

The Group— Resource and Technique

EFFECTIVE college teachers have as a primary concern the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes in their students. It is significant that in practice this development is almost always attempted with groups of students, rather than simply with individuals, although in reality the individual is the actual target, not the group. That is, the college teacher rarely if ever trains groups to function as *groups*, as would be true of squads, platoons, or special teams in the army, for instance. Instead, the individual student is placed with others for the purpose of instruction, after which he is expected to separate himself from not only his instructor but also his fellow students and then to exhibit as an individual the results of his teaching-learning experiences in college.

Is it only coincidence that most college teaching involves groups of students? Is college teaching done this way only because it is more economical to talk to several, rather than one student at a time?

Certainly some coincidence and some historical accidents may account for the development of the present system, as

for the development of any institutionalized system. Also, the fact that economic considerations support class rather than individual instruction has helped to shape the system; but beyond these and similar considerations is a general principle of perhaps greater significance.

The group situation, *per se*, is conducive to learning.

Socrates taught groups of students, and we assume he would not have chosen otherwise. Jesus set up a group which he then instructed in the essentials of his mission. Much earlier we are told that Moses frequently called the people together for purposes of instruction. In later years, when universities began to be established, students were brought together to function as groups while being taught the disciplines or subject matter at hand.

Thus, the history of educational effort has included almost exclusively the utilization of groups of learners. Such use of groups is likely to continue for some time to come, despite occasional whimsical pronouncements of the one-log-one-pupil-one-Mark Hopkins type.

What, then, is there about groups so important for the development of learning in the individual? This article certainly does not exhaust the implications

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of this question. However, in the paragraphs which follow certain approaches will be indicated.

A group, sociologically defined in essential form, is two or more people in interaction. "In interaction" means that the members are reciprocally influencing each other, and that the action of one is affecting and at least partially determining the (response) behavior of the other(s). Understanding the person in his group aspects requires, therefore, sociological approaches. Stimulus-response theories alone will not suffice since the person is *interacting*, not simply acting, and his actions are in response to (or are motivated by) *group situations*, not simply to stimuli. Further, the person's action in the group situation is dependent upon his perceptions and definitions of that situation and, it must be remembered, these are themselves determined by the interaction of group definitions and the individual's relevant sets, not simply by the latter alone.

An Active Process

The statements concerning action are intended to apply to learning since learning is an active process. Like all other human behavior except for a few reflexes, learning is motivated, or goal directed, and the learner expends energy to learn, thereby actively creating a reorganization of his own system because he believes that thereby he can better meet his needs, either immediately or in the future. Frequently the group will assist the individual in defining and clarifying his own goals for learning, or will provide goal definitions where none previously existed. In other cases the group will provide endorsement or support for existing goals, thus enhancing the person's acceptance of these goals.

Other than these group processes having to do with goals of learning, what group factors are available for use by the instructor?

Communication is perhaps of paramount importance. Teaching-learning is, of course, dependent upon communication. In turn, good communication is dependent upon many factors. Many college teachers apparently assume that communication has been accomplished when the instructor has read a set of notes to a roomful of students. Nothing could be more in error. Sometimes the group can close and not allow new information to enter; sometimes information is spread unequally within the group. Communication is certainly a two-way process and, by definition, this process has not been completed until "feed-back" has been brought about. Many college instructors rely upon tests and examinations for feed-back, although an honest appraisal of many testing procedures would warrant a "too little, too late" indictment. That is, both teacher and student need to know that every point has been transmitted accurately; yet while tests cannot possibly approach full coverage, the teacher and students need to know immediately, not at mid-term or at the end of the session, just what has been conveyed successfully.

Why, then, not use group structures and processes so as to approach full and immediate feed-back? The answer probably lies in the typical instructor's failure: (a) to recognize the full implications of communication as a group process, (b) to appreciate the potentials of the group processes as aids in teaching-learning, and/or (c) to develop appropriate techniques for utilizing groups in teaching.

