

**Using Committees  
in the Classroom**

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APR 30 1958

## Preface

The skills essential to effective living in today's world are many: computing, writing, reading, communicating, planning, decision making, working cooperatively—to name only a few. Because it is the responsibility of the school to teach all these skills, it is not surprising to find students engaged in classroom activities that involve learning how to work together in order to resolve differences, to set objectives, and to plan procedures. Often these activities take the form of committee work. It is with the use of such committee procedures that this pamphlet is concerned.

The skills involved in learning to work together can be introduced at an early age, but they must be practiced at increasingly higher and more complex levels as students mature in their experience and understanding; committees are used at every educational level, from elementary to college. The focus in this pamphlet is upon basic principles underlying the use of committee work, and specific illustrations are drawn from various grade levels.

The suggestions given in the following pages result in large part from the author's own experience with the use of committee work in both school and college. It is hoped that they will be of value to classroom teachers; to supervisors, curriculum workers, and principals responsible for assisting the growth of teachers in-service; and to college instructors in teacher education programs.

The author would like to express her thanks to Dr. William A. Fullagar, Dean of the College of Education, University of Rochester, and to Dr. Thomas J. Hill, Principal of the P. K. Yonge Laboratory School, University of Florida, for their helpful suggestions during the writing of the pamphlet and for their contributions to the ideas and examples developed in it; and to Miss Edna R. Lawrence, Lecturer in Education, Queens College, for her valuable assistance in the final preparation of the manuscript.

L. E. H.

New York City  
February, 1958

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## The Case for Committees

In mid-twentieth century the American family finds itself swept up in a multitude of activities involving close working or recreational relationships with other people. The club, the church, the school, the community, the workaday world have become vast centers for cooperative endeavor as citizens have come to recognize the need for working together to achieve common goals. As our society has become increasingly complex, men and women have found it helpful to meet in groups in order to solve common problems or to enjoy similar interests or to learn new arts and skills.

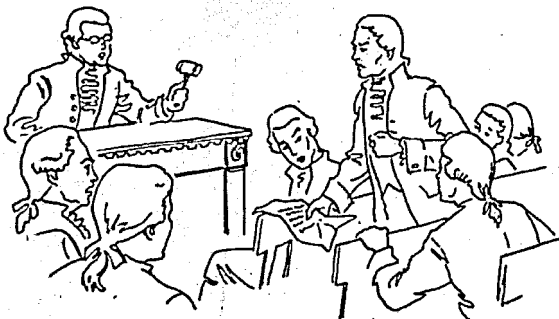
On any one evening it is not unusual to find each member of the "average" American family engaged in some group activity of special interest to him. James Dalton may be with the men's group at church to make plans for raising money for the new playground. Mrs. Dalton is chairing the session of her program committee at the League of Women Voters. Their son, Dave, a high school student, can be found with a group of his friends making arrangements for the traditional senior trip, while his sister, Mary, is at school helping decorate for the next evening's sophomore hop.

Such participation of individual family members with other individuals in the pursuit of common purposes is merely one manifestation of what is characteristic of American life and society in general—the emphasis on group endeavor. This characteristic is not new to the American scene but has been notable throughout our history. Traditionally we have been a people who have found strength and success through working together. Herein lies an important part of the democratic ideal.

### GROUP ENDEAVOR—A HISTORICAL REALITY

In colonial times the New England town meeting provided the setting for working together to achieve good government; the barn raising gave an important cooperative aspect to our economic life and promoted the concept of community action; the quilting party brought good fellowship to

our recreational needs. As we matured toward independence and self-government there were many occasions in which matters of state were entrusted to the hands of small groups of individuals who were expected to achieve certain ends. In pre-Revolutionary times the men who served



on the Committees of Correspondence provided the means of communication through which the colonists from one end of the Atlantic coast to the other were kept informed of events affecting the welfare of all of them. In essence our two great documents of liberty and self-government—the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution—were the work of small groups of men to whom were delegated the responsibility for drafting into suitable form the thoughts, feelings, and wishes of the larger bodies of men for whom they were speaking.

