Follow-Up of a Summer Workshop

HUBERT S. COFFEY
and BURTON C. TIFFANY

Do commitments enthusiastically adopted in a workshop setting carry over into action in classroom, school and community? Sometimes they do, according to the authors of this follow-up study: Hubert S. Coffey, assistant professor of psychology, University of California, Berkeley; and Burton C. Tiffany, curriculum coordinator, San Diego County Schools.

LEWIN pointed out in a number of significant researches the efficacy of group decision in producing change in individual behavior. These studies showed that even with such rigid and persistent habits as those involved in eating, food preparation and dietary choices, change could more easily be brought about when the individual had made his decision to change in a group situation than when he was requested to do so individually by an expert. Can we expect the same results from a group decision when it is related to changes in teaching procedures, staff relations and community participation on the part of teachers?

WORKSHOP IN GROUP DYNAMICS

A six-week summer Workshop in Group Dynamics was held at San Diego State College under the joint auspices of the college and the office of the County Superintendent of Schools. The planning was done cooperatively through a committee which represented both agencies and included the summer staff member who was obtained as a consultant in group dynamics to function as a core leader in the workshop. The objective of the workshop was to assist teachers in greater awareness of their functions as group leaders in the classrooms as they dealt with children, in their schools as they participated as staff members, and in their communities as they played their important roles as citizens.

It was agreed at the very outset that the agenda for the workshop would be flexibly organized. Full cognizance would be taken also of the interests and needs of the workshop members. While certain assumptions about broad areas to be covered could be made, it was considered essential to follow the important interests of the members as these pointed out the direction which should be taken.

The workshop was organized into two major time divisions within a day's schedule. The opening session consisted of exploring the broad phases of group dynamics by the consultant. This session included such topics as "the effects of differing social climates," "the theory and development of leadership skills," "the relation of socio-economic position and cultural background to certain personal and social attitudes," "the function of the informant," "pupil planning, participation and evaluation of group activities," "development of parent participation in curriculum problems," and "the role of the leader in the group."
planning,” “analysis of group task roles in a discussion group,” “the relation of individual level of aspiration as influenced by group participation,” “sociometric evaluation of group-membership,” “the use of group evaluation methods for individual report cards,” “the relation of motivation to group decision.”

Informal Atmosphere Encouraged

The early sessions were conceived as a platform from which discussion topics for the smaller group meetings would spring. Make-up of the smaller groups was determined by the level of teaching interest. The group consultant moved as rapidly as possible to develop an atmosphere of informality and group participation. Two devices helped to achieve this end: one, material for consideration by the group was brought in from the smaller groups and placed on the agenda for each day’s general session; and two, an evaluation committee was established to help the leaders direct the workshop toward the goals and the expectancies of the group members. The opening session became less and less a lecture by the group consultant and more and more a discussion group meeting.

Role-playing was a very important adjunct to the development of an informal group atmosphere, and to realizing in action terms the essential character of many of the problems which were brought up. One of the first problems discussed and presented in a role-playing situation was that of leadership. Different types of leadership were examined. A school staff meeting was used as the central problem, with three or four different leadership roles being played by different members of the group. Role-playing situations moved from the initial experiences, which were structured by the group consultant and workshop director, to those which were conceived by workshop members in direct response to the problems raised by active group members.

Members Evaluate the Workshop

An account of the workshop would be remiss if it did not give an evaluation of what the experience meant to its members. This evaluation may be seen in two ways: (a) what the members expressed at the time of the workshop as the major gains in their experience, as well as any disappointments they may have felt; and (b) the extent to which members carried the workshop aims and achievements into action when they returned to their home bases.

What was both surprising and gratifying to the workshop staff was the feeling on the part of workshop members that they had been involved in “an experience.” Many of the teachers expressed the opinion that this was the first time they had ever been in a learning situation where their own needs were the pivot around which the activities of learning revolved. For many it was the first time they had ever had the courage to participate more or less freely and without fear of failure or of being made to feel ridiculous. Most of the members had never been aware of the fact that a group process with its involvement of group members really existed. They had regarded groups as something one belongs to, but certainly not something one might look at and understand. No one of those members would have predicted that

Educational Leadership
such a group of strangers could have developed the kind of group relation-
ship which makes for freedom of criticism; for tolerance and appreciation of
members' idiosyncrasies; for development of intelligent ways of approaching
problems in cooperation with others; and especially for the warmth and
affection which draws support for some, and makes possible intelligent dissent
from others.

While we cannot point to quantitative measures of statistical indices (and
these would be valuable if we had them), we can point to some empirical
observations which allow us to assess the amount of change which took place.

