and following interviews, and even appropriate dress for such an occasion. To insure understanding on the part of members of the community, the teachers discussed with the respective officials the purposes of the study and the methods being employed.

Without exception, all persons consulted by the teachers and students gave wholehearted and generous cooperation to the study.

When the students had obtained and organized their data they presented their findings to their administrative officers. Members of their Council questioned them as to the accuracy of their reports. When one ninth grade citizen added his personal observations to the figures given to him by the Chief of Police of Ithaca, a Council member cautioned him against letting his own feelings about the problem discolor the facts.

When all reports had been presented the young people asked, "What can we *really* do about these problems?"

"We are doing something about

them now by searching for the facts and talking about them here in class," one of the boys said.

"Yes, I know," responded the questioner, "but I mean what can we really do in *Ithaca*—not this pretend city!"

Tackling Real Problems Outside the Classroom

Their own city had outgrown its usefulness. It had been suggested by the classes and had served as an effective vehicle for studying the qualifications of city officials and leading to an election of ninth graders to those posts for which they seemed fitted. Now it was clearly evident that these youthful citizens wanted to make their influence felt in a real way in the larger Ithaca community, of which they were members.

The editor of the *Ithaca Journal* had now become interested in this student investigation and the utilization of so many community resources. He suggested that the original question be proposed to the entire student body. Further, he offered to publish the ten statements which reflected the best methods of fact finding, evidences of clear thinking, forceful presentation of information, and practical suggestions for improving the problem situations.

Thus, in a way not anticipated by either pupils or their teachers when the project was cooperatively planned, some of the conclusions reached concerning issues broad in scope and controversial in nature were presented to the entire Ithaca community.

Toward More Intelligent Voting

One example, selected from the ten published statements, will serve to suggest to what extent the young people

gave serious thought to ways in which they, themselves, could help to raise the level of community living.

"I believe the most important problem facing Ithaca is the failure of the citizens to participate in local politics. Ithacans' lack of interest could lead to disastrous consequences. When the work of politics is left to the few, corruptness and graft can easily creep in. Everyone knows of the concerted and energetic work done for national campaigns. Why do we not have the same interest in local elections? When Ithaca holds a city election, such as the one Tuesday, November 4, the campaign and primary work are left to the old faithful and, as a result, poor candidates could be elected by a few unscrupulous people.

"To make matters worse, there is an extremely smaller vote than usual if it happens to be raining. It's a funny world, isn't it, when grown people forego their greatest privilege as Americans to keep their feet dry on election day?

"Though this statement may sound as though it is directed primarily at the voters of Ithaca, it is intended to be an appeal to the youth. The children of Ithaca have a great responsibility in this matter, and it is the duty of the boys and girls to acquaint themselves with local candidates and issues. If they are fully informed, they can influence supposedly wiser adults to participate for a better city government."

Varied Skills Are Acquired

What had been accomplished in the five weeks spent in becoming acquainted with our municipal government?

Children of widely varied abilities and interests had worked together in

learning experiences which had been suggested by themselves and their teachers and which were focused on problems of concern to all members of the Ithaca community. The types of questions raised and discussed would indicate that a considerable amount of critical thinking had been done.

They had gained insight into how the city government was organized to function for the people's welfare. This first-hand study gave meaning and purpose to the study of state and federal government. More important, the students sensed that they had responsibilities here and now to improve community living. Attitudes, information, and skills acquired should prove helpful as these students assume tasks as active, thinking, adult citizens.

The teachers had also learned much from this attack on local issues. We learned the importance of informing the community fully as to our methods. The only difficulties encountered in the investigation and presentation of findings were in situations where there had not been full explanation of the "why" of the methods used. Since we are using the community members as source material it is only fair that they understand why we ask their cooperation. Only in full mutual understanding can community-school relations reach the maximum of effectiveness in pupil growth and community participation. This is particularly true when controversial issues are being presented.

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