#### IMPORTANCE OF GROUP LIVING IN TODAY'S SOCIETY

It is in the present century and especially in the recent decades that the use of group procedures has achieved a status unequaled previously. The vastness of our nation, both in size and in population, along with the fundamental concept of government by democratic action, has made necessary the development of techniques whereby work can be accomplished and goals reached without risking the dangers of monolithic autocracy or the equally dangerous effects of unwieldy numbers afraid to delegate responsibility and authority.

Within the various large groups to which most citizens of the United States belong—governmental, fraternal, industrial, religious, social—there are many smaller groups assigned specific tasks. Labor organiza-

#### Recognition of Power Potential of Groups

tions have their committees on education, pension plans, safety measures, and the like; management groups, fraternal organizations, clubs, and churches are similarly organized for effective functioning. Not only do we have these operational committees; in addition, the complexity of American society has made it essential that we learn to operate by means of small groups who represent their larger parent organizations. For example, face-to-face meetings now occur between groups representing employers and groups representing employees; between groups representing lawmakers and groups representing voters; between groups representing various government services, like public education, and groups representing the citizens for whom these services are provided.

Perhaps nowhere is this committee approach more dramatically illustrated than in the realm of government. Today governing bodies at every level—local, state, national—have found it expedient to form subgroups in order to accomplish the multitude of tasks forced upon them by the expanding responsibilities of a self-governing people. Government at the national level has become, in effect, government "by committee." Many are the persons who have been painfully disillusioned upon first visiting the galleries of Congress during a session, because they had failed to learn, or remember, that the fundamental work of our legislators is handled in committee long before it reaches the floor of either house. Recently, too, the team concept, so long familiar to business and industry, has been introduced into the executive branch of our government.

#### RECOGNITION OF POWER POTENTIAL OF GROUPS

The widespread use of small groups and committees has resulted not only from expediency and the need to facilitate decisions and actions but also from our growing understandings regarding the nature of group dynamics. At a very elementary level we long ago recognized the effectiveness of having three or four people deal with a problem whose solution had previously eluded a single person. When we give serious thought to this phenomenon we are struck by the way in which suggestions are modified, improved, and refined as the various individuals interact with each other. We have, indeed, ample evidence that "two heads are better than one."

Currently the recognition of this old truism is finding expression in the popular wave of "brainstorming" sessions. Whether these are held at the level of a parlor game or in the more rarefied atmosphere of the business world and governmental departments, they have one thing in common—the effort to release the creative potential in a group of people.

Today the whole area of group dynamics has become an important research field as investigators explore and probe the scientific aspects of

people interacting with people. Certainly it is a fruitful field for research in view of the "group" nature of American life and society.

Strangely enough, such commonly accepted and vitally necessary practices in cooperative and shared endeavor in our society have for some time appeared suspect where formal learning is concerned. It has been only relatively recently that we have seen our schools come to use procedures long recognized as valid and worth while in other parts of our daily lives. However, in the past few decades our public schools have made much progress in the move from teacher-directed instruction and passive learning to procedures of cooperative learning and shared experiences. This progress has resulted from the understanding and acceptance of three major emphases in current educational thinking.

#### REASSESSMENT OF PURPOSES OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

In recent years, as our schools have opened their doors wider and wider to all American youth, regardless of ability or socioeconomic background, we have recognized as never before the overarching goal of education for effective citizenship in our American democracy. With the acceptance of this goal in fact as well as in theory we have discovered the need for teaching the skills of democratic living and working together. If our youngsters are to become mature and responsible individuals, equal to handling the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, experiences must be provided for them in our instructional program that will give them practice in working together, in cooperative problem solving, in critical thinking, in the assumption of responsibility, and the acceptance of consequences. Such experience may be provided by committee work.

#### NEW FINDINGS IN LEARNING THEORY

The past several decades have witnessed an important change in our concept of the teaching-learning process. At one time it was thought that teaching was solely the imparting of knowledge and that this could best be done by the teacher's telling information to the class or assigning material to be read, then recited. The learner in this type of situation was a relatively passive recipient of the facts, understandings, and attitudes that school people and society thought should be a part of his mental equipment for mature living. As a result of many studies in the fields of psychology, sociology, and education itself, we have come to recognize the increased effectiveness of learning situations that place the learner in an active role of researcher, thinker, planner, organizer, speaker, and that consider the essence of learning to be problem solving.

