

of living in groups in the college environment; study of the basic skills of communication; participation in making choices and forming judgments; study of current world problems through forum on United Nations.)

That learning is facilitated when there is inner motivation, when the learner participates in the planning, executing, and evaluating of experience. (Cooperative planning in many situations with peers, with adults, and with children; study of needs, interests and abilities, her own and those of the children with whom she worked; orientation of experiences to real life situations.)

The principles illustrated above represent only a few from which Janet acquired understanding through her own

direct experience. In addition to those principles, Janet became convinced of the importance of growth on her part in all aspects of living, of continuous growth in her profession. She learned to value change. She became interested in experimentation and exploration as bases for change.

Furthermore, the experiences planned with and for Janet provided her with some understandings of the role of education in society at large and with the complete educational program for which the school as an institution must assume responsibility. She already values the democratic process as it relates to curriculum development, to administration, and to guidance of children.

A High School Experiment _____

JOHN W. HANSON

"I like this exam," wrote one student at University High School, University of Illinois, Urbana, where John W. Hanson, author of this article, is social studies teacher. The exam was the evaluation after a week's experiment with group processes during which time a class tackled a big problem and successfully solved it—indicating that high school students are ready for such action programs.

RECENT DISCUSSIONS of the principles and applications of group dynamics have tended to limit themselves to the implementation of new developments in group work at the adult level. The teacher interested in developing citizens capable of assuming the type of leadership necessary to eliminate intergroup tensions must also, of necessity, train youth in the techniques of democratic group work. The exploration of some of the potentialities of mod-

ern group dynamics within one classroom situation—as described below—was merely the initial step in a long-range program of education in the methodology of the group process.

Setting the Stage

The experiment was carried out in a somewhat traditional class in world history. The conventional material of world history, however, had been constantly oriented toward current prob-

lems confronting the world citizen today. The general climate of the classroom had been "permissive"; direction and discipline were exercised as much by group pressure as by teacher imposition. A maximum of individual expression was encouraged, and the principle of full participation was not a new idea to the students.

On numerous occasions the organization of the materials and the activities of the class, as well as the selection of appropriate points of emphasis, had been determined by small student-teacher planning committees; and on these occasions actual direction of group discussions had generally been in the hands of various students in the planning group. On one occasion the principle of the group "observer" had been employed for a class period. The teacher was generally accepted as one of the group.

Incentive for Experimentation

The problem around which the experiment in group dynamics developed was not determined by the group itself but was, in a sense, imposed from the outside. The class, through its teacher, was requested by the student chairman of the Student Council Constitution Committee to examine the Constitution of the Student Body of University High School. The initiative for the particular problem considered came not from the group but externally from an agency democratically representative of the group.

The exact time for the discussion was dictated by the joint considerations of the request for speed on the part of the Constitution Committee and the "logical" position for its insertion in the

course within the limits so established. The amount of time to be devoted to the experiment was estimated by the teacher to be two days, but no specific suggestion as to time limit was made. Actually the experiment ran full-hour periods for one week.

As a pre-experimental step, the students were given a short briefing on group process. This briefing emphasized that the respective stages of process involved:

- identifying individual resources and interests
- locating significant problems
- arriving at solutions through consensus
- implementing the conclusions reached by the group.

The briefing clarified the role of the group leader as a person who would assist the group in profiting from the participation of all its members; the role of the recorder as a participant in mapping the route covered and the progress made; and the role of the process observer as one primarily concerned with the dynamics of the group. It was explained that this procedure and organization were being used by adult discussion and action groups with notable success.

How Do You Choose Leaders?

With the teacher acting as interim chairman, the group set about determining its permanent organization and leadership. The teacher suggested that on the basis of previous experience in the process, he might be the logical choice for group leader. This suggestion did not, however, accord with the wishes of the group. Various proposals concerning the method of selecting

leadership were forwarded. Group consensus ultimately determined two criteria to be used in the selection of permanent group leadership:

The persons selected should be those who had not had previous leadership experiences within the class (as they wished to provide all members with a maximum experiential range)

The persons selected should be those who enjoyed the confidence and respect of the group as a whole.

The establishment of these two criteria, far from proving mutually exclusive, were in harmony with both the educational and experimental aspects of the situation. The selection of individuals without the traditional type of leadership experience, and yet maintaining the confidence of the group, placed leadership in the hands of less dominant individuals in the class. These criteria also, fortunately, accorded with the educational goals of the school to establish as wide as possible a proficiency in leadership.

The determination of the specific personnel desirable in the group process was undertaken by the entire group. After a short initial discussion, it was agreed that the size of the group and the scope of the problem suggested the desirability of having two group recorders. The selection of personnel was carried out through traditional democratic structures. Nominations were made and discussed; and for purposes of expedition the positions of group leader, recorders, and one observer were ultimately filled by formal election. In all cases the criteria established seemed to be the determining factor in selecting the best qualified class members.

