

Our Commission conceives of planning as an on-going process in which all citizens share continuously in deciding what they want in their city. They see their function as being that of coordinating and giving practical form to the dreams and hopes of all the people, including the city's children. It was a member of that Commission who asked the help of the schools in developing among citizens, particularly the youthful citizens, an awareness of their environment; an awareness of the passage

of time and a belief in the reality of the future; an awareness of the possibility of a more creative environment; and a will that what is wanted shall be obtained.

This is an ambitious partnership into which the schools have entered. There are skeptics who say, "It's a pipe dream." But there are others who remember that God offered to spare Sodom and Gomorrah, peradventure ten righteous men could be found. For those who have faith, the morrow holds great hope.

Understanding Communication

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This is the story of how two teachers guided children in using reading experiences as aids to a better understanding of themselves and others. Julia Marbaugh, who tells the story, and Grace Pointer, the cooperating teacher, are in the South Bend, Indiana, schools. The project described was carried out under the guidance of Intergroup Education in Cooperating Schools, American Council on Education, which now functions as the Center for the Study of Intergroup Relations, University of Chicago.

MOST OF US have given book reports of some kind. When we did so we were asked to give the *title*, name the *author*, list the *important characters*, discuss the *plot*, and state the *climax*. We probably considered the *action* in the story but certainly not the *interaction* that existed between the persons or groups of persons.

A Fascinating Program Begun

In the Intergroup Education Workshop at the University of Chicago, during the summer of 1947, my job was to plan work for our sixth grade communication unit. While another teacher

developed the social studies portion, I explored ways in which stories could be used to develop insight into the processes of communication and into the blocks that prevent good communication. We planned to explore the human experiences of people in books and those of the children themselves, the ways in which people communicate with each other, and the things which block that communication.

This placed a new responsibility on organizing our work with children. It was necessary to determine with the social studies teacher ideas, situations, and experiences in communication to

which children could make warm responses. Further, we had to explore the stories and books at hand for incidents which provided an avenue for children to understand and feel the impact of these situations themselves. Provocative short stories or episodes from longer stories to use as points of departure for the discussion had to be located. This became a fascinating part of the planning.

Discussions had to be planned to guide children toward forming generalizations and extending and reinterpreting their own experiences in the light of these. This gave new interest to planning classroom procedures.

Some thought was needed, also, concerning what is necessary for children to understand what communication is, how it is developed, and what tends to block it. This required not only the exploration of the immediate human situation in children's own experiences and in stories, but the comparison of analogous problems at different times and in different settings, and a further search into fiction to find vivid presentations of these situations.

Organizing for Group Work

In order to do all of this it seemed inevitable that rich group life should be provided in which there would be wide understanding and mutual communication among the children—a classroom situation in which children had both the opportunity and the responsibility to get along with each other in actually doing things. For this reason each child was asked to name three persons with whom he would like to work. These choices were plotted into a sociogram and were used to make up work

groups so that individual preferences were met.

Leaders were chosen for each group to help in achieving the group's common goals. It was also the leader's duty to work through differences among members and to help organize the work of the group. What to discuss and how to proceed with discussions were decided with the children. They made proposals, then critically evaluated the list to arrive at final ways of carrying forward the class project.

Identifying the Blocks

This method of working together helped both in making the experience more pleasant and in keeping plans realistic and geared to the facts. Children were quick to combine the "lessons" they learned from their own experience with what they learned about communication. Each group listed the blocks in communication they had experienced. These included quarreling, calling people names, dishonesty, being a coward, impatience, difference in customs or religious beliefs, tattling, having bad manners. In our discussion of these we discovered some barriers to communication between individuals and groups. Some of these may be automatic behaviors; others unintentional defense reactions or just plain misinterpretations.

Blocks may also arise out of differences in language, customs, values, or beliefs. How communication was blocked by difference in customs was amply illustrated from individual experiences. One child said, "When I came to this school I didn't know the same games the kids here knew. We had played other games. So I didn't

play. They thought I was stuck up and I thought they didn't like me."

Among things that would help, children listed: a pat on the back, a smile, encouragement, explaining clearly, trying to bring out the best in everybody, and using information to clear up misunderstanding. All of these incidents were put on slides.