With this new approach, then, the classroom has become literally a laboratory situation in which teacher and students together are trying to solve the multitude of problems attendant on this business of learning. Increasingly we find that students themselves are having to locate material rather than being assigned specific pages by the teacher. By using a number of books rather than only one, boys and girls are learning to be selective, to organize, to judge critically, to check for accuracy. Instead of merely reciting answers to questions, students are learning much-needed skills and arts in effective communication through intelligent presentation of their findings to their classmates. Classes are more and more drawing upon community resources in a two-way exchange that serves to broaden both the students and the community members themselves, whether the exchange takes the form of field trips out into the community or visits of community members to the school classroom. Many schools are beginning to report concrete evidence of effective learning as seen in contributions to the school or its neighborhood in the form of landscaping and care of school grounds, establishment of a recreational center, student studies of school and local needs with resultant suggestions for action, or work experience of the service type.

When learning becomes this kind of active process, it is inevitable that people must somehow work together to accomplish some of the tasks. Consequently, working in groups or committees has become a normal procedure in many classrooms across the country where learning is considered to be a major responsibility of the learner as well as the ultimate goal of the teacher.

These various justifications for the use of committee procedures in our educational program have a historical base as well as a contemporary one. Recognition of current societal emphasis on group living and group action, acceptance of the goal of educating for effective citizenship, and awareness of new insights into how people learn—all these factors lead us inevitably to the need for widespread practice in cooperative endeavor in our schools today.

## Classroom Committees in Practice

The current emphasis on living and working in groups has had its impact on our educational program. As we learn more and more about the operation of groups, we are using our new-found knowledge to help us provide learning experiences that are purposeful and meaningful in the best sense of these terms. From various studies we are becoming familiar with the effective results obtained in learning situations where learners work together on common goals as compared with the quality of learning resulting from complete individual freedom or complete teacher domination. Findings like these are being carried over into classroom situations as we seek constantly to improve the process of education.

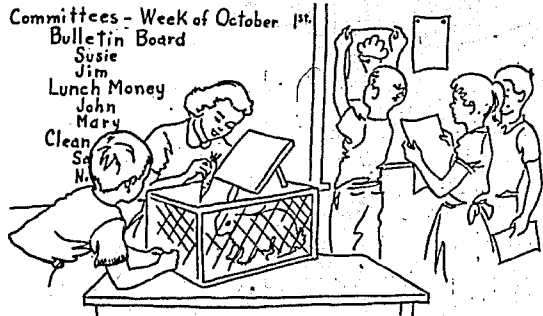
### OCCASIONS FOR COMMITTEE WORK

As a result of the various influences mentioned above and in the preceding chapter it is possible today to walk into many of our schools and see children and older students working in small groups in classroom after classroom, in school and on the playground, in the activities program and in the more academic part of the curriculum. An examination of current practices indicates the effectiveness with which teachers and students are using small group work in a variety of situations and for many worthwhile reasons.

#### For handling administrative details

There are many classroom routines that can be successfully entrusted to small numbers of students, especially at the elementary school level. Housecleaning details, like handling the curtains, keeping the chalkboards clean, caring for the plants, or feeding the pets, lend themselves to a small-group approach, probably of a rotating nature so that all members of the class have an opportunity to engage in such activities. At the junior and

senior high school level some of these same details need attention, and action might take the form of a committee responsible for improving the appearance of the classroom. In one seventh-grade class such consideration resulted in making draperies for the windows and setting up a reading corner in part of the room, with comfortable wicker chairs, tables, and chair-back covers for the straight chairs.



At various levels responsibility for maintaining attractive and current bulletin boards can reside in the hands of pupil committees. Younger children like to be remembered on special occasions: on birthdays, during illness, upon setting out on a trip, and so on; often a class courtesy or welfare committee is set up to send appropriate cards and gifts or give suitable recognition to some event. As classes get involved in the serious study of various topics or problems, the materials and resources utilized in classwork must be carefully managed. A small group can assume such responsibilities as cataloguing books, pamphlets, maps, pictures, models, and other materials and checking their use. Similarly another committee can be responsible for setting up and maintaining a file listing resource people in the community who would be willing to visit the class and share with students their specialized knowledge, hobbies, collections, slides, and other interests.

