

# Status Leaders Evaluate Their Work—

This is an analysis by a group of school administrators and a consultant of conditions limiting group effectiveness and conditions facilitating group progress in an in-service project carried on in the River Rouge, Michigan, school system during 1948-49.\*

THIS IS THE STORY of the work of twenty-one status leaders of the River Rouge school system during the school year, 1948-49. They met thirty-two times, two hours each time, to determine:

What conditions get in the way of our doing better work?

What are the causes of these conditions?

What can or should be done about them?

Most of the time was spent in two work groups: administrator-teacher relations and administrator-community relations.

In order to focus on process, they used bi-weekly logs to consider these questions:

1. In your opinion, what is happening to the project of your group?
2. As you see it, what is happening to your group and the individuals in it, including yourself?
3. What might be blocking the progress of your group?

At the end of the year they reviewed the entire year's work in terms of five evaluative questions:

1. What happened to the project of your group?

2. What happened to your group and the individuals in it?
3. What blocked the work of your group?
4. What facilitated the work of your group?
5. How have you felt about the year's work?

This study project was organized by the superintendent and his administrative staff who felt the role of the status leader to be a critically important factor in school program development. This article<sup>1</sup> summarizes material drawn from the bi-weekly logs and the five evaluative questions.

## CONDITIONS LIMITING GROUP EFFECTIVENESS

The contribution of each member of a group is unique because each person reacts in the way he perceives others, the group, and the group's activities. Because people do not lose their individuality in a group situation, certain hindrances to group work develop.

A block may be an individual, a room in which the group meets, the

<sup>1</sup>A more detailed report of this study may be obtained by writing to Gaylord M. Speaker, Superintendent, River Rouge Public Schools, River Rouge 18, Michigan.

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nature of the problem, prevailing social custom, biased or stereotyped thinking, or the background of the participants. It may be clothed in suspicion, hostility, aggressiveness, perfectionism, confusion, frivolity, or argumentation. A block may be the enthusiasm of some persons if the group has not developed a readiness for group thinking. Such barriers must be analyzed in the light of a specific situation. At a given time a block to one group could be an advantage to another, or a particular block could well be seen by the same group as an advantage at a later time.

#### Individual Uniqueness

In this situation, individuals seemed to cause blocks. For some there was a definite feeling that professional competence was being questioned. Anxiety developed when the *status quo* was questioned. Criticism was interpreted as personal affront. Facetiousness concealed honest feelings. Complacency was a cover for uneasiness and anxiety. As the projects progressed, some individuals appeared to be disinterested. Intercultural attitudes blocked progress.

Members were plagued by differences in point of view toward education and philosophy of living. Some were reluctant to question the validity of their personal experiences. Some tended to reject the project and the group. This prompted a few to refuse responsibility—to ride along. They were prone to veto whenever the opportunity was presented. At times suspicion and distrust on the part of some tended to spread. A continuous block was seen in the confusion of some members. One member described the major block to the entire project as "ourselves."

#### Blocks from Group Setting

At times there was a lack of simple courtesy. Speakers were interrupted while talking. Participants were sometimes chided for their opinions and ridiculed for an idea. Personal antagonisms carried over from conflict in halls and classrooms. Some took it upon themselves to interpret others' ideas and actions for the group. Some refused to see themselves as group members but rather as individuals in combat with others. Some attempted to monopolize the discussion. Both groups suffered from lack of leadership. Domination as distinguished from leadership was another block. Lack of readiness for cooperative endeavor provided another. Difficulties of communication impeded progress.

Although one could anticipate at times the reactions of individuals, he was surprised at other times by a series of unorthodox reactions—argumentative devices which concealed feelings. It became evident that the group could talk about commonplace things with great facility, but solving a problem, somewhat shrouded in emotional conflict, involved a different language.

#### More Blocks from the Process

The process was slow—even plodding at times. It involved hard work. Results seemed limited in relation to the energy expended. Unfamiliarity with the process sometimes resulted in lack of enthusiasm. The idea that the individual was more important than the process also impeded the work. Some appeared to believe they must never allow themselves to become part of a group. Many felt the work was begun with vagueness of purpose. The process seemed to



lend itself to extreme generalization without regard to the specifics involved.

Frequently mentioned as a block was the terminological warfare which both groups experienced. Still another was the continuous defense of "pet theories." Research was not considered important. One member mentioned that this attitude was a question of unreadiness rather than unwillingness. Another hindrance to the process was the inability to develop group solidarity with respect to proposed decisions. Apparently some of the original problems were listed as blocks because members considered them overwhelming and without solution. Some felt that the presence of top administrators limited participation.

#### CONDITIONS FACILITATING GROUP PROGRESS

Deep-seated diversity in educational and personal philosophies constituted one of the most important conditions that helped in the long run. The strength of a group lies in its ability to resolve individual conflict. Without diversity in thinking, there is little interchange of ideas. The fact that people were different produced a wholesome condition for cooperative thought and action. A conviction developed among members that each participant must have the right to "speak his mind" without fear of censure or reproach. Members tended gradually to accept each other with mutual respect. Some showed patience long after it would have been reasonable to lose patience.

The social coffee period preceding each weekly meeting was relaxing. Some members mentioned the presence of top administrators. Another factor

was that the groups were organized on a voluntary basis.