Such failures are difficult to understand. The philosophical and theoretical bases for the use of groups in teaching

are readily available even to those teachers whose training did not include such matters. The Socratic and Aristotelian methods of teaching are analyzed and interpreted almost anywhere one looks. (Both of these are important, but the former is especially significant for the present discussion. As a method of teaching it is based upon questions rather than upon statements, and allows full and free discussion and idea development among students as well as between students and teacher.)

General presentations of findings on the nature and usages of groups are available and are certainly understandable to anyone intelligent and educated enough to be teaching in college. One might begin with W. J. H. Sprott's little book, *Human Groups* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1958). Somewhat more systematic and extensive are George C. Homans' two books, *The Human Group* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950), and *Social Behavior: Its Elementary Forms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1961). Another important and helpful general treatment is to be found in *Small Groups: Studies in Social Interaction*, edited by A. Paul Hare, *et al.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955).

Much of the philosophy and theory of the use of groups has been applied to the modern classroom situation, and experimental work has long since established its advantages. For example, Nathaniel Cantor, at the University of Buffalo, has developed extensive sets of techniques which he has described in his book, *Dynamics of Learning*. The new experiments under the sponsorship of the Fund for the Advancement of Education at Miami University and the State College of Washington indicate clearly that innovation in college teaching is long overdue. Carl Rogers, in a



COURTESY THE AUTHOR

Portion of 60-student class, showing five small discussion groups. The groups have a limited time to help one member prepare to participate in a panel which will treat the major topic.

chapter in his famous book, *Client Centered Therapy*, describes his own application of therapeutic principles to classroom work, under the heading of "Student Centered Teaching." (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1951). It is to be inferred that Rogers believes most teaching is something other than student centered, and is subject matter centered, instructor centered, not centered, or yet something else.

It remains to be stated, however, that using groups in teaching is difficult unless one has had training and experience in doing so. For persons who need such training, numerous manuals and handbooks are available, of which by far the best is William W. Reeder's *Some Meth-*

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2. Harold Anderson. *Studies of Teachers' Classroom Personalities II and III Applied Psychology Monographs*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1946.
3. Richard Anderson. "Learning in Discussions: A Resume of the Authoritarian-Democratic Studies." *Harvard Educational Review* 29: 201-15; Summer 1959.
4. Robert Bales. "A Set of Categories for Analysis of Small Group Interaction." *American Sociological Review* 15: 257-63; April 1950.
5. Robert Bales. *Interaction Process Analysis*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Press, Inc., 1950.
6. Morris Cogan. "Theory and Design of a Study of Teacher-Pupil Interaction." *Harvard Educational Review* 26: 315-42; Fall 1956.
7. R. DeCharms and W. J. Bridgeman. "The Teaching-Learning Process Seen as a Problem in Interaction." Mimeographed paper. American Educational Research Association, February 1961. Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri. 10 p.
8. Ned A. Flanders. "Analyzing Teacher-Behavior." *Educational Leadership* 19: 173; December 1961.
9. Ned A. Flanders. "Personal-Social Anxiety as a Factor in Experimental Learning Situations." *Journal of Educational Research* 45: 100-110; October 1951.
10. Ned A. Flanders. "Some Relationships Between Teacher Influence, Pupil Attitudes and Achievement." (Pre-publication manuscript for NEA Classroom Teachers book titled *The Evaluation of Teaching*.) Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan. 25 p.
11. Ned A. Flanders. "Teacher Influence in the Classroom: I Research on Classroom Climate." (Unpublished manuscript.) University of Minnesota, 1958. 17 p.
12. Ned A. Flanders. *Teacher Influence, Pupil Attitudes, and Achievement*. (Cooperative Research Project, U. S. Office of Education.) University of Minnesota, 1960. 121 p.
13. Ned A. Flanders. *Teacher Influence, Pupil Attitudes and Achievement*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 1962. 178 p.
14. Ned A. Flanders. "Teacher-Pupil Contacts and Mental Hygiene." *Journal of Social Issues* 15: 30-39; 1959.
15. Ned A. Flanders. "Using Interaction Analysis in the Inservice Training of Teachers." *Journal of Experimental Education* 30: 313-16; June 1962.
16. N. L. Gage, George Leavitt and George Stone. "Teachers' Understanding of Their Pupils and Pupils' Rating of Their Teachers." *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied* 69: 1-37; No. 21, 1955.
17. Ronald Lippitt and Kurt Lewin. "An Experimental Study of the Effect of Democratic and Authoritarian Group Atmospheres." *Studies in Child Welfare*. Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 1940. p. 45-195.
18. Ronald Lippitt and Ralph White. "The 'Social Climate' of Children's Groups." *Child Behavior and Development*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1943. p. 485-508.
19. Harold Mitzel and William Rabinowitz. "Assessing Social-Emotional Climate in the Classroom by Withall's Technique." *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied* 67: 1-19; No. 18, 1953.
20. Hugh Perkins. "Climate Influences Group Learning." *Journal of Educational Research* 45: 115-19; October 1951.
21. John Withall. "The Development of a Technique for the Measurement of Social-Emotional Climate in Classrooms." *Journal of Experimental Education* 17: 347-61; March 1949.
22. J. Withall, J. M. Newell and W. W. Lewis. "Use of a Communication Model to Study Classroom Interactions." University of Wisconsin Paper, American Educational Research Association. February 1961. 11 p.