#### For "stretching out" time

With class size ranging from twenty-five to forty-five students, it becomes increasingly difficult for a teacher and class to accomplish, in the

amount of time at their disposal, all their hoped-for goals with the desired degree of efficiency. The language arts class of the secondary school is a case in point. Oral reporting and the presentation of speeches pose a major problem not only in terms of the time factor but also with regard to the interest element. It is neither feasible nor effective to have thirty or more oral presentations given consecutively, whether they be formal or informal speeches, book reviews, talks on hobbies, or the like. Many teachers are solving this dilemma by organizing the class into small groups for this oral sharing. In this way each student has an audience, and everyone in the class has an opportunity to be heard within the space of a regular class period or two. In the course of a semester, through judicious handling of her own time, the teacher will find it possible to hear the work of all her students several times. This technique also lends itself to the reading of creative pieces of work done by the class, stories and poems and themes that might otherwise be relegated to the teacher's files without ever reaching the eyes and ears of class members.

#### For improving the quality of living in the classroom

We long ago accepted the function of socialization in our educational program, the need to help boys and girls become social individuals, capable of living and working together in harmony and mutual understanding. Teachers have found that the use of small groups for one purpose or another does much to achieve our goal in this direction. It is impossible for four or five youngsters to work together on a common task without learning a great deal about the need for respecting each other's ideas and for valuing differing abilities and talents. They also learn to merge their own desires and inclinations into what seem to be the more promising directions set by cooperative planning.

This focus on improving the quality of living takes different forms at different age levels. In the first grade the children benefit through working together in constructing a shelter for their newly adopted pet rabbit. At the fifth-grade level members of a committee may learn to work together by assuming responsibility for deciding the best way to share their Christmas spirit and good fellowship with those less fortunate than they are: In the seventh or ninth grade, a time when so many youngsters are entering the larger secondary school from the more secure and familiar surroundings of a number of smaller elementary schools, during the first week the teacher may provide time for the class to meet in small groups in order that the members can get better acquainted with one another. During these sessions they can share experiences, likes and dislikes, interests, hobbies, information regarding their families, and many other things that interest young adolescents. In the senior high school,

as students work together in committees dealing with understandings regarding various problems and issues in their social studies or science class, they learn much about sharing sources of information, exploring ideas with one another, and, as they face the task of presenting the results of their research to the rest of the class, working for a group goal. When young people are working together on a common task, the results cannot be overestimated so far as the quality of living engendered in the classroom is concerned.

#### For providing wider opportunity for individual participation and interaction

At the same time that small-group work is promoting social gains for students, it is also providing opportunities for individual youngsters to participate more frequently and to benefit from wider interaction with their classmates than is the case in large class discussions. In the classroom where the teacher dominates and the students are treated as a class unit there is little for class members to do except to respond to questions. Under such circumstances it is not unusual to find a youngster sitting through several days of class without ever making a contribution. Through small-group work individual students are given the opportunity to participate frequently; in fact, they find that they cannot shirk their obligation to contribute to the progress of the group undertaking. Because a committee contains a small number of students, there is less chance for any individual to remain withdrawn and reserved or to monopolize and dominate discussions, as often happens when the teacher, anxious to have the lesson move forward, falls into the habit of relying on a small number of eager volunteers.

Special opportunity for wide individual reaction is offered by the "buzz-group" technique. This kind of group consists of a small number of students meeting for one relatively brief session in order to explore points of view on a topic under discussion, to share reactions, or in one way or another to benefit from quick interaction among four to six individuals.

A student teacher employed this procedure to good advantage in an eighth-grade class. After the students had done some reading and study of the Monroe Doctrine, the teacher organized the class quickly into four buzz groups. The members of one group were to discuss the Doctrine from the point of view of Spain's Latin American colonies, trying to react as they believed the colonists really felt. Similarly, the second group focused on the reactions and attitude of the United States, a third on Spain, a fourth on the Holy Alliance. After fifteen minutes of intense and rapid sharing, one member was chosen from each group to come



forward and join with the others to form a panel of four to present in summary the varying attitudes of the different nations toward the Monroe Doctrine. Through this technique the teacher helped the entire class to participate in an exchange of ideas.

