

Interaction Processes

SCHOOLS appear to have inertial properties which make them resistant to change. Veblen has said that any generic bureaucracy results in a trained resistance to work, and change requires work. The work necessary to bring about change in a school must be done by all the individuals involved. Since the processes of teaching are almost more ritualized and rigid than even folk or religious customs, those individuals responsible for initiating change also have a complex and arduous work assignment. This is particularly true if the goal is not just to freshen the situation but to bring about a major change, moving toward a built-in design for self-programming for individuals to learn and grow in a social system.

A recent undertaking by an institution of higher education has involved a change process focused on the development of a program incorporating the arts and humanities in the curriculum and life of an elementary school in a low socioeconomic, multi-racial area of a large city. The central concern was one of staff development, and the modes of intervention included a wide range of processes and content all aimed at increasing the competencies of the school personnel. Discussions, organized seminars and training sessions, consultations, demonstrations, performances, tours, films and other new media, materials, and artifacts were all a part of the program, which was financed by a small grant from a foundation. The processes were somewhat irreverent of tradition and were multivariate in style.

This project is one of many which are attempting to ferret out and state concisely and pithily the variables which, in the full scope of training designs, really have some impact on the adults involved. Although the second year of the project is budgeted for more empirical and systematic documentation, the staff of the program concluded after the first year that all the varied organized group activities were only the epicycles, those small wheels attached to a larger cycle, related to the basic cycle, that of relevant human interaction between two people or very small groups. It appeared to the staff that it was the quality, depth, relatedness to the setting, and meaningfulness of the interaction process between the trainers and consultants and the teachers, and eventually among the teachers themselves, that brought about the observed changes in the teachers and in turn created a more effective learning environment for the children.

The most effective interaction processes generally occurred in a very limited human matrix. There were those moments in large group activities, in film viewing, in demonstrations, at performances, when there appeared to be a moment of human mutuality and impact. The interaction process, however, appeared to be the process which brought these varied experiences of the teachers into personal focus.

The significance of the human interaction situation in enabling adults to acquire new competencies has long been an assumption of individuals concerned with adult

and Change



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learning and training. The fields of counseling, group development, supervision, and management have all been exploring constructs of creating human interaction situations which facilitate change in human beings. The writer has been developing for several years a construct of interaction focused on the process of consultation. As the writer analyzed the range and characteristics of the interaction processes in the school project, he found that these could easily be categorized in the major processes of his taxonomy. These are not in any way conclusive or set, but represent a stage in an understanding of interaction processes which seem to be most helpful in enabling change to take place. To illustrate four of the processes, the writer has drawn from actual experiences in the school project.

The Consultation Process

The *consultation* is seen as a pivotal process in the staff development program. The term has been used to mean a whole range of activities which enable a person called the consultant to perform a role of assisting another individual or small group of individuals to become more professionally competent in a particular situation.

The taxonomy of terms presented here differentiates the process of consultation from the group process of training and from the process of counseling. As the process of consultation is defined here, it uses the technique of dialogue, encounter, confrontation,

and may use counseling, but it has a quality of its own which is distinguished from the others. The process of consultation as described here is perhaps the most sophisticated of all. This process requires the consultant to have the insight demanded in all of the processes. Yet he uses the skill of consultation because he is convinced that this particular process will be the most enabling in the situation.

The major goal of a consultation is to help a consultee to understand the situation and to recognize himself in the situation, his strength and needs; to help a person help himself as he relates to a task or set of functions. A consultation enables an individual to learn concepts and information, to enact a role, to gain competencies and skills in a face-to-face interaction with a person, the consultant, in relationship to a situation. The consultation is an interview process between two, three, or, at the most, four individuals. Those designated as consultees are all involved in a particular situation, problem, idea, or task. The marked difference in the actual technique of consultation is that it focuses the interview on a third person, a problem, an idea, or a situation, rather than on the consultee himself. The exchange of information or materials about the matter moves toward a genuine peer relationship. The consultant does attempt to see the situation from the perceptual framework of the

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consultee, but generally does not enter the private inner world of the consultee.

The exchange of information may be direct or through the use of varied media. Referrals are made to other training resources and other means of gaining help, such as individual or group sensitivity or therapy activities. These other activities and processes are not part of the consultation itself. However, there is a fine line between consultation and training, and the consultant may assume the role of a trainer for certain periods of time in the sequence of consultation.

Some aspects of the consultation process are:

1. Consultant begins interview with a spirit of warmth, respect, and openness.
2. Consultant clarifies who he is and why he is present.
3. Consultant solicits response and listens.
4. Consultant facilitates clarification of situations—goals, issues, needs, and problems.
5. Consultant shares relevant knowledge and experiences as situation demands.
6. Consultant makes pertinent referrals for specific kinds of assistance.
7. Consultant enables possible solution and approaches to arise eventually from mutual interaction.

The use of consultation might be illustrated by describing the process of working with Teacher A, an older woman much interested in reading, language, and verbal skills. The consultants used this single apparent interest of hers to enable her to move to a much richer and broader curriculum focus and to a use of new techniques and materials. All of the initial discussions centered on the teacher's interest in reading and language development and ways were mutually explored to help her children gain more language competence.

Children who had difficulty expressing themselves began making puppets and dramatizing stories and writing their own. As the teacher found security in the new processes related to language, the consultants found her ready to move to looking at things more

comprehensively and imaginatively. The staff believed they saw change take place here because they dealt with what the teacher perceived as her problem and interest, improving the reading and language skills of her children.

