

The Group Process as Idea

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Supervisors and other curriculum workers make extensive use of group procedures in carrying on their work. George H. Henry, curriculum director in the Bridgeville, Delaware, Consolidated School District, critically discusses the group process as a mode of redefining democracy and as a way of creating individuality.

WHAT THE GROUP PROCESS MUST DO TO SURVIVE

IN THESE DAYS of ideas-as-weapons there is no excuse for any movement such as the group process to be naively culturally determined. The Progressive Movement, for instance, now seems incredibly naive in that most of its devotees did not understand how their incurable optimism was part and parcel of the stock market boom; that in a complaisant society, wherein a \$90 billion economy was the equivalent of Utopia, education-as-growth had nothing to do but go all out for "freedom."

Similarly, twenty years from now, what will prevent educational theorists from smiling on the group process as a well-meaning but hopeless movement taken in tow by managerial fascism? Just as the English Romantics, horrified at the first impact of the Industrial Revolution, recoiled only by romanticizing the individual, are the group process workers, struck by the evils of rampant individualism, likewise only reacting by romanticizing a process?

Anyone who has participated in the group process is instantly aware of the wide range of interpretation of how the process operates. On the one hand, indiscriminate and sentimental appeals to democracy are used to justify "buzz sessions" and "6-6" intermissions, whose

productivity is frequently no greater than that of the old-fashioned Ladies' Aid Society.

The following statement from Mary Follett seems to have permitted some supervisors to rate any gathering of a few teachers as a group process, contributing to something called the American Way: "The deeper truth, perhaps the deepest, the will to will the common will, is the core, the germinating center of that large, still larger, even larger life, which we are coming to call the true democracy." This statement represents what probably might be called the mystic fringe of the group process. Of this sort of idealism in education Albert Guerard has this to say: "But we shall lose everything if we make ourselves and our students believe in the benevolence of our every tactical maneuver."

At the other extreme there is a straining after scientific positivism in extolling the process-as-process as all-sufficient. This point of view we note in one educational writer, who seems to strip both history and tradition from the process, and invites us to participate in pure, hydrated, naked, *sec* method; there should be "no end of inquiry fixed in advance by any thing or person—mores, customs, institutions, or persons with status authority." He is trying to make the group process the equivalent of scientific

method; or, if you like, scientific method is being turned into social psychology.

However scientific it may be, there is nothing in the process itself that saves its participants from confusing it with other movements or from perverting it. For instance, Mary Follett, who may be credited with being the founder of the group process, leaned heavily on Gestalt psychology. "The contribution of the new psychology is that *le droit* comes from relation and is always in relation." Yet the aims-and-objectives administrators, *by means of the group process*, are still perpetuating the additive connectionist psychology, having teachers dividing up democracy into its ten elements or its twelve characteristics, just as they cut up spelling and arithmetic in the 1930's. At the same time, these same teachers are confusing the group-process-as-classroom-method with the older Progressive Education, when the two are poles apart.

This statement from de Huzar, "The very thing that makes the method most powerful is the fact that it does not depend on a revision of human nature for its success," is obviously incompatible with this dictum from *The Discipline of Practical Judgment*, "They fumble at policy-making because they do not recognize that they are held far apart by conflict among their basic normative generalizations." Yet both owe much of their inspiration to Mannheim, whose recurring theme is that "capitalism had to create a corresponding human type—[in the future we need] not an ideal person in general but one needed in the next stage of social development—a new type of personality." Are we not impelled to ask

how effective a process is that isn't at all clear as to its fundamental nature—whether character is in the process or outside it?

In light of this confusion, the group process can certainly not be consciously evolutionary, the writer believes, until its participants seek to establish what assumptions (social, economic, or ethical) are embedded within the process when they try to effect a conciliation between the process and character.

THE GROUP PROCESS IS A MODE OF REDEFINING DEMOCRACY

The rise of the group process is a recognition that political democracy is only a part of democracy; "that democracy is more than a form of government"; that parliamentary democracy, arising historically as a compromise between the landed gentry and the wealthy merchant class, is not entirely adequate to meet such issues as the new leisure, recessions, corporate assembly line organization, coordination of local welfare agencies, institutional harmony.