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ods and Tools to Increase Interest, Participation, and Teaching Effectiveness (Ithaca: Cornell Extension Bulletin 907. June 1954).

Both in theory and in practice, whether evaluation has been formalized or not, the results are no longer in doubt. When simple bunches of students are converted into groups, and when the inherent group processes are understood and utilized by the instructor for purposes of teaching-learning, classroom work is improved. Students find the work less difficult and more fun. Learning is more nearly complete and review seems less necessary. Students pick up skills

on the side which they value highly, such as the ability to speak out in groups of their peers and the ability to challenge a status authority figure (the instructor). Former students report that group experiences stand out in their memories above experiences in regular classes and that they treasure highly the friendships established in joint activities with fellow students.

Techniques used in such classes will include various combinations and proportions of small group discussion, large group discussion, committees, panels, symposia, opposing panels, group observers, and the like. It seems to matter little which procedures are used, except as the instructor and the class find themselves better able to handle some than others. What does matter greatly is that the instructor have faith in student ability, knowledge of group processes, and the knowledge that good learning must be the responsibility of the student.

Curriculum Requirements—Cox

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State Departments of Education. Advisory councils or committees made recommendations directly to the state departments of two states. In two other states, regional and state accrediting commissions were described as cooperating agencies with the state departments.

State Legislature. The State Board and State Department of one state and the State Superintendent's Association of another state were described as important influences leading to legislative action in curriculum matters.

Combined Authority. State-wide committees recommended changes in requirements to the state boards and state departments of two states. In the other state reporting state boards and state

departments as joint authorities, various groups were reported as recommending, advising or in other ways influencing their action.

Several groups recommended changes to the state boards and state legislatures of three states. One of these states reported extensive use of advisory committees. Another reported that in some instances pressures from special interest groups were exerted. In the third state the State Committee on Accreditation Standards proposed changes in curriculum requirements through the State Department and the School Board. Additional requirements could be established in this state through legislation.

Teachers, supervisors, administrators and college specialists in one state were asked for comments on curriculum guides worked out by state curriculum committees. These committees were appointed by and worked with the State Department in establishing new requirements.

In only one state were three state-level agencies identified as responsible for the approval of new required courses. Although several states involved a variety of agencies, in each case one or two were assigned the major responsibility. The State Legislature of this state could establish either general or specific requirements. In the case of the former, the State Board established the necessary specific requirements with the assistance of the State Department. The State Board could establish requirements on its own initiative.

Seven states reported no major state-level authority. In each of these states, requirements were established locally. The services of state department consultants, standards committees, accreditation officials or state department staff were usually available to these schools or school districts upon request.

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