In addition to those thus selected, cer-

tain other personnel fundamental to the group process were decided upon. Provision was made to bring in an experienced, outside process observer for the first day, which was to be devoted to identifying problems. The faculty adviser of the Student Council was invited to sit in as a resource person. Additional resources within the group were identified—two members of the Student Council being asked to carry particular responsibility for informing the group as to the implications and practical application of the problems under consideration.

Organization Gets Us Underway

Following an opening discussion directed by the student leader, the group decided that the Constitution should be examined in its entirety, article by article. The group members assigned themselves the task of preparing for further work by careful individual analysis of the Constitution and the isolation of significant problems. It was agreed that the discovering of group problems would begin the following day.

Prior to the second general meeting, the group leader and recorders asked assistance of the teacher (as unofficial adviser) in more accurate definition of their duties. This briefing, as given, tended to emphasize the distinction between ordinary secretarial work and the participatory duties of the group recorder, and the position of the group process leader as contrasted with that of the discussion leader in the commonly accepted classroom or discussion situation. These conferences with the teacher, a joint conference at the end of the first day of problem solving, and



Courtesy Phoenix (Ariz.) Union High School

daily check-up discussions provided the in-service training of the group process personnel involved.

What Are the Problems?

The second and third days of work were devoted to an identification of problems. This grew out of the examination procedure as previously determined by the group. The initial stages gave rise to the recognition of over fifty individual questions, many of which were capable of combination. As there had been no previous discussion of the process of working from individual to group problems, it was not until the group was ready to move into the step of solution that the question of distinguishing common problems arose. The recorders had already arranged many of the problems into significant and coherent areas of interest. The group itself now considered the method of determining which problems deserved attention.

It was decided that the best way to arrive at common problems would be by quickly viewing specific questions as

they had arisen in connection with each of the areas of interest. Such smaller problems were concurrently examined by the group, and larger problems were constructed out of the small ones recognized. These larger problems were then discussed, and significant "group" problems were again decided by formal vote. Following the general discussion of areas of interest, a considerable degree of unanimity was evident in the selection of common problems. These included all problems of unusual interest to individuals. Individual members accepted the definition of common problems with enthusiasm.

Group Traits Emerge

During this stage of the process certain characteristics of the group developed. Initial interest tended to lag—partly because the problem had been selected by an outside group. As group interest awakened, however, a certain element of impatience became apparent.

The group was dissatisfied with the long process of determining problems, and an element of urgency to get into

solutions developed. This was revealed in the course of the discussions by rather frequent attempts on the part of individuals to move into the realm of solutions. By this time the sense of the process had grown to such an extent, however, that many members of the group anticipated the observers in calling this fact to the attention of these persons. On one occasion the classroom teacher was reminded that he was projecting his discussion into the realm of solutions.

As the sense of the process grew, there was also a simultaneous development in the direction of full participation. Small groups which had been unresponsive now tended to move into the stream of group thought and were carried along with it.

These two movements of a growing consciousness of stages of process and of full participation were materially aided by the leader's frequent recourse to the recorders and observers. In a short time the process had so caught fire that not only were the recorders able to block out general progress coherently, but the observer was able to point out significant aspects of the *esprit de corps* of the group.

We're Ready for the Solution

The time devoted to identifying problems had resulted in the definition of thirteen which were of common interest and concern. With two exceptions, these problems were far above the level of semantics; and, even in those two, the tenor of discussion indicated that the group was interested in clarifying and safeguarding democratic procedures in the Student Council.

The nature of the group recommendations represented, in essence, a spirit

which had grown in the group as the process had become generally accepted. An initial reluctance of many persons devoted to student government to see the Constitution examined critically tended to evaporate as they recognized that the group was working in the direction of strengthening the democratic provisions of the Constitution.

Of the thirteen common problems, action was taken on all but one. Considerable discussion on the highly controversial issue of the political device of "recall" failed to result in a group consensus. On all other matters fundamental agreement was reached, and nine group recommendations were formulated and approved. The significant element in these recommendations was the attempt to arrive at greater safeguards for the existing democratic features and to extend further the democratic rights already provided. It was interesting to note that as the spirit of democratic participation grew, the nature of the proposals became increasingly democratic.

The Implementation Step

The final step was to determine what suitable action might be taken. The recommendations arrived at had been recorded, and the obvious question concerned the best means of implementation. The discussion which developed was devoted primarily to determining the channel through which action might be most readily achieved. Three channels of operation were suggested by the group: through the Student Council members present in the group, through the Student Council president, or through the chairman of the Constitution Committee.

The initial difference of opinion in

the group was centered around the relative importance of the points:

- the Student Council members in the class could best explain the considerations which had led to formulating the recommendations
- the Student Council president was the type of individual who would see to it that the recommendations were considered
- the Constitution Committee was the group which would have to take the initial action on the recommendations.

Ultimately the group agreed that the recommendations should be channeled through the chairman of the Constitution Committee, and that an *ad hoc* committee of the class should be appointed to discuss the recommendations with that committee. Both group recorders were appointed to this *ad hoc* committee.