As Follett states it, "Representation is not the main fact of political life; the main concern of politics is modes of association." Bigger, better, and more "good" elections do not promise a solution of the kind of economic dislocations that confront us. The kind of common agreement to sustain civil rights in an industrial society that needs to be born cannot be created by a government, only by other social processes.

If our national congress and our state legislatures were in themselves solely

democracy-at-work, totally outside the many pressure groups at odds with one another, each trying to capture the power of state authority for its own temporary needs, then that democracy would be well-nigh superfluous in this interlocking economy. The group process, if it is not to be a mere extension of a political technique of association, must operate within power and pressure either to integrate them better before they become political or to resolve them that they need not become political.

Surely the dialectics of pressure—all too often non-political both in origin and in character—obviously has not been working toward a beneficent end. As man's intelligence cuts into the "mystery" of the "free market," he would not want to regulate all of what he knows by conscious law even if he knew how: politics-as-life would become unbearable. On the basis of what he saw in the 1850's, Herman Melville shaped his grand theme (see Alfred Kazin, *The Partisan Review*, January, 1950) that "reality was not susceptible to a political interpretation."

Man may be a political animal, but he is larger than politics, larger than democracy. Totalitarianism is due chiefly to the fact that we have few techniques for getting things done except by state authority. The state is thus becoming the equivalent of reality. The trend toward federalism is a confession not that local government has broken down but that we have few extra-political methods of solving these social problems; in fine, not that self-reliance is disappearing but that social responsibility is not appearing. The group process is inimical equally to the octopus

of the state and the octopus of the corporation and it ascribes our woes not to a lack of traditional frontier self-reliance but to a lack of shared authority and of ways of working in groups.

If the group process is a mode of redefining democracy, somewhat as stated above, the school supervisor is in a dilemma. He is working with parents, teachers, and pupils whose inmost characters are subconsciously hostile to this assumption; and his school is inside a community that sees no immediate need for redefining democracy, though chronically apprehensive about federal aggrandizement and continually incensed about the ineptitude of government—at the same time leaning on it more and more. Not to be aware of this assumption and its consequences when one embraces the group process is to be naive.

THE GROUP PROCESS IS A WAY OF EXPANDING DEMOCRACY

When one embarks on the group process his very presence declares that he believes democracy is not homogeneous in respect to our institutions; that the family, the church, the corporation, the military, and the school have inherited certain forms of organization from the past that are inimical to democracy. These institutions, the process implies, have lagged far behind political democracy in their idea of authority and of administration. These institutions are still regarded, as in the 19th century, as untouched spheres. These institutions are now fused together in act and deed but not in our minds, points out Elton Mayo of the Harvard Business School.

Furthermore, these institutions, following their own rationale, now differ radically from one another. One form of human relations prevails in the classroom, another between teachers and administrators, another in our legislative halls, another in labor-management relations, another inside church governance, still another in the army, and yet another in Kiwanis. These disciplines of association are different even within subject matter, even inside one subject like psychology—the laboratory and the clinic. In regard to industry in particular, Mayo calls it "a disintegration of the community into an infinity of mutually hostile sections."

As a result, we behold Congress struggling to re—"form" its committees; the armed forces split asunder over reintegration; the home, at odds with new ideas of freedom, battling to preserve its ancient paternal base; and "everywhere—the social and intellectual relations of people . . . disrupted by the rationale of an organization peculiar to its technical demands." As for the school, each teacher shuts himself up in a cell all day, each forging his own discipline from laissez-faire to rank authoritarianism, and each frustrated that intermittent faculty meetings are powerless to mitigate the loneliness in the cell. Line and staff organization was never designed to alter the experience of a child.

Thus, the group process must be perceived by those who enter it not as a way of reconstructing the social order such as Counts advocates in *Dare the Schools Build a New Social Order* which, depression born, presents a kind of liberalism that stems from a belief in a "program." The group process, in

contrast, is an attempt to spread a way of working together and to make it common to all institutions, so that it brings a new quality of participation, a richer form of association to its personnel, to the end that within each institution the interaction is greater, thus releasing more intelligence and energy inside its organization.