The Process of Dialogue

Dialogue is an exchange involving two, three, or four individuals. The discussion is a mutual exploration of an idea, information, a situation, an experience, or a task which may be central to the group. The content of the discussion remains with the topic. Less direct attention may be given to the expression of difference and highly individualized points of view of the members of the dialogue group.

A dialogue may last for an hour or two at the most. It may be part of a series of meetings, with different consultants brought to it for particular kinds of input. It may move toward the resolution of or the approach to a task. It gives a major emphasis to exploration and not resolution, to the raising of questions rather than specific answering. The consultant does not play the facilitation role unless he is asked to do so, but shares in the giving and exchanging of information and experiences.

Teacher B was an older, established, and conservative person who was secure with his traditional style and methods. The consultant had established what appeared to be a good relationship with Teacher B, but found that she was most successful with having change take place when the interaction was truly a dialogue. The discussion was less on the class, on the children, on the teacher, or on the teaching and more at the ideational, the conceptual, the referential, and the content level.

Teacher B attended seminars and became exposed to a variety of new materials and processes, and in conference with the consultant preferred to explore these from a generalized or content approach but never from a direct attack on his own classroom situation. The staff saw major shifts in the teacher's style and in the use of the arts in

his total curriculum, and saw the safe area of the dialogue as that which was most effective with him.

The Process of Encounter

In order to understand the struggles of men, we must first join in them.—Jean Paul Sartre

The *encounter* is a meeting of two or more individuals, but usually not more than eight, who come together to face a situation in terms of themselves and their roles as highly differentiated individuals in the situation. The process defined here arises out of the need for a group of people to face their real selves as they deal with a mutual problem. Out of the encounter should come realistic appraisal of the roles of the individuals. It differs from the processes of consultation and dialogue, in that the participants deal not just with the mutual concern from a problem-solving, task-oriented, or situational approach, but with the person or persons involved.

The encounter provides the opportunity to communicate feelings, to be angry, to be sympathetic, to be sensitive, to respond with conviction of a deep personal nature, to reflect passion and concern, to experience people as they are. The participant does not play a role, the facade is down; he is a real person and does not deny self. One listens to what others are saying, what they are trying to say, and what they are actually saying.

Teacher C was a young woman who had been teaching for a number of years and was perceived by the project staff as a very ordinary classroom person. It was learned that she was a very accomplished actress and very active in experimental theater groups and in summer stock. She also had had some directing and staging experience. The staff never saw any reflection of this world of hers in the classroom. Teacher C attended all of the seminars and participated fully in the sequence of opportunities provided to involve the teacher in the arts. Her classroom evidenced some change, but dramatics were never introduced. In consultation with her, this matter was discussed and ways to use

this area were explored. Finally, after several months, the consultant decided to ask the teacher very directly why she did not use her unusual experience in dramatics in her classroom.

What ensued was a real encounter, each stating the reasons for her position. The consultant had functioned with such integrity in her consultations with the teacher that she seemed moved by the encounter. The teacher stated that she had found it hard to introduce what she considered her "private and different world" into the classroom and appeared to believe that "teaching is teaching and acting is acting." The session ended with the teacher's asking for some assistance as to how she might begin to use her acting experience in teaching. In the weeks ahead the teacher began to see more of a oneness in her life and her teaching, and her work with the children took on a dynamic new style. Her curriculum was improved by the introduction of her own reality. Did the encounter serve as the pivotal factor in this relationship that really made the shift? Both teacher and consultant seemed to think so.

The Process of Confrontation

Hard words wear nailed boots.—Carl Sandburg

The *confrontation* is a planned activity, initiated by someone based on his understanding of the person, conflict, and the quality of the relationship. Factors of time and urgency as well as the skill of the initiator and the ego strength of the confrontee are all determinants of the effectiveness of a confrontation. The process is used when no other method seems to create movement or change in the person.

There may be some real dangers in using confrontation. Can the confrontee handle the attack? Will the process really reintegrate his perception of self and his action? Does he operate from what he considers a position of honesty and integrity for him? If he is functioning outside the limits of the situation, does he know what the limits are before he is confronted about them? Have other less direct and threaten-

ing processes been used prior to the confrontation? Is the initiator ready for the crisis or hostile behavior and negative attitude that may result from the directness of his observations?

Men face confrontation every day of their lives. Self-confrontation and meeting the challenges of others are part of the fabric of living. In many ways the technique of confrontation is a more authentic and honest one than the less direct and more sophisticated interaction process. The user must always keep in mind, however, that the behavior of the consultee may not change and that the interpersonal dynamics may become so strained that the helping situation is destroyed completely.

It was April of the school year and Teacher D had been attending the staff development sessions and, as a person, seemed interested in the arts and humanities; yet very little change was evident in her classroom. She had an unusually fine relationship with one of the consultants. Their discussions referred to her classroom activities. They had faced each other quite directly at

times concerning some of the reasons for the lack of change.

The consultant had a number of the teachers in the school who were anxious to have more time with her, and she decided to confront Teacher D with the fact that if some changes were not made, she would have to stop working with her on an individual basis. During the confrontation the teacher became angry and left the interview in a huff. That evening the consultant had a call from the teacher, who said she had done a lot of thinking and would like to talk with the consultant once again the next day.

The following morning the teacher stated that she had not slept well, thinking about the confrontation and her own teaching. She declared that although at the time of the confrontation she was furious with the consultant for her straightforwardness and the threat to withdraw her services, she now saw the experience as a very critical one in her teaching career. In the months that followed the teacher worked hard and her classroom became a much better place in which to live and learn. □

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