A group of instructional leaders working at Wayne University participated in an in-service experience which they believe was a most significant one. They share it with other such leaders in the description below. They testify that there is probably nothing new or unusual in their conclusions; they feel that the significant result was their own operational change.

What is group participation? What is a group? How is it organized? How can its success be assured? What are the physical obstacles, organizational barriers, and emotional blocks to making it effective? What part does the leader play in this process?

These and other questions confronted a group of twenty persons interested in the improvement of in-service teacher education programs during the fall and spring terms of 1947-48 at Wayne University. They chose as their problem the analysis of the role of the leader in effective group participation.

Establishing friendly human relations was recognized as a prerequisite to any kind of cooperation. The members, therefore, proceeded to identify themselves by describing their areas of work and the progress which they felt had been made in these areas in the last five or ten years. They stressed particularly the obstacles that seemed to block their doing better work. After a classification of these expressed obstacles was made, three slightly different centers of interest emerged, all focused on the problem of group participation.

- What are the techniques involved in developing cooperative school-community relations?
- How can we apply human relations in building citizenship among faculty, student body, and parents?
- What are the techniques to be used by a status leader for promoting real participation in group planning?

This is the story of the eight members of the group who made the third center of interest their study. After this group selected a chairman and a rotating recorder, there followed several weeks during which each member of the group, with the help of the others, further identified the difficulties which prevented him from doing more effective work in his local situation. This process of analysis resulted in a more sympathetic understanding of each other’s situation, a much clearer insight into one’s own situation, and the identification of a common denominator for the work of the group.
In order to delimit their work, the group identified the following specific questions within the framework of which they decided to proceed:

- What is cooperative planning?
- What is effective group planning?
- What are the techniques that insure success?
- What role does the leader play in the process?

Realizing, at the suggestion of the instructor, that sign posts were needed to guide the work of the group, the members outlined the following plan of procedure to attack their problem: review the experiences of the group, their successes and failures in dealing with similar problems; study the experiences of authorities in the field; select the methods and devices that seem to be practical and applicable in their local situations; apply selected methods and devices and evaluate the results; re-study the problem and revise techniques for further trial; re-appraise the problem.

Looking at Our Role

In reviewing individual experiences, it became more and more evident that most problems result from failure to employ the group process effectively. Consciousness of this one fundamental weakness accelerated the analysis, and the individuals agreed tentatively to a number of working guides. Among them were the following:

- Recognize the worth of individual opinion; be willing to listen to others and treat each other fairly.
- Derive problems to be studied from the entire membership of the group—not from a person or small number of persons designated by the status leader.
- Form study groups on the basis of some common bond such as proximity, social contact, business, or community interest.
- Keep groups for discussion small. Eight members at the most to insure maximum rapport within the group and between the status leader and the group.
- Strive to make the group as heterogeneous as the situation will permit, cutting across lines which mark class, position, or clique.
- Encourage any member of the group to assume the role of leader or coordinator to facilitate the progress of the group.
- Enlist the participation, either active or passive, of all members of the group. Guide the discussion to subjects of paramount interest to the majority of the group, maintaining a balance between the demands of immediate versus ultimate objectives.
- Be conscious of a need for change, give individuals the opportunity to change in their thinking and their method of work and still feel secure.
- Make evaluation a continuous process, starting when a group decides what it specifically should study and how it should go about making this study. In other words, start with initial planning and focus the attention of the group on each of the steps taken in working out new solutions to the problems before it.
- Accomplish individual and group logs periodically; concentrate on such items as: What is the status of the group project? What is happening to the group and the individuals in it? What is blocking the work of the group?
- Help individuals to make appropriate adjustments in their thinking to facilitate progress on the group project and to maintain group morale.
- Utilize the skill of the status leader when sufficient leadership does not emerge within a group.

There is nothing new or unusual in these recommendations. In fact, they...
might be considered commonplace. Although they were arrived at early in the term, time was required for individuals to grow in the ability to use such techniques and to develop the necessary confidence in their application. The rest of the year was required to integrate them into the behavior of the members of the group as they pursued daily work in their school communities.

The process of assimilation and adaptation in developing these behavior patterns promised to be more important than the concepts guiding them. Individual problems of application were discussed weekly; results of experiments of varying degrees of success were reported and analyzed. One of the major effects of this procedure was a greatly increased confidence on the part of members of the group in applying the techniques of group participation. Frequent meetings were held during the dinner hour. These contributed materially to the solution of the problem through changes in interpersonal relationships among members of the group which, in turn, made possible the discussion of matters which otherwise would not have been brought before it.

The position occupied by the leader was an important factor in the success of this group. Assuming a non-directive leadership role by making himself a member of the group, he thus established a friendly, helpful relationship with individuals; encouraged good fellowship; and made it possible for the participants to feel relaxed, secure, and confident of the sincerity of one another's efforts. Pressure for achievement was generated by the group, not by the leader.

Seeing Blocks in the Leader

As the group analyzed the circumstances or conditions which they felt stood in the way of better classroom teaching, improved school programs, and more wholesome community life, they became more and more aware of the critically decisive nature of the leadership role in program development activities. In the beginning they felt that some of the blocks and barriers were insurmountable since there appeared to be, in many cases, a framework of policy which prevented positive action. Gradually they realized that many of the blocks existed only as attitudes of mind on the part of the leaders. Accepting this point of view, the group no longer resorted to blaming others for deficiencies but faced problems realistically and exerted more objective efforts to overcome them.

As a result of their experiences the group saw more clearly:

- It is relatively simple for a group to achieve as verbalization a set of action guides for leaders in group work.
- Long periods of time must be allowed for the assimilation and integration of such guides for action into the behavior patterns of persons interested in increasing their leadership competency and their feelings of adequacy in this regard.
- Obstacles to progress reside as often in leaders as in the groups they attempt to guide.