To say that the process is only a process and not a belief is to have a truncated idea of its meaning.

THE GROUP PROCESS MUST BE A FUNCTION OF DELIBERATE EDUCATION

The group process rests on the premise that democracy must be learned; that it cannot be entirely left to the market place, the chance contact of patriotic ritual, the vicissitudes of the informal environment. Democracy, this means, is more than proceeding in a democratic manner, but includes a way of acting that seeks to *perpetuate* the process.

Our traditional school curriculum, divided into subject matter disciplines, was never organized as a means by which to learn, let alone practice, democracy; it was intended for a voting minority that need not act democratically in respect to all people, only to quarrel in a more dignified way among themselves about their own best interests. Class mobility is still the chief reason for being of our high schools; the dynamics of class dominates the whole curriculum; it is the *spirit* of education today.

The race for status in our graduate teachers colleges, for instance, is greater than it is in a factory; nowhere is human nature graded so meticulously for this

race as in these schools—all justified by something called tests and measurements. And those in school work who press for the group process the most, it is interesting to note, are frequently those who have plenty of status; for the group process, emanating from supervisors and professors, is not by any means a grass roots movement. Those who shed their status for the occasion often do so with one eye on a higher rung of the status ladder. The group process implies, in contrast, that one does not learn democracy by climbing the job ladder.

If the school is a place where democracy is to be practiced, then the problem of how to produce desirable behavior becomes the hub of the learning process. For a number of years it looked as if education-as-behavior, or if one prefers, democracy-as-process, had reached an impasse; there seemed nothing except theory to support the new focus on behavior. Then Lewin's deservedly famous experiments came along and those of his colleagues, Lipsett and White, and others experimenting in industrial relations, and the devotees of the group process pounced upon this slender sheaf of experiments as "science" itself coming to their rescue. Group decision, as a consequence, has now been incorporated into the group process as probably its major step.

But a philosophical analysis of these experiments still goes begging, something of the tough-minded treatment, for example, to which Lynd subjects the new social science study out of Princeton, *The American Soldier*, about which he says in the *New Republic*, "With such socially extraneous purposes con-

trolling the use of social science, each advance in its use tends to make it an instrument of mass control, and thereby a further threat to democracy."

Group decision can be one more device for the propagandist, the führer, the reactionary, the revivalist. Let's take this oft-quoted passage from Lewin: "As long as group standards are unchanged the individual will resist changes. . . . However, if group standards are changed, the conflict between individual and group standards is eliminated." This gives equally the KKK, the NAM, the CIO, Catholic Action, and the group process a "scientific" base. Furthermore, when the subjects in group decision *sense* they are being worked on by the manipulator-leader, as they were in the experiments, group decision ceases as a psychic compulsion to act. The "whole wheat bread" and the "cod liver oil" experiments were in the hands of manipulators *who knew best*, and the decisions were on a much lower level of action than the policies a faculty is often called upon to frame.

It is no accident that the era of rugged individualism evoked a rat-in-a-maze psychology; that now our interlocking urban centers suggest not several rats in a maze but experiments in group structure. Our present apprehension over survival frantically sends us to the realm of the "extra-personal," the "extra" morale that makes ten people in a group more than ten individuals; but devotees of the group process seldom warn us that this morale can be used for good or evil.

If educators don't see this, the group process may turn into a stronger form of indoctrination than the education-as-dogma it revolted from. Psychology

today is the theology of conveying an ideology already believed. It is a weapon, a tool. And a tool has implied ends. Paradoxically, the open-ended group process *has ends*.

If decision and action be the focus of education, then supervisors must revise their idea of a life-like situation. We are led to ask whether washing dishes is more life-like than working with others, or, stated differently, whether washing dishes does not involve working with others and for others. Robert Frost phrases it in this way, "We work together whether we work together or apart." The reality, the life-likeness, is thus our degree of human involvement in the task. To work with a person is as concrete as to operate a machine. The classroom is life-like not when it is like life (this "life" is not yet born, this reconciliation between the worth of what a person is doing and his degree of social involvement) but when it comes close to being the best democratic practice we know of at the moment. The process is as much an ideal as it is a process!