During the final steps of the process the spirit of confidence and of accomplishment was readily apparent. Special attention had been given to seeing that everyone's problems had been brought into the open, and the problems ultimately tackled and solved were of the composite type representing the best of the group thinking. The original defensive attitude on the part of Student Council members and those closely associated with the Council had broken down, and it was generally accepted that the recommendations of the group would safeguard the democratic advances which had been made under a progressive school administration.

The Evaluation Process

As a part of the experiment an evaluation was made one week later to determine the confidence of the students

in the group process as a classroom technique and the conscious recognition of *process* on the part of the students. The stage was set for the evaluation by having seven members of the class carry on a group discussion around a table in the center of the room; the rest of the class was asked to sit in a customary circular arrangement.

Although the term *group process* was unfamiliar to the class, the students in the demonstration were given the following problem:

In recent years there has been considerable discussion about the nature of a *democratic society*. The question is often raised as to the amount of freedom the individual, group, or nation should possess in a truly democratic society. In the light of the material we have recently been examining, let us try to define a democratic society by means of the democratic group process we have developed.

The students around the circle were given the additional statement of directions:

Your task is to observe the process by which they (the students in the center) tackle their problem, commenting upon the extent and the success with which they employ the group process as we developed it in examining our Student Council Constitution. In other words, you are asked to play the role of group process observer during their discussion. You are asked to make your observations in writing in the space below.

In general, the demonstration group failed to follow the process in many of its essential elements. After an initial period of some confusion, a group leader was tacitly agreed upon, the individual selected being the most dominant individual in the group. No recorder or observer was selected. The group first

defined its problems, but individual definition was not clearly substantiated through group consensus. The step from definition to solution was made after only seven minutes of analysis; and the period of solution was complicated by the introduction of new problems, largely leader-originated.

However, some distinction between the problem-raising and problem-solving stages of the discussion was made. The leader encouraged contributions from all members, and conclusions reached did represent group consensus as far as it was possible to determine. Students in general respected and elaborated upon the contributions of others, and the group as a whole directed its thinking toward the solution of the problem presented. By and large, however, the process was abandoned in favor of the more traditional discussion techniques involving leader identification of many problems.

A more positive reaction was obtained from the students who were asked to play the role of group process observers, examining the discussion from the standpoint of the previous experiment. Of the thirteen students asked to fill this role, eleven distinguished completely between content and process. Two students included evaluations of content *per se* in addition to their evaluation of process. The types of observation made, while revealing some internal disagreement among the observers, indicated a fundamental recognition of many aspects of effective group work. The comments covered: failure to provide adequate personnel, insufficient distinction between stage of raising problems and stage of reaching solutions, degree of

participation, qualities of leadership, development of group feeling, and characteristics of group process.

Among the more perceptive observers, the following are illustrative of comments which appeared:

"They should sum up every once in awhile and follow from there."

"No person is assigned as recorder or leader, but it's evident Mary Jones is doing both."

"Everyone is working toward the goal."

"Everyone gave ideas and contributions to his group."

"Line between stating and solving problems not too clear."

"Don't seem to be answering the questions that were asked in the section for that."

"Leader pulled everyone into discussion."

"Mary (the leader) just gets opinions from others. Gives none of her own. Did you appoint her to lead?" (No)

"They should sum up their conclusions every once in awhile."

How Skillful Were We?

From this account it seemed clear that while the group process can be used by high school students to solve problems, considerable experience in its use will probably be necessary in order to produce in the students an optimum readiness to employ it. Under the stress of solving a familiar problem, the students tended to rely on old, familiar patterns. Such revealed characteristics of the process as the emphasis on full participation and the role of the leader in drawing out the resources and interests of all members of the group were more probably the result of training acquired throughout the school year than of new learning during the experimental period.

It is, moreover, quite clear that high school students are able to distinguish between process and content. They were, in the experiment described, able to recognize the fundamental elements of the group process as it is now understood. Although interpretations of the process demonstrated in the evaluation varied from individual to individual, the

general problems of group process were discovered and commented upon. In general, the evaluation "examination" elicited enthusiasm from both the demonstration group and the observers. The general attitude of the group seemed to be typified by one student who wrote in large letters at the top of her evaluation sheet—"I like this exam!"

Everyone Shares in City Planning

C. LESLIE CUSHMAN and JOHN T. MLADJEN

Children and youth prove the worthwhile contributions they have to make to improved community living when they are included on a partnership basis. This account of rebuilding a city with the aid of the schools comes from C. Leslie Cushman and John T. Mladjen, both in the Curriculum Office of the Philadelphia public schools.



Courtesy Philadelphia Board of Education

IF YOU WANT A CITY to be planned and built well, you need the help of the boys and girls and youth who live in that city.

This statement has been made many times during the past two years by city planners in Philadelphia. In part, the basis for the assertion is that among

Copyright © 1949 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.