

find ourselves constantly pulling away from those concrete experiences into a realm chiefly notable for the volume of polite horse-trading with phantom horses.

The educational clinic was developed as one protest against the process of abstraction. It attempts to provide a group of people with common referents, with examples of concrete experience, and with as much reality as possible. The success of such attempts undoubtedly leaves much to be desired, but testimony of participants in clinics seems to justify the claim that the

clinic procedure may be employed to avoid over-abstraction.

A DEVICE ONLY

Only a few of the possibilities in the educational clinic have been explored in this article. In true clinic fashion, the purpose has been to set off a train of thought, to provide a few examples that may suggest local adaptations and inventions that will profit curriculum development. The educational clinic is only a device, a means to an end—and the end is the improvement of instruction.

*Education in a New Perspective*_____

LIBBIE B. BOWER

The seminar described here was part of a design for in-service teacher training based on educators' interest in human relations. Libbie B. Bower, Consultant for the School Project, The Massachusetts Society for Mental Hygiene, Boston, shows how use of the group process helps to sensitize group members to change.

THE EXPERIMENT described here grew out of an interest in the field of human relations expressed by several educators while we were conferring with them on a school project, *Human Relations in the Classroom*, sponsored by The Massachusetts Society for Mental Hygiene.¹

The director of the Society, William H. Savin, anticipating this interest, had prepared a design for teacher training on three levels, one of which was the seminar described here. He had secured

as leader for the seminar a psychoanalyst trained and experienced in group therapy. This psychoanalyst had demonstrated with groups of social workers and mothers of children under psychiatric treatment, skill in creating a setting in which they had been helped to work out some of their own problems. Announcements mailed to a restricted list of prospects (the number of participants had to be limited to not more than fifteen) included the statement:

"The seminar in individual and group psychology will meet weekly for twelve two-hour sessions. After

¹ Bullis, H. Edmund and Emily E. O'Malley, *Human Relations in the Classroom*, The Delaware State Society for Mental Hygiene: Book I, 222 pp., 1947; Book II, 219 pp., 1948.

some introductory lectures on dynamic psychology, the seminar will deal with some typical psychological problems which the participants will present from their own experiences. In addition, the situations which develop within the seminar will be utilized as far as proves possible to further self-understanding."

Eight women and two men from several public school systems registered. However, one of the women dropped out after the second meeting because of illness in her family. There were two psychological counselors, a director of guidance, a supervisor of teachers of religious education, a supervisor of curriculum, an assistant principal, two principals, and a psychologist. At the first session, relative strangers seated around a table had an opportunity to become acquainted through informal conversation. When the meeting formally commenced, members introduced themselves by relating their experience and training. Most of them stated they had little, if any, training in dynamic psychology. The leader was reassuring when he said that formal training in psychology was not a prerequisite for admission to the seminar.

We Choose an Approach

The leader suggested to the group, "You might decide how you would like to proceed," and presented two possibilities: (1) The leader would present some didactic material and illustrate it with clinical cases ("That would be the more orthodox type of presentation."); and (2) Members of the group might present "live material,"



Courtesy Roland Faince

problems from classroom situations, and "perhaps group members would like to talk about their own feelings in relation to the way they handle these problems." He added, "I do not intend to give psychiatric treatment to group members, but rather to discuss with you how irrational feelings may come in to interfere with your work."

After a brief discussion, the group members decided on the second procedure, though not without some concern for "lack of common interest." This was reflected in the question: "If some of the problems which group members present are to be on the administrative level, and other problems revolve around teacher-pupil relationships, perhaps not all of the group members will be interested in the second approach." The leader pointed out that their differing problems would be seen rather as the raw material out of which the common interest would be constructed. Concern over the commonality of problems is often expressed by persons uninitiated in the group process who are task-oriented rather

than goal-oriented. It was presently demonstrated, however, that group members could identify self-interest with interests of the group as immediate goals were worked through by means of the group process.

The Problems Under Attack

During the twelve sessions, five problems involving children, parents, and teachers were presented. The cases were:

- ♦ a child of low I.Q. rejected by the teacher
- ♦ an over-protected child who had at times regressed to infantile behavior
- ♦ a twelve-year-old boy with a severe reading disability which on the surface looked like an educational problem but was diagnosed at a clinic as an emotional problem
- ♦ an unstable and aggressive boy showing psychopathic trends
- ♦ conflict between a teacher and vested authority.

When a report was presented by one of the members, the problem was laid before the group with all obtainable school factors affecting the situation. At these times it was apparent how meager most school data are. As Baxter suggests, "The school should be ready to interpret each child's needs fully and comprehensively. This means that the school is constantly in touch with all that is happening to each child and with his reactions to his daily experiences . . . findings from the related professional fields may throw light on some of the needed interpretations . . . psychology, psychiatry will have contributions to make."²

² Baxter, Bernice. "Our Task as Interpreters for Children," *Educational Leadership*, Journal of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, May, 1949. p. 506.

A Collaboration of Experience

The group members, instead of limiting their discussion to specific factors such as I.Q., medical history, progress in school, and conferences with parents, together with the leader selected critical factors revealed in this material. They pooled their knowledge and experience in relation to the problem under consideration. This gave the group the benefit of more points of view than any one individual could possibly bring to an analysis of the problem. Moreover, the member learned that the difficulties that he experienced were shared by other schools.