The group process, it follows, is not to be measured by the behavior of teachers in workshop or faculty meeting, but in how well the pupils themselves are mastering it. The teacher's ultimate security is not found in his growth in working with his peers but in observing how well the group process makes a desirable growth in his pupils. The teacher believes in democracy only as he sees how well it can be taught. A democratic society has faith in itself only to the extent that it believes democracy can be practiced by its citizens in the varied aspects of their community life.

THE GROUP PROCESS IS A WAY OF CREATING INDIVIDUALITY

From the intense competition growing out of the large-scale industrialization of the 19th century, there came into being certain types of individuality, each widely considered to be enlightened and democratic, and in the main compatible with Christian ethics: (1) the socially-minded individual who is considerate of others and observes the amenities but whose self is never integrated in common cause, motivated as it is by *noblesse oblige*; (2) the altruistic individual who gives a recreation hall to the town yet prevents its inhabitants from planning their own hall; (3) the cooperative individual who pitches in and helps a cause but never knows his relation to the others in the affair.

These three proceed from a doctrine of salvation that makes one's relations with God a strictly private affair and society a *separate* sphere or proving ground to show that this private relationship is changing one's life. The pride and egoism obviously inherent in this mode of goodness (it is the recurring theme of Reinhold Niebuhr's books) became a stumbling block to the church and was a reason why the evangelistic sects of the lower social orders maintained that we are saved by grace alone and not by works.

How could a poor person do good? Early frontier democracy side-stepped the problem by declaring this egoism a "right" available to all. Just as each was to be his own priest, each was to be his own lord. This seemed true until the advent of the assembly line.

When the physical frontier closed and the mass-man appeared, this doctrine of salvation began fading out, ally-

ing itself with secular liberalism, to become the social gospel, one wing turning into the muck-raking school led by Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell, which collapsed when "Utopia" was ushered in during the boom '20's. When the social gospel could not cope with the depression (charity and the reformers being unable to handle a national dole) both it and liberalism waned and the "welfare state" loomed up as the likely way out of catastrophe.

Since the last war there has been in many quarters an aversion to the welfare state and a call to return to divine inspiration—the ego system of capitalistic individualism once more—but this time with fewer chances of its being rugged: a salvation with fewer outlets to prove you are saved, for the state is already in the field "doing good" better than you can do it privately.

So one can hardly do more than resort to salvation as psychology, quite divorced from the social problems of the day; or one can castigate the "over-reaching" of public welfare programs out of fear of statism. Or, like the Spiritual Mobilization movement (17,000 ministers signed up and 200 radio stations hooked up) one may put the issue this way: whether "to pray to God or to Washington."

Now these types of individuality were never conscious that they were suffered to exist either because they were in literal control of things (factory, land, or government) or because there was a common agreement, covenant, compact, constitution, creed, Act of Toleration to sustain them to which most men in charge of affairs subscribed. Without this common base men seek their salvation in a round of

endemic religious wars as in the 16th century or frantically create new bases like Hitler's National Socialism or the communists' Soviet.

In short, the good man is not individual nobility socially applied. Today these traditional types of individuality (ways to salvation) are not good enough for our present interdependent society, *which nobody planned*. For we Americans planned by means of the Constitution to keep the economic order unplanned, but business planned it their way, in technically, extra-political ways, leaving the worker less free inside the newer organization than under his Constitution.

The group process is an attempt to create an individuality appropriate to this corporate condition that rugged individualism itself unconsciously brought about. This individuality is not inalienable; it is not apart from society, and it is yet unborn. The group process is a way of planning for that individuality, a way of sharing with others not necessarily our goods but our salvation—which is to say, our freedom. Retraining teachers in this sense is not a mere change of methods, but is a matter of helping them achieve a new way of looking at themselves.

THESE IMPLICIT BELIEFS EVOKE RIVAL PROCESSES

Whether we like it or not or whether we are aware of it or not, these ideas above are embedded in the group process whenever it functions. They are not necessarily unfolded when an impasse is struck, for this involves a check either on how well the members have applied the technique or on the reliability of the hypothesis.

