

In addition to what has been started in this forum, some of the more thoughtful of our community leaders are asking questions that might be generalized thus:

What ought to be done, in addition to forums like this, to develop a more realistic consciousness among young people, and maybe adults too, about problems like the following (some of them have been mentioned by these young people) that are so important, but remain on the periphery of youth's concerns:

- ☛ the ever-increasing influence of science and technology on the lives of us all
- ☛ the lack of stability in the total economic scene that is reflected by such things

as periodic unemployment and tensions between government, industry, and labor

- ☛ the greater amount of leisure at our disposal

- ☛ the ever-increasing demands on education to meet life's problems with the same old devices and resources

- ☛ the lack of regard and appreciation for people who enter politics and government service

- ☛ the failure to understand the implications of America's present role as a world power

- ☛ the ferment in the area of spiritual values which is reflected by: the disillusionment and cynicism over how little positive good has come out of World War II; the increase in critical and controversial issues of church and state; an increased interest in identifying and following "the good life."

What, Another Meeting? _____

CHARLES R. NELSON

A sigh, or a note of exasperation, too often accompanies the exclamation in the title of this article. Charles R. Nelson, elementary coordinator, San Diego County Schools, California, suggests that if meetings were planned and organized as productive enterprises we might eliminate both the sigh and the note of exasperation. Mr. Nelson is on leave of absence at Teachers College, Columbia University.

SO YOU HAVE A MEETING to attend today! At least 30,000 of your colleagues in the nation have one, too. Probably most members of the profession attend at least one meeting a month, and in many cases, one meeting a week. This phenomenon is not limited to education, of course, for it is found to be a familiar and frequent activity in many other professions and occupations.

No doubt there are too many meetings held concerning school matters in

many districts. Probably it can be said that there are too few meetings held in other districts. Nevertheless, the meeting is an integral factor of the democratic way of living with others. As the concept of democracy in education extends itself, the meeting assumes greater significance as a potent medium for the continuous betterment of the profession and improved education of the citizenry.

The democratic process to which this nation is committed contributes

much to the prominence of meetings as a means of arriving at goals. Belief in the process impels any given group to share in the formulation of decisions and to assume the obligation to accept these gracefully.

The concept of unity springing from diversity is found as a basic strain in this country's heritage. As society becomes more and more complex, accompanied by the pyramiding of demands upon people to work together for home, community, state, national, and international cooperation toward the better life for each, the need for meetings increases. Daniel Boone probably spent little time around a committee table. On the other hand, think of the interesting scraps he missed.

MAKING MEETINGS PRODUCTIVE

Teachers and administrators schedule and conduct meetings because there are decisions to be made, understandings to be developed, action to be fostered, and unity to be sought. Whether formal or not, the meeting can serve to provide the group with the opportunity to progress another step toward the solution of problems. The beginner in the profession soon recognizes the numerous problems in his local situation which demand attention of, and solution by, groups. Development of curriculum, balance in budgetary demands, prudent use of the school physical facilities, problems of staff personnel, to name a few, require cooperative consideration by groups of persons. Consequently, there are meetings.

For quite some time now, educators have used the meeting as a means of identifying the multitudinous issues which incessantly crowd in upon them.

However, they have just begun to use the meeting as a technique for really getting things done, for effecting action. The former approach resulted in a gradual increase in the number of conclaves until the weary and disgusted rose up to question seriously the values of the group process. Too many meetings! Talk, talk, talk! Sit, sit, sit! Nothing happens.

As concern for action takes on real significance, attention must be centered on real results and group efficiency rather than in the mere reduction of the number of meetings. Fewer meetings are certainly desirable, from the standpoint of one's psychological load, but not at the expense of getting things done which need doing!

DOING SOMETHING ABOUT MEETINGS

As the emotional disturbance arising from the preponderance of meetings subsides, its effective impetus might well be directed to doing something constructive about them inasmuch as the distraught individual is a member of the group concerned. There are two immediate contributions an individual can make which should produce results in a short time:

- *actively urge the refinement of the group's emphasis*
- *work to arouse interest in the dynamics of group process.*

To achieve the first step, he can suggest that the group reserve for itself only those problems which directly concern it, about which it can take action, and for which it has authority to act—partially or completely. A building staff, for example, should probably not spend its time on the problem of revising the over-all city

salary schedule, improving the classroom procedures of Miss H—, or planning the daily schedule of the principal's secretary. One of the most frequent failings of meetings is the expenditure of so many minutes on inappropriate problems.

Arousing interest in the dynamics of group process requires some extensive but rewarding efforts. Regardless of the quality of the content of the meeting, it must be accompanied by effective group interaction if real results are to obtain. Any participant can strive to bring his group to concentrated attention on the method of the meeting. Obviously, the previously established patterns of habit cling to warp creative direction of groups on the part of many participants. This need not continue as a limiting factor but rather as a sound argument for the use of the group's time for a brief study of group dynamics. A member can suggest that the group experience the values of self-planning for the series of meetings. He can focus attention on the evolving role of the different participants for effective participation, and on follow-up consideration, evaluation, and group productivity analyses.

Active participation implies more than being an officer, a member of a sub-committee, extensive verbalization, and keeping one's neighbor busy with "significant asides." It requires a vivid awareness on the part of each participant of the very real responsibilities assumed when he accepted membership in the group.