List of Commitments Developed

The last session of the workshop was devoted to developing a list of com-
mitments which the members of the workshop would work toward during
the following year. These commitments were as follows:

- To be a more democratic leader—to use pupil planning, group discus-
sion and group evaluation.
- To make children aware of their participation in groups and to evalu-
ate such participation.
- To become more of a "participant" as a staff member—through the
group experience better to evaluate my own participation and to help
evaluate my staff for the purpose of working toward more productive
goals.
- To use my relationships with parents more effectively—to get them
more involved in the school program,
to learn from them as well as to help them in their thinking.

- To evaluate more effectively the human inter-relationships involved in the interview situation, and to respect as a source of insight and change the attitude the parent brings, no matter how antagonistic the attitude may seem at first.

- To be willing to hear and to encourage expression on the part of parents in interview situations, realizing that such expressions and the reflection of feelings in these situations may provide the foundation for a more constructive relationship.

- To use the technique of "role-playing" when it seems to be a constructive means for clarifying real situations and promoting real growth in children.

- To implement the security and confidence that I have gained as a group member this summer through wider participation in groups, staff meetings and community work.

- To broaden my role as a teacher beyond the confines of a schoolroom to membership in groups in our society in which I can be a "real person," exercising the rights and privileges of citizenship and personality accorded other persons.

- To be a change-agent, effective not only in working with children but in helping my community solve some of the real problems which threaten our society today.

At the session's end, several members of the group suggested that we meet during the following year to examine the commitments again in the light of whether or not they were assimilated—in short, whether or not they could be carried out.

A Reunion for Evaluation

Eight months later, four-fifths of the workshop members were able to attend the reunion. The whole day of reunion was spent in discussion of the commitments; they were the agenda for our reassembled group.

The group consultant had been greatly gratified at the formulation of the commitments but he had had many apprehensions as he returned to the reunion. From the beginning he had been aware of the practical difficulties in carrying out the commitments, also he had become somewhat accustomed to teachers' being defeated as they tried to apply theory to practical situations. He could almost hear, in apprehensive fantasy, the complaints, the excuses, the rationalizations which might characterize a discussion of outcomes of each of these self-imposed obligations.

After fifteen or twenty minutes, the consultant began to realize that his apprehensions were unfounded. The first enthusiastic recital about what had been accomplished with respect to the first commitment, even though he knew it to be honest, sincere and true, he regarded merely as a morale booster. The second response, which was an illustration corroborating the first, he tended to regard still as tribute to last summer's joy, but he could not believe such attestations would continue. However, they did.

Commitments Carried into Action

There was Miss B who told of her experience in helping primary children to set up standards by which they
could be judged and judge themselves. This resulted in a group-evaluated report card, for which the teacher and children worked out the meaningful criteria by which they would be judged, and also would participate in making the judgments. There was Mrs. H, who had undertaken careful group planning before a field trip, and then had assisted the group in evaluating the experience in light of group standards they had cooperatively developed. There was the secondary school teacher who had taken imperious and intolerant peer-group prejudices and remolded this blind acceptance of the mode into a set of mature standards by which the group was willing to have itself evaluated. There was the larger project of Mr. Z, who had helped several grades plan and execute a clean-up day at school. For this, children had allocated tasks, had met all the difficulties entailed in a project involving such wide range of ages, and had used group-developed criteria by which to judge the success of the experience. Over and over again, we found exciting evidence of what teachers had done to put their resolutions to work.

It was very evident that many of the teachers in this group had approached their relationships with parents with greater ease, confidence and appreciation. Mrs. K told a story of how her patience and endurance had been sorely tried. An irate mother had challenged the teacher’s integrity in her guidance of the child. When this parent found, however, that she would be listened to sympathetically, she had remained to unburden herself of her own anxieties about the child’s behavior at home. There was Miss B who prior to the workshop had always been “a silent partner” in deliberations of her own staff, undergoing the gnawing restlessness attendant upon an inability to say what one has to say. She had found her voice now, prompted, as it were, by the greater voice of the group, and had gradually become a participant.

Group Members Accept New Values

The recounting of experiences by one person seemed only to stimulate others to relate similar experiences in different contexts. There was sharing, not only in the successes which they had enjoyed, but in the appreciation of barriers they had come up against in the pursuit of their goals.

Lewin said, “The individual accepts the new system of values and beliefs by accepting belongingness to a group.” The workshop members had relinquished certain time-worn stereotypes of the teacher and had accepted a new picture. It was the picture of a competent, informed and participating group member willing to guide children in their learning activities, ready to help them evaluate these activities and prepared to step outside the routine order to accomplish those tasks which he sincerely believed were in the interests of child growth and development.

Workshop members had accepted a new view of themselves as important agents in social change. They saw themselves as helping children to develop the skills in group living so important to future happiness in our social order, and they recognized their own role in helping their communities face the problems which only intelligent leadership and intelligent group participation can solve.

October, 1951