The group process was a force towards placing problems in a broader perspective. The leader equipped with special skills helped others think and evaluate together. It was seen, as Prescott states, that "the child lives and acts as an indivisible unit. Understanding teachers need to have a working knowledge of the cardinal principles of several different sciences, one of which is psychoanalysis."³ One aspect of a child's behavior or development cannot be understood, influenced, or changed without taking many factors into consideration.

We Study the Individual

The leader presented some didactic material about the child's emotional needs and suggested some factors in the family situation that might be motivating the child to behave as he did. For example, he pointed out the way the child reacts today is the re-

³ Prescott, Daniel A., *Helping Teachers Understand Children*, American Council on Education, Washington, D. C., 1945. p. 11.

sult of his life's experiences. He is the result of many influences: the examples his parents set; their discipline or lack of it; their expression of love, rejection, or indifference; and rivalries with siblings. These influences go back to the early years in the life of the individual and are reflected in his behavior today. Group members began to see, for example, that if a child misbehaves in school, it is not necessarily directed against the teacher. What is it that is motivating the child? What are the unconscious factors operating? Collaboration by the leader and the group members cuts across lines of theory and practice, and group members began to realize that the roots of difficulties are more complex than is generally assumed, that there are no general formulae or prescriptions for treating conduct.

The leader's training in handling emotionally charged problems brought the discussion continuously back from the problems to the way the members felt about the problem. The permissive nature of discussion in a "safe atmosphere"⁴ has the effect of sanctioning the open discussion of private attitudes and feelings. A group member talked about his hostile feeling toward a colleague whom he felt was not accepting a dull child. Another group member expressed sensitivity to another member's statement, "Why do you cover yourself with a cloak of authority?" in relation to the way she handled the problem she presented.

There were no final plans for any case at the end of each presentation,

⁴ Berman, Leo, M.D., *Mental Hygiene for Educators: Report on an Experiment Using a Combined Seminar and Group Psychotherapy Approach*, unpublished paper.

but sufficient "non-closure"⁵ to encourage persons concerned to carry on. The cases were discussed enough so that group members would not feel frustrated and impotent. It would be misleading, however, to indicate that conclusions were reached in any but the broadest terms. What was apparent was that lasting change is not brought about by manipulation of persons by other persons, or by changing the environment. Only at one point did the group undertake a full analysis of the case presented to help construct a working hypothesis of how to proceed.

We Study Our Group

Presentation and discussion of school cases and group members' feelings in relation to these cases were not the only or even the primary reason for the seminar. As indicated above, they merely provided the spark for further self-examination. There was at times resistance to self-examination. "Any attempts to look at ourselves objectively imply that some other state of affairs might actually be the case."⁶ But having thus far worked cooperatively on problems, a feeling of interdependence developed so that as one member put it, "If you get a group feeling, you can let your hair down a bit." The leader was concerned with the emotional things that transpired, intra-group tensions expressed by hesitation, silence, smiles, times when the discussion moved away to irrelevant topics. He would try to penetrate beneath the

⁵ Jaques, Elliot, *Interpretive Group Discussion as a Method of Facilitating Social Change*, Human Relations, Vol. 1, #4, 1948, pp. 533-549.

⁶ Thelen, Herbert A., "Resistance to Change of Teaching Methods," *Progressive Education*, May, 1949, p. 208.

words to the feeling which words are usually unable to convey adequately. He was particularly concerned with the members' own early experiences. As a member was able to divulge material from his early life, the leader, non-judgmentally, selected dominant elements and often related them to the member's problem. His interpretations in clarifying the member's feelings presented a genuine learning situation.

A Flexible Pattern

There was no single pattern for group processes. There were no sequences of steps in the discussion. Rather, it was kept in a fluid state. The leader proceeded technique-wise, intervening when indicated, noting immediate reactions to the discussion, pressing for further light, but always guided by the member's desires and clues such as those indicated above. Other group members felt impelled to talk at such times about their own personal experiences. These threads were picked up and explored by the leader and members at the proper times.

Acceptance of interpretation by the leader depends not only on its accuracy but on the acceptance of the person offering it. The leader's objective was to clarify. He helped sensitize group members to their own emotional development, to the awareness of "some traits which he would want to master were he more cognizant of them."⁷ Increased awareness then led to discussion of the possible origins of such traits in his earlier life, and to the consideration of the development of certain more or less unconscious patterns of behavior.

⁷ Berman, Leo, *op. cit.*

How does the group process bring about change? The process supplies a new frame of reference. At the outset, the difficulty presented seems irremediable. As the other elements (one's present feelings, experiences during one's early life) are admitted into consideration, the whole picture of the relationship between oneself and the others undergoes change. As the emotional tensions are released and clarified with the help of the leader, the problem is more soluble when seen in these more accurate terms.

The educational value lies in the recognition that one cannot meet resistance with resistance or by fighting their symptomatic expression. Interpersonal relationships do not disappear, but they are handled differently. The group process takes time. It is seemingly long and drawn out, but the most effective change is a product of this process. The group members wished to continue with the seminar meetings in the fall. The leader suggested, however, that time be allowed for "consolidation of ground won."

A New Era in Understanding

"Educators continue to search for better methods of guiding youth toward better human relations. They are beginning to realize that their need to understand goes deeper than had been supposed. . . . Teachers' preparation will have to be rooted in deeper psychological foundations. . . . Educators who lift their sights beyond educational mechanisms can broaden their perspective and share in the wisdom of others who also are vitally interested in children and their development."⁸

⁸ Baxter, Bernice, *op. cit.*, p. 506.

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