These assumptions do become plain, however, when there is opposition to the process as a process: when those in the process find themselves at variance with other processes that claim to have the same basic aims, and that too would wrestle with security and freedom, but with a different idea of security; would enhance the dignity and worth of the individual but by a different method; would create a common agreement but by a different mode of association.

Surely Spiritual Mobilization as a movement is utterly at odds with the group process, yet it too is concerned about heading off totalitarianism. Then, too, the great books study groups, certainly not entirely dissimilar from the group process, is yet another rival process. On a much more intellectual level than Spiritual Mobilization, Professor Trueblood of Earlham College, whose religious books are best sellers, advocates small groups similar to the *agape* of the early Christians, a fellowship (mode of association) in Christ, that would permeate the social order with a fresh, vital moral spirit.

Still another conception of common assent (*consensus*) is described by a corporation president in this way: Political attrition against American industry must not be allowed "to disfranchise the votes of millions of satisfied customers whose decision dictates business success. . . . We can preserve competition only by allowing it to operate, and so to make effective the votes of millions of satisfied customers." The group process wants competition too, but differs on what is meant by "allowing it to operate." The group process, its participants must thoroughly understand, as they practice it the best they can, is

a confession to a philosophy of life that millions like Mr. Hoover and his followers might dub "the last mile on the road to collectivism."

Teachers who do not know this will abandon the process with alacrity when, to their astonishment, they find they are part of something that many people do not call democracy at all. Recently, in one town the school board tossed out a core program that had been *successfully* in operation for six years, largely because a faction labeled its process an alien "ism." And in another town a group of pupils who were being initiated into the process "informed on" a teacher for being a red.

At our summer schools, supposedly engaged in the process for the occasion, may be found a teacher who finds her security in her church, a superintendent whose security is in his job's authority, another whose security is in his rigid middle-class ideals. For these folks to transfer their present allegiances to the security of the group process would mean no less than banishment from home or a feeling of being *declassé* or a flight from God. Already, education-as-process has been termed godless because it is scientific; anti-intellectual because it shifts the emphasis from the three R's; and against human nature because it would change the incentives for things done.

Not to perceive that when one elects the group process he chooses among processes is to abstract the process from society, and this is the logical fallacy that many of its advocates are now falling into. Though the process may legitimately have no aims except those that are engendered as a problem opens up, the process does have implicit aims

that set society moving in a certain direction in respect to the way democracy itself shall go in the future. Not to perceive this is to lead to this half-truth from one of its interpreters, "a group does not exist in a vacuum; it exists to act in terms of its needs, purposes, goals. . . ."

But where do these needs come from? He should have added, "and in terms of the other processes that surround it and press in upon it."

Ultimately, the process is to be meas-

ured not by how efficiently it solves this or that particular problem, but only as it brings an individualistic motivation into harmony with a corporate society at hand, as it reconciles the dignity and worth of the individual with social responsibility, as it redefines democracy and expands it into "unprocessed" areas, and, finally, as those outside the process become sensitive to the emerging forces in society, still inchoate, that can be brought into harmony with these assumptions.

When School and College Cooperate—

JOHN I. GOODLAD and FLOYD JORDAN

This is a report of the Atlanta (Georgia) Area Teacher Education Service. The authors are John I. Goodlad, associate professor of education, Emory University, and Floyd Jordan, professor of education at the University of Georgia. The authors are, respectively, consultant in curriculum and instruction and coordinator in the Atlanta Area Teacher Education Service.

"THIS YEAR we plan to hold our annual planning conference several weeks after the beginning of the fall term. By that time, we'll have most routine matters under control and will be free to concentrate on instructional problems. What do you think of the idea?"

This question, part of a telephone conversation held early in the summer of 1949, was a link in a chain of events culminating in a major educational conference in the fall of the same year. It was asked of the Coordinator of the Atlanta Area Teacher Education Service by the Director of In-Service Edu-

cation in a large county school system in the Atlanta area. This workshop-type conference included a banquet and keynote address, two days of intensive group study under trained leadership, an evaluative summary, and a final inspirational address. It involved more than 800 local teachers, supervisors, administrators, and consultants. Of greatest importance, it represented the co-operative planning of all these persons and resulted in certain specific recommendations for the betterment of local educational conditions.

The above account is only one of many that might be written to describe

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