Small-group work also provides the opportunity for students to explore individual interests and concerns. One teacher's diary describes how her third grade worked in this way:

*March 16.* Today, we had pamphlets about oil conservation to give out to our classes to take home to parents. . . . I was surprised to find that the children were very interested and asked to know more about oil. One girl said she didn't think the girls wanted to study oil. Someone else mentioned that we were still studying Indians.

A third child said he would like to study flowers next. I told them it was perfectly possible for us to study several topics and not devote all of our attention to just one thing. . . . I suggested that those who wished to study oil might do so and those more interested in Indians or flowers might study them. . . .

*March 18.* We had our second group meeting. Donald had told us of a neighbor who could get some comic books about oil for the class. He brought enough in for all. They were very helpful and explained to children much about oil. The group on oil used them thoroughly, getting ideas for making pictures of rock formation and deposits of oil in the earth. Excellent reports were given by them. They used many other books too.

The group working on flowers is using our cracked aquarium as a terrarium and is planting bulbs and small plants in it. Someone in the group brought a flower book, and they took turns reading it. They might make a scrapbook. The group studying Indians selected books to read. It was surprising that their interest in this particular group held so that only two wished to change.<sup>1</sup>

#### For developing skills of communication, critical thinking, and reasoning

When boys and girls have to participate often, their experience in communicating with each other begins to pay dividends. As youngsters work through their committee tasks, they find that they have to make their thoughts clear to others, to give reasons for their ideas and suggestions. Almost every assignment undertaken by a small group provides increased opportunity for improving skill in communication, along with the need to do some critical thinking, to reason thoughtfully. When the sixth-graders make plans for their open house for parents, they have many decisions to make and must weigh alternatives carefully. When the committee in physics class undertakes the construction of a model of an earth satellite, much thought and knowledge must enter into the members'

<sup>1</sup> Alice Miel and Associates, *Cooperative Procedures in Learning* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1952), pp. 381-82.

deliberations. In this way youngsters are learning to make decisions in actuality, through the testing of hypotheses and weighing of conclusions, through dealing with direct goals which they themselves have helped to formulate.

#### For developing needed qualities of leadership

The whole question of leadership has been attracting unusual attention in our life today as we increasingly recognize the need for developing mature citizens capable of assuming responsibility and fulfilling obligations, of providing the leadership necessary for meeting vast problems of a social, economic, and political nature, and possessed of the skills with which to inspire and guide others toward the solution of the critical issues of our time.

It is the responsibility of the schools to search for ways and means of developing these needed leaders. As teachers find that they must face the challenge of identifying and developing potential leaders and, in fact, of bringing out the leadership ability of each person, they discover that classroom procedures need careful re-examination if the school is to be successful in its task. An examination of certain teaching methods shows serious weakness in the area of opportunities for boys and girls to learn the skills of leadership. It has become clear that in a classroom setting where all the opportunities for planning, directing, and evaluating rest with the teacher, there is little left for youngsters, except to do as they are told. Such a situation may be producing more or less willing followers but is certainly failing to develop the leaders we very much need.

In small-group activities where students have to do their own thinking, they are given ample opportunity to develop desirable skills of leadership. They are becoming familiar with the expected role of "status" leadership as practiced by the committee chairman. At the same time they are learning that in any given situation everyone has a responsibility for exerting leadership in order to forward the work of his group.

In addition, the use of a planning committee affords valuable opportunity for boys and girls to learn skills of leadership and to assume responsibilities as representatives of their classmates. A planning committee can serve two kinds of functions.

In one form such a committee can take the various ideas suggested by a class for study of a particular problem and organize them into a proposal for action. This proposal is then submitted to the class for approval or modification.

After a class is organized into small groups, a planning committee may be formed of representatives from each. These representatives meeting with the teacher can discuss common problems that the various committees

are experiencing; schedule times for reporting sessions; plan various experiences for the entire class; like films, trips, guest speakers; and assume responsibility for handling materials and resources.



If a planning committee is to serve one of its major purposes, that of providing opportunities for leadership, it is important that all students have a chance to serve on it at least once during the year. Also, they must be helped to understand their role as representatives of their classmates and learn to recognize that decisions on their part are basically recommendations only, subject to approval by the entire class.

