

# The Workshop, the Group and the Curriculum

What is the actual potential of the workshop? Can it develop a group spirit that will enrich the lives both of the participants and of the groups of which the participants are year-round members?

**G**ROUP PROCESS as used in teacher workshops for curriculum building has developed several significant principles during recent years. Some of these principles are that:

- Changing the curriculum is primarily a matter of changing people.
- One's groups—in Lewin's words—are "the grounds on which he stands."
- Change in individuals depends on changes accepted by the groups of which they are members.

Acceptance of these principles places group processes in perspective, not merely as a "newfangled" method of conducting a meeting, but as an important consideration if change is to be made and if change is to be lasting.

The workshop in curriculum development has a potential for developing a group spirit which in terms of ultimate results may be more significant than more specific and tangible products such as teaching units and statements of policy. This discussion is devoted to the workshop as it involves two kinds of groups: the group of persons participating in the workshop and the group of which the participant is a year-round member—his

school faculty, his students, the parents of his students and the community at large.

## The Workshop Group

The presence itself of a number of people does not constitute a group. A group is characterized by a feeling of community, by common interests, common goals, and an interest of each individual in most of the others in the group. The typical graduate class at a university does not normally achieve this group quality because the lines of communication usually join the individual student and the professor but do not connect each student with other students in the group. While students may be working on the same problem it is difficult to define a genuine problem developing from the common experience of the group. Moreover, the student is not often in a position to follow through on group recommendations in his own school unless he is the only person involved. Furthermore, cooperative attack on problems is generally not consistent with emphasis in college courses on individual attainment of objectives.

In addition, traditional university

organization of courses is based on a focus different from that of a workshop. The college catalog is a statement not of student needs but of college offerings. There is a status relationship between professor and students that differs materially from the leader-consultant-participant relationship in the workshop. The center of interest in the graduate course is normally the professor, the resources he employs and the announced goals and content of the course.

Motivating factors are degree or certificate requirements, ultimate career objectives, interest in the course *per se* or the professor's reputation. These are all considerations of some merit and they warrant the offering of given courses, but they do not carry with them the group-generating factor of a common attack upon common areas of concern in the participants' school districts. This is not intended to gain-say the fact that many college professors experienced in working with groups often do much to establish a group atmosphere. Within the limits of a simulated condition and the absence of an organized group of co-workers they approximate the effectiveness of group approaches as they work toward solution of a simulated problem.

Frequently graduate courses are set up as "workshops" and students are given time and assistance in working out problems that they have identified in their individual teaching situations. The emphasis on the participants' problems is desirable, but often the course-workshop suffers from (a) competing demands by other courses on the student's attention and energy,

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(b) concern with meeting credit requirement (writing a "paper," e.g.). It is difficult for the individual to develop the feeling that he is part of a real group that has a continuing existence. Such a workshop may contribute to the solution of individual problems, but it does not capitalize on the dynamic power of group membership in motivating attack upon a common goal. When the participant returns to his working situation it does not insure follow-through on solutions developed in a campus situation.

To weld an aggregate of individuals into a group, workshop leaders have found certain guidelines highly desirable.

#### 1. Time

Group leaders have recognized that social and working relationships among people depend upon the opportunity to spend considerable time with each other. They also recognize the need to limit the number of new personal contacts if people are to get to know each other well. As a result, a number of devices have been employed.

In some cases workshops have been set up within a school district to strengthen existing social ties and to minimize disrupting effects of new contacts that would not contribute to the purposes of the workshop. The workshop in the home situation has the advantage of involving the actual group working on a specific problem—a school faculty or a district commit-

tee for example. There is usually the opportunity to include in membership administrative and supervisory personnel who carry responsibility for follow-through and who recognize the administrative implications of suggested developments. There is the danger of being limited by restricted viewpoints and an absence of the diversity of experience available when representatives from several school districts share in facing common problems. In such situations it is sometimes difficult to secure adequate consultant services. Small school systems are particularly limited in diversity of personnel both as affects participants and resources.