LOOKING AT THE HOW

From the first get-together the membership should understand that planning

for subsequent meetings is its responsibility. It is the extremely unique group that cannot be vested with self-direction for maximal progress if time pressures can be controlled. Meeting time, place, emphases, direction, leadership should all be within the group's jurisdiction.

We All Play a Role

The role of the chairman is crucial, of course, for effective meetings. He plans extensively with the planning committee inasmuch as a great deal of preplanning is necessary. Starting the discussion on time, "setting the stage," sustaining a fertile atmosphere, maintaining balance of discussion, providing variety and techniques, keeping the group moving, pushing toward solutions, providing for summarizations, suggesting follow-up activities, projecting purposes to subsequent meetings, pressing for face-to-face commitments, and closing on time are some of the responsibilities of the chairman. Keeping on a schedule demands dogged determination, but it is done with a minimum of overt effort so that efficiency and good morale prevail. He builds on the constructive, not necessarily agreeable, comments. The chairman enjoys the discussion!

The individual participant accepts the responsibility of acquainting himself with purposes of the meeting, with probable topics involved, and the starting hour. For constructive participation he stresses issues involved instead of personalities; disciplines himself to contribute verbally to a reasonable extent; assumes the center of interest when appropriate; listens critically and

provides questions, answers, and suggestions which are relevant; and assists the chairman in achieving progress toward defined purposes, and in maintaining the fertile atmosphere.

The resource person assumes the obligation of acquainting himself with the nature of the group, the purposes of the meeting, and the manner in which the group wants him to function. He prepares his contributions in terms of these facts. Stimulating the group process in addition to bringing information to bear on the topic at hand are his responsibility. Sustaining verbal participation through adroit questioning, recognizing members in various ways, and continuously easing group tensions are of equal importance to the delivery of his remarks. Adherence to his allotted time is usually essential for the most effective reception of his treatment of the topic. A magnificent contribution can be weakened substantially when accompanied by extended time-killing near the time of adjournment.

The recorder usually keeps a running account of the important points discussed during the meeting. Often the group's secretary has this responsibility. If a group is interested in action, this participant is exceedingly important, for the recording of solutions or agreement on the subsequent steps must be retained and made available in the minutes for continuity.

The observer is a participant whose role is vital for appraising many groups. He acts, in a sense, as a welcome intruder who watches the proceedings of the meeting through a window and cannot resist stepping into the circle near the close of discussion to make

observations concerning the interaction of the various participants and ideas. Not all groups find a need for this participant. Some groups use the observer frequently, but not regularly. As a group matures in its readiness for analyses of its social interaction, the observer serves to give strong impetus to its progress.

We Evaluate Our Growth

Frequent evaluation is in order. Did the meeting answer the purposes as set out in the beginning? Does the group see the next steps ahead? Did enough members participate to reveal a cross section of opinion? Was something accomplished, even in the broad sense?

The chairman doesn't have to start this analysis. Any participant can. He can interest the group in evaluating its progress. Possibly one member can take two to five minutes at the close of the meeting to share with the group the overt signs of progress, immobility, or even regress. Once in a while the group should receive a short evaluation sheet, check list type, so that a group reaction can be obtained. This is often asked of each participant as he rises from the table to leave. It is prudent to place only enough emphasis on the method of the meeting so that it serves to an optimum extent to make the content as fruitful as possible. *Occasionally groups become so enthusiastic about the process of interaction that content is relegated to a secondary position.*

TURN OVER A NEW LEAF

So you have a meeting to attend today! Make it assume the most important position on your calendar for the

day. Start with this one to influence the group toward more interesting and productive meetings. Begin to mold a group consciousness for selectivity concerning the topic or content, to

build a renewed interest in the dynamics of group interaction to promote a vital enthusiasm for results, for accomplishment. Capture the thrill that results from enthusiastic meetings!

Group Leaders Look at Frustration—

HERBERT A. THELEN

That any group becomes more or less frustrated from time to time by its problems of functioning seems to be a common observation. In this recorded discussion, edited by Herbert A. Thelen, associate professor of education at The University of Chicago, five group leaders analyze the sources of frustration in group situations and define the rôle of the leader in meeting problems of frustration when they arise.

IS FRUSTRATION necessary to group progress? How much frustration. What kinds of frustration? Under what conditions? What is the psychological significance of frustration in groups? What are its values? What can the group leader or leadership do to minimize its costs?

Following the second summer session of the National Training Laboratory of Group Development,¹ held at Bethel, Maine, we find five of the leaders of the Basic Skill Training groups (the primary curriculum division) meeting together for the purpose of exploring the problem of frustration. You are invited to join them as they discuss what group frustration is, what some of its implications are, and how it may be conceptualized.

Dimensions of Frustration

Earlier in the day, the group had been given a listing of six "dimensions" of frustration. This list, which was prepared by one of the members as an aid to discussion of the subject, is:

1. Feeling of inability to overcome identified barriers or obstacles.
2. Feeling of inadequate space of free movement, particularly with regard to individual need-meeting in the group.
3. Feeling of being held in a strong powerfield: leader domination, group expectancy for itself, rigidly institutionalized procedures or values.
4. Feeling of lack of direction toward goal.
5. Feeling of threat or fear in objectively recognizing and verbalizing forces which create impasse.

¹This analysis was carried out as part of the program of the Second Summer Session of The National Training Laboratory in Group Development held at Gould Academy in Bethel, Maine. The National Training Laboratory is a training and research enterprise in exploring the processes and the skills of effective group action.

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