#### COMMITTEE APPROACH TO UNIT STUDY

As can be readily seen from the preceding discussion, committee work takes many forms in our classrooms today and can be used for many purposes. In some instances small-group procedures have been widespread for several decades, especially at the elementary school level. Committees for administrative responsibilities and for short-term tasks as well as for exploration and sharing of interests already have a long history of successful practice in our schools. In recent years a committee approach to unit study at the elementary school level and in various subject areas of the secondary school has been receiving more and more attention and achieving effective results.

A few examples will serve to show the extent to which teachers of various high school subjects can utilize committee work for some unit study.

In the *guidance* area the topic "Choosing a Career" is a natural one in which students can group according to their vocational interests to discover information about job qualifications, salary potential, opportunities for advancement, opportunities and need for each particular job in the local community, and the like. In the course of their study students can obtain statistics regarding employment in various jobs, identify geographical areas where job opportunities look good, survey the local situation. They can conduct interviews with employers and employees, have speakers come to the classroom. They can write to chambers of commerce and various governmental organizations for information, and can present data in various visual forms—on maps, in charts and graphs, through posters.

Many opportunities present themselves in a *science* class for committee work. For example, in a study of atomic fall-out a group of students who are greatly interested in atomic energy can investigate the scientific phenomena that produce this fall-out. Other groups can study the implications for civil defense, in the area of preventive measures and in the treatment of casualties after exposure. Still another group can study the biological implications—present effects and possible consequences from a genetic standpoint for future generations.

The *home economics* teacher has long been accustomed to permit her students to work in groups of three or four. An interesting use of small groups can be found in the preparation of a complete meal, providing an opportunity for each committee to prepare one part of the meal—hors d'oeuvres, soup, entree, salad, dessert. In addition to the planning and preparation of one course by each group, the students will need to plan together in the beginning so that the various courses will fit together into a well-planned and well-balanced meal.

The *civics* class has many opportunities for small-group work as students study about their school, neighborhood, and local community. It is in the civics class that boys and girls have a chance to suggest some action proposals as a result of their group study. For example, in a unit entitled "Improving Our Community" students can group according to their interest in improving the appearance of the community, providing recreational facilities, dealing with juvenile delinquency, helping the aged and infirm, getting out the vote, and similar vital issues in community life. They can conduct surveys, interview various people, visit government agencies, read about other communities and ways in which they have dealt with problems similar to those facing the local community. As a result of their various activities they can draw up some specific suggestions for action that can be presented to interested civic and church groups with the possibility that the youngsters themselves can take part in projects to convert their suggestions into reality.

In a *mathematics* class a unit on family budgeting can be profitably handled by committees. An imaginative teacher and class can organize committees, each of which would develop a family case example, hypothesizing size of family, level of income, financial obligations, and similar information. Using these data, the committee could then arrive at a proposed budget, having opportunities to study about the costs of various items necessary to family living, to decide upon appropriate proportion of income to be spent for various categories, to work out savings and insurance proposals. They can draw upon their own families for needed information and can include a study of their own allowances, or personal income if the teen-agers themselves work. Various businessmen and bankers in the community can be consulted, and research can be done regarding the cost of living index and its relation to prices and wages.

In an *English* class the study of literature presents interesting opportunities for small-group work. The class might focus its study on the way various writers handle a particular theme or topic, like war, adolescence, or family life. Each committee could study a different book or a different author, analyzing various categories of information that have been generally agreed upon in advance by the entire class. Or small groups might engage in a comparative study of how various authors handle historical fiction, adventure tales, travel, or science fiction types of writing. In this way all class members can gain some familiarity with many writers and their works.

And so it would be possible to go on listing indefinitely the variety of opportunities for group work.

#### SOME INTERESTED PEOPLE SPEAK

In visiting schools where such group situations exist it is often enlightening to talk with teachers, students, principals, and other interested personnel regarding their attitudes toward committee work. Their reactions and expectations are very revealing and help point some directions for anyone getting ready to embark on the use of cooperative procedures.