On university campuses in many cases workshop participants have been scheduled to meet together for the full day so that they would have time to develop an understanding of each other and not be disturbed by the hourly bustle of changing classes and changing faces. The university campus provides a reservoir of consultant services and professional literature which it is difficult to duplicate in other ways. In addition there are generally facilities for a group to live and eat together and to share in the cultural and recreational resources that the university musters.

There has been an increasing emphasis on the use of recreational situations, such as parks and camps for a "retreat" from competing interests and for the establishment of situations where participants can live the whole day with each other, appreciate each other as human beings and work on problems of common concern. Workshops in recreational situations are not new as such. They may possibly stem

from conventions conducted in vacation resorts and from retreats of religious orders. In place of traditional organization of conventions, concerted attack is made upon selected problems. There is continuous contact among a limited number of people in a permissive atmosphere where discussion is free and the quality of social contact is at a maximum. Examples of this type are the regional workshops of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development conducted both in state parks and on university campuses, the annual Washington State Administrators' Work Conference conducted by the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Administrators' Association at Mt. Rainier National Park the week before the park facilities are opened to the public, the Workshop of Illinois Administrators at Grant City State Park under the auspices of Southern Illinois University, the annual series of curriculum workshops for teachers conducted in state parks by the Michigan State Department of Public Instruction and Workshops on Conservation and Outdoor Education conducted in Washington camp situations.

## 2. Participation

There is recognition of the need of meeting basic needs that individuals have as members of a group. They have a need to feel that they "belong," that they are making a contribution to the group, that they are respected by the group and that the group is accomplishing worth-while results. Development of "in-group" and "out-group" feelings tends to alienate out-groupers and result in their being less

willing or even unwilling to work toward goals adopted in the workshop and to put the outcomes of the workshop into practice upon return to their teaching situation. To avoid development of in- and out-groups it is necessary that every person share in planning, in setting up goals, in contributing toward accomplishing these goals and in evaluating results. Leadership has to be kept fluid not so much in terms of chairmanships but in terms of opportunities for the individual to contribute. The concept that we carry of ourselves is of utmost importance. Members of the group have to develop a picture of themselves as important cogs in the workshop group.

### 3. *Limits*

Groups have to recognize their own limitations in order to avoid frustration that may succeed in breaking down the ties that bind members together. Goals must be possible of accomplishment and not be outside the responsibility or authority of participants. Discussions should not be continued beyond the point of fruitfulness. Group members should recognize the need to call in consultant help if available and to make use of professional materials in order to secure additional information and clarify understandings.

### 4. *Learning by Doing*

Persons learn to use effective group procedures by making actual use of those procedures in situations where assistance is available. Considerations of adequate time, individual participation and recognition of the group's limits as already described are a part of this process. In addition, when the workshop is concerned with promoting

group attitudes and effectiveness, it provides for face-to-face contact of small groups for discussion either through a short "buzz" or through extended consideration of knotty problems. Emphasis is placed on achieving consensus as a basis for moving ahead. Decisions are not made until there is substantial agreement. Alternative approaches are provided for those individuals or small groups not wishing to submerge their individual differences in a group consensus.

### 5. *The Individual and the Group*

Just as the group provides the background for the individual, the individual stands out as a figure from the group background. Complete submergence of individuals in the group would deprive the group of diversity, interest and potential sources of growth. It is inevitable that there will be a conflict at times between individual desires and group goals. An effective group is marked by the *general* acceptance of group goals by all individuals, but especially by the freedom of the individual to express himself, to be heard by the group, to be respected by it and to be able to secure modification of group objectives.

To effect workable compromises between conflicting points of view between some individuals and the majority in the group, it is necessary that group members be able to take on what George Mead calls "the role of the generalized other" (or as your neighbor says, "to put yourself in the other man's boots"). To secure this understanding much use has been made of role playing and sociodrama. Individuals and groups are helped to

play the part of others in order to recognize the motivation of the person holding a contrary point of view. The role of a fictitious person in a conflict situation is often acted out before a group so that members can evaluate varying approaches to a difficult problem in human relations and so that the actors can identify with the person who is normally across the desk or table from him. Some excellent suggestions are found in the pamphlet *Role Playing the Problem Story* by George and Fannie R. Shaftel (New York: National Conference of Christians and Jews).