Finding Solutions in Books

Next the children listed incidents they found in stories which illustrated how communication was blocked between individuals or groups, and how communication and understanding were established. For example, they thought that in *Caddie Woodlawn*, communication between Caddie and her mother was blocked because Caddie wanted to be a tom-boy and her mother wanted her to be a lady. Lack of understanding of each other's desires prevented talking it over. After Caddie mistreated her cousin, Annabel, her father did not condemn her but explained why it was necessary to "be a lady." Caddie's changed attitude made it possible for her to understand her mother and to remove the block between them. Many such incidents were dramatized to show the setting, the problem, and the solution. These incidents representing different kinds of misunderstandings and blocks to communication were also put on slides.

When the question was asked whether anything like what they found in books ever happened to them, one girl said, "I like to wear blue jeans and my daddy doesn't mind, but my mother just has a fit because she wants me to wear a skirt. She has most to say in things like this. My daddy explained to me why in such

matters my Mom should decide. He helped me open communication with my mother and I understand her better."

Evaluating Our Work Together

The youngsters were enthusiastic in their praise of this way of working, as is shown by the samples from written assessments:

- "I like this way of working better. Last year we wrote book comments and you just tried to remember the story. Now we look for blocks between people and how they work them out. It's new and I like it."
- "I like this way of working because we understand more. In our book reports the boys just picked out the places where there was the most fighting and let it go at that."
- "Besides seeing how people argue, I see how they make friends."
- "I can see why there is a reason for people to get mad."
- "It made everyone like more people and not quarrel and fight. Our committee *injoyed* it very much."
- "I like this work because we don't have to write book reports. It also helps when we grow up. It helps us to understand people's ways by group discussion. We shouldn't have wars between nations unless they can't help it. In other words, I mean it doesn't matter about your race or religion. You shouldn't hate anybody."

The students' reactions to the ways of grouping were equally enthusiastic.

- "I like this grouping because it helped to get the class united together."
- "It makes me happier. It makes me feel better and everyone will try to like me. The reason is because if someone is a leader and you were just a new boy you would like to learn what to do. The new boy can be a leader, too."
- "I like working with a group. The group I was chairman of communicated well and got right to work and read the books that we all enjoyed reading."

Looking at the Now and Long Ago

The next part of our project was to compare and contrast pioneer and modern communication. New groups were formed to discuss these books and the things they showed. A wire recording was made of each discussion and its summary. In order to lift out the problem of communication, the stories presenting life in another period were put side by side with stories of modern life.

In the pioneer story, *With Daniel Boone on the Carolina Trail*, it was difficult to open communication with the Iroquois Indians because they were warlike and language and customs were different. Their devices for communication were not mechanical. They made much use of signs and face-to-face discussion.

In the modern story, *Road to Alaska*, every block in communication was opened by intelligent, scientific planning. This was done by face-to-face communication and group discussion. They used all the modern mechanical devices to carry on communication and they had the advantage of scientific knowledge to accomplish an enormous job.

Telling Our Own Stories

When the youngsters planned to make a movie, they built the play around ideas in communication and blocks in communication from their own experience. George said, "I think if I told the story of my life here at Franklin School it would be the best play I could write." And three boys on

his committee agreed to help him because George writes poorly.

George's story begins: "When I came to this school I was timid and scared I couldn't do things. I used to beat up little kids on the schoolgrounds." The finished movie recorded the class discussion with flashbacks of four different children's problems—including George's. Now George thinks his progress report opened up communication for him and he gets great pleasure from working for the good of the school.

We Believe There Are Results

We at Franklin School feel that this project has changed the general attitude of the sixth and seventh grade children. They are more eager to help newcomers; they want to discuss their problems in a friendly way; they desire to take initiative; and they are eager to help the newcomers become leaders. We have all noticed that there are fewer conflicts between the children. The reading and discussion seem to have sensitized them to a feeling of friendliness and good sportsmanship.

As for myself, this experience with boys and girls has provided a splendid chance for developing new skills and insights in maintaining good human relations. Literature is given its rightful place in making vivid the experiences of people in many situations from which new ideas and interpretations can come. Social studies and literature are used to reinforce each other in developing ideas and understandings in an integrated school experience.



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