##### The teacher

Yes, I like to have committee work when it seems the most effective way of dealing with a problem or a topic. My students have much to gain from working together, and I expect very definite learnings from group situations. I want them to learn much about getting along with each other, about the need to respect each other's opinion; and I expect them to acquire increased skill in critical analysis and effective communication, along with organizational ability and a thoughtful use of the imagination. At the same time I expect them to learn a great deal about the problem at hand, whether it be an analysis of data they have gathered regarding housing conditions in their community

or the planning of the Student Council budget for the coming year. And they rarely let me down. When boys and girls are given part of the responsibility for their own learning, they sometimes make greater demands on themselves than I would make upon them. The amount of work that they tackle is often amazing. For this reason, I wish that more principals and more of my fellow teachers would recognize that real learning is going on in these committee sessions, that committee work is not a waste of time. Oh, yes, everything is not always sweetness and light. There are the goldbricker, the shirker, the monopolizer, the know-it-all; but I have them in my classes whether we do committee work or not. They need help in overcoming some of their bad habits and unfortunate personality traits. I have found that on many occasions their peers have done more to help change them through the interaction of working together on a common task than I had been able to do with all the perceptiveness and experience at my command.

##### The student

Committee work? Yes, I like it—if it isn't overdone. I don't like to work in committees all the time, but I like occasionally to have the opportunity to work with some of my classmates in really digging into a problem. It also makes me feel important to do some of my own thinking and not have the teacher always tell me what to read and what to do. If there's one thing, though, that I don't like, it's to be told we can go ahead with our own plans when we form committees, only to find that the teacher had something specific in mind all along that she wanted us to do. She might just as well have given us the assignment in the first place and not let us believe we could do our thinking. I'm not saying, mind you, that we don't want the teacher's help. We *do* like suggestions, and when we ask for some ideas of books we can use, we like her to be helpful. We don't want her to expect the impossible, either. Sometimes one of our teachers expects us to finish a pretty big committee job in just two days. They have to be more reasonable about what they expect. And I wish that some of our teachers would do something to see to it that everyone in a committee does his share of the work. Some of us like to goof off sometimes or get just plain lazy. I don't think it fair that only a few of us carry the burden. Oh, yes, one more thing: I *do* like a chance to work with my friends sometimes. One of our teachers always tries to break up a couple of our class friendships. She says we'd never get anything done: if we worked in the same group. I think we would, but we haven't convinced her yet.

##### The librarian

I have mixed feelings about this business of committee work. It can be a wonderful experience, and, of course, I like to see youngsters really pitching in and trying to gather information from every available source. I have noticed that classes that do a lot of group work tend to use the library more frequently

and more effectively than those that do not utilize small committees as a learning procedure. However, there is a wide variation in the effectiveness of committee work from class to class, and I think that much depends on the teacher's attitude toward the library and the help I can give in such learning situations.

Some of the teachers work closely with me and keep me informed of what their classes are studying and what I can expect in terms of pupil use of the library. Others operate independently, and I know only what I can find out from the students. I wish that teachers would remember that boys and girls need help in the location and use of materials, that they have to be carefully guided so that they utilize the vast variety of library materials in addition to the encyclopedia. I wish, too, that more teachers would become personally acquainted with my library materials, perhaps unit by unit, so that they know something of what is available. And I do welcome suggestions for purchases. The more, the better!

#### The principal

I like to encourage my teachers to utilize committee work as one effective way of teaching. However, I do want them to keep certain things in mind. I am especially concerned that the teacher help her boys and girls know what they are doing, that they work carefully with them so that youngsters have a purpose and a goal toward which they are working. When I meet a boy in the hall on his way to the shop from one of his social studies classes, I want him to be able to explain to me what he is going to do there and how this particular job ties in with what he is studying. I know that, with small groups at work, there is bound to be some noise in a classroom, and I think I am fairly reasonable about this. However, I do expect the youngsters to be taught to keep their voices down and to learn to speak to each other with some degree of courtesy, one at a time. Activity for the sake of activity is questionable; there must be purpose to what they are doing. And I also expect them to be taught respect for property and the careful handling of chairs and desks and books. If various groups need to work in different parts of the building, I want the teacher to be sure to check first to see that it is feasible and possible for them to do so at any particular hour. She must also keep a record of where individual students are when they are not in her room. One final word; it seems to me that we have to be careful not to use group work indiscriminately. There is a danger that teachers will use a committee method when some other procedure is more suited to the content and purposes of the learning under progress.