The process necessitated an interdependence in the thinking of all members. The cooperatively developed plan of the work and the clarification of problems helped. The semi-monthly logs provided a check on progress. The bi-semester summaries caused members to see the year's work in perspective. The consultant's work in helping members see relationships within the projects served to sharpen the focus of group effort. Rotation of chairmen and recorders helped each to feel responsibility for progress. Library resources and bibliographies stimulated group thinking. The fact that the process was new to some motivated their interest.

#### HOW WE FELT

The ideas and techniques of democratic participation are expanded through the practice of group planning. A member becomes a contributor to the process, thus serving others without sacrificing his need for expression, status, and approval. Frequently, the emotional equipment of members was entangled in an interplay that made the difference between success and failure. Often individuals found within themselves a capacity for cooperative planning hitherto little realized. Their background was such as to render compromise an acceptable and normal adjustment. Others rejected partly or completely the total procedure. Between acceptance and rejection was found a variety of reactions.

#### ... Toward Cooperative Planning

While the essential objective of democracy is the recognition of the

worth and dignity of the individual, the conditions for materializing that goal lie within the group process. In such a framework the nature and degree of participation often depend upon the extent of emotional conditioning for cooperative planning. There were those who found the experience acceptable for working out common problems. They professed adherence to the idea that cooperative planning results in the establishment of common grounds upon which progress is slow but undeniably certain. They admitted that the slow, frustrating pace was discouraging. They held firm to the theory that regardless of apparent difficulties in accomplishing something "concrete and practical," the process itself was good.

The other side of the ledger revealed the feelings of those who professed open distrust of any learning process that failed to simulate their past experiences. The records indicated a definite reluctance to accept the group process. Some recognized little value in open discussion. Across-the-table dealing was felt painfully inadequate. Discussion was labeled the open road to "idle talk." During the critical periods when these feelings ran high, the groups strained for equilibrium, the projects sagged for want of direction, and progress seemed at a standstill. These conditions were a disappointing reality for those who perceived no order in the seeming chaos. In fact, a survey of fluctuating attitudes covering the entire year lent credence to the belief that pessimism was in some cases predetermined. Others saw a development of ideas and attitudes that spelled a new kind of progress.

A third group consisted of members

whose attitudes wavered between receptivity and curiosity. Some met the group situation with what might be termed "neutral feelings." Unfamiliar paths opened up when ideas, method, and goals interplayed. Then a fusion of feelings produced some degree of interest, frustration, or compromise. The resulting adjustment became a variable since interest and participation changed as the tone and direction of certain meetings complied with individual desires.

### . . . Toward Leadership

Persons little experienced in the group process often face the problem of reviewing their conception of leadership. Some members accepted the responsibility of leadership with little concern that the project was being controlled by any one person. They shaped conditions so as to encourage mutual participation. Others held that control was acceptable only when pressed by a recognized authority whose job was to show them how to "get things done." For some time common understanding of this important aspect was lacking, so criticism was directed toward the consultant. Requests for more "direction and leadership" and "intervention by the leader" reflected a reluctance to accept personal responsibility for success.

### . . . Toward the Projects

An analysis of this attitude, month by month, showed variation in most cases. A few remained resolute throughout, but even they revealed grave doubts at times. There was more confidence in the group process as the projects progressed.

The first logs, prepared in Novem-



ber, showed directly opposing attitudes. One person "felt good" despite the presence of reticent people. At the other extreme was a strong feeling of dissatisfaction. Logs for December and January recorded a favorable note. The person who expressed grave doubt in November declared that "the group has seen the light and there will be definite accomplishments." Another member reported a marked improvement in some persons. A low point seemed to have been reached in February as evidenced by a feeling that the projects were too generalized, and that very little progress had been made. One member discerned three kinds of attitudes:

- Hopeful for results later
- Loyal but hardly hopeful
- Pessimistic.

#### THE SUMMING UP

At the close of the year there was evidence of greater tolerance toward the slowness of the process. One person

recognized that great benefit had resulted from the projects, and stated he had already made use of similar techniques in his classes. Another who thought in April that the project had been lost, now believed that it "was really shaping up." A sober note was the expression that the study project had been a worthwhile though grueling experience.

Although members of the Status Leadership Study Group were obviously discouraged from time to time during their year's study together, there was evidenced, nevertheless, a willingness and a determination to go beyond the scope of their own study. This conviction, held also by the administrative staff, resulted in the planning of a second year's work. Two consultants were made available through Wayne University, and a group of about sixty teachers and administrators began work in September, 1949.

## Meeting the Elementary Teacher Shortage

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GEORGE W. EBEBY

This article describes the plan developed in Portland, Oregon, for "transitioning" competent secondary teaching candidates into much-needed elementary teachers. George W. Ebeby is assistant superintendent of the Portland public schools.

OUR PROFESSION is confronted with a grim reality. In a year when the shortage of elementary teachers will be increasingly grave, many prospective secondary teachers will fail to find employment in positions for which they have prepared. Why does the problem

exist? How is it being met in various parts of the nation?

The problem is simply one of arithmetic. Our teacher education institutions are producing one elementary teacher where three or more are needed. At the same time they are preparing

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