### The Working Group

Some enthusiasts for the workshop approach to in-service growth have asserted that the workshop group, like the old soldier, never dies, that it is a continuing entity. While this statement may be true in some senses, it should be apparent that persistence of the group's activity is not automatic but that certain efforts have to be made for following through the work that is begun in the workshop situation. This is true particularly because most workshops are not organized in relation to a single working situation involving personnel from that situation only. Generally there is need to carry over from a cosmopolitan group composed of persons from many different situations who are pooling their understanding and experience to approach problems that are common but not identical. Specific provision has still to be made to transplant processes, study and possibly tentative solutions from the workshop

experience to individual school situations.

Gradual recognition is developing of the difficulty that a single individual faces in trying to recreate for his group back home the enthusiasm developed in a friendly, energetic and productive workshop. He has considerable difficulty, too, in communicating to others interest in making changes or adopting recommendations that have developed from the workshop. As a result attention has been given to team representation at workshops and to continuing contact by the workshop leaders and participants for stimulating interest among other people.

Team participation is taking various forms. In some cases two or three persons from a single school district attend a workshop together on a basis of personal friendship. Group planning for the home school district in these cases tends to be fortuitous except as one participant gives to his colleague the reinforcement that is necessary when trying new ways and new ideas. In other cases several people may officially represent a single school district. They carry responsibility to develop plans in the workshop as far as possible and to continue such activity, including the involvement of others, upon their return to the home situation. Teams of this kind have included one or more administrators, some teachers, other professional workers, some parents and community representatives. Participation has been financed in some cases by the workshopper, in others by the school district and in still others by organizations or business enterprises interested in the purpose of the workshop.

One example of team participation is the procedure of the Citizenship Education Project (Teachers College, Columbia University) in inviting an English teacher and a social studies teacher from one school as full-time participants in their workshop, combined with part-time attendance by the school principal and superintendent. The Washington Congress of Parents and Teachers conducts a series of leadership workshops each summer to which P.T.A. unit leaders and teachers from the same school are invited as a team. Washington workshops on conservation and outdoor education in 1953 and 1954 enrolled as a basic element teams from a number of school districts including one elementary school teacher, one secondary teacher, one administrator and one public member.

The purpose of many workshops currently being conducted is curriculum study and development. Since change in curriculum involves change in orientation of the teacher, the student, the administrator and the community, any fundamental action is likely to require a considerable period of time. Workshops can serve to clarify purposes, to initiate long term study programs, to prepare materials that may be used as a basis for study or to evaluate programs or materials already in use.

The workshop is only one segment in a continuum of study. Preparation in terms of group planning, identifying the wishes of interested persons in affected schools, reading and visiting can make actual time spent together by workshopppers especially productive. Follow-up is necessary in the form of

organizing groups for study and action in the working situation from which the workshop participants have come.

The team is invaluable in preparation and follow-up. An added asset can be continuing contact between a central committee for the workshop or its leaders and the workshopppers prior to the group experience and following their return to school. The individual in this way finds support from others who have shared in planning the workshop. He can serve with his teammates as a nucleus for new groups that will continue to promote desired change. Follow-up activity can be given further impetus if resource persons who have been present at the workshop are available for continuing service in local areas. Reporting results of local efforts serves to keep the workshop group effective and alive.

There is no magic in a name. A workshop may be no more productive than a lecture series. The advantages of working on problems of one's own choosing, adequacy of time to work on these problems, availability of resource personnel and materials and the presence of kindred spirits with kindred problems are helpful but not enough. These may merely be variations on the theme of academic study remote from the working situation. Two circumstances, however, can help to translate these activities into actual improvement of the local teaching situation. They are: (a) Group reinforcement of individual purposes, understanding goals and convictions through the group spirit engendered at the workshop, and (b) Provision for group activity in the working situation "back home."

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