#### The supervisor

As I work with teachers, I find that usually two attitudes are reflected toward committee work, both of which are extremes. Many teachers will have none of it, and many others overuse a committee approach or misuse it. Let me

speak about this latter group a little. I wonder if, in our eagerness to implement what we have discovered about learning, we have somehow given a false impression—that all learning must now be group learning. And so I find teachers having their classes working in committees on everything they study from September to June, whether such an approach is the most suitable one or not. Another weakness I note is a failure to integrate committee work with individual assignments as well as with total class sessions. Both of the latter learning experiences should still be an integral part of a classroom learning situation, whether the major procedure is committee work or not.

Then, too, I would like teachers to be more aware of their role in committee work. Too often the tendency is to go to extremes here, also: either dictating to the committees what to do and how to do everything, or abdicating all responsibility and letting the youngsters flounder without sufficient guidance. One more thing, if we are going to use group work, then we have a responsibility to help boys and girls learn in increasingly mature fashion how to handle themselves in committee situations. Teachers must be constantly on the alert to find ways of helping students improve their skills in group work, grow in ability to work together, and achieve more and more significant results in terms of "content" learnings. If a class is no more skillful and successful in committee work in June than it was in September, I would say that some very important learnings and values were overlooked in the course of the year.

#### The parent

I am very much concerned about *what* my child is learning these days. While I'm willing to keep an open mind regarding various methods and procedures, I do want an emphasis on accomplishment. Sure, I want Jim to learn how to get along with his peers, but I also want him to be learning something else in the process. There are times when I think this committee approach is a swell idea, when, for example, Jim turns everything upside down in his enthusiasm for locating information, ransacking our magazines so that he will have something for his committee report. On the other hand, I'd like him to have some definite individual assignments—occasionally, ones that I know the teacher gave him. Then, too, I think that sometimes the committee work results in more emphasis on humorous skits and parodies of quiz programs than on real learnings and understandings. Jim himself has said that he gets awfully tired of committee reporting sessions and that he often learns very little from them.

#### GUIDEPOSTS TO EFFECTIVE USE OF COMMITTEE WORK

✓ All of these people have reacted honestly and thoughtfully to this question of committee work, and their reservations, cautions, and suggestions deserve serious consideration. Perhaps it would be helpful to note some of the main threads that run throughout their comments, threads

that will serve as guideposts as we explore the effective use of small groups in classroom learning.

**The appropriateness of a committee procedure with regard to the particular learning at hand**

Careful consideration must be given to the suitability of a committee approach to the nature of the particular learning involved. The use of committees is most appropriate in situations where students can engage in planning learning experiences, gathering data, organizing information. It is also useful where opinions and ideas and informational material can be exchanged for the mutual benefit of all concerned. It lends itself readily to the study of broad problem areas, large topics, or a variety of special interests. On the other hand, it is not a very effective means of teaching specialized skills or formulas.\*

When the criterion of suitability is applied, it is obvious that it will be possible to utilize small-group work more effectively in some subject areas in the school program than in others. However, a teacher should not automatically assume that her subject does not permit the use of small-group procedures. Rather, during her planning she should ask herself, "What method or procedure would be most effective for achieving the goals of this particular learning?" If the use of buzz groups or unit study groups can achieve these goals successfully, then that should be the approach, whether the class be mathematics, English, science, or core, or any of the others usually found in our schools today.

It is important also to keep in mind that even when the use of committees is the general approach to a particular area of learning, usually provision can and should be made for occasional, if not frequent, opportunities for individual work and for total class work with the teacher. There is sometimes the danger that a class may study a particular unit through committee work for four or more weeks with little opportunity for any other kind of learning experience.

**Depth of learning**

Teachers, administrators, parents, and pupils are all concerned that group work result in real learning and that it not be a shallow, superficial kind of situation in which there is much activity on the surface but little depth. It is important to help boys and girls to gain in knowledge and understanding about *what* they are studying as well as to develop insights

\*It is true that for the teaching of reading or other skills teachers often group youngsters according to ability. However, this is a different use of grouping from that under discussion in this pamphlet.

and skills with regard to the way in which they handle their committee procedures. When sufficient attention is given to both aspects, through careful and continuous guidance by teacher and librarian, the results of committee work represent real growth and achievement. In this respect special care must be taken to develop in youngsters an ability to utilize sources of information as effectively as possible.

**Role of the teacher**

Everything that has been mentioned so far clearly indicates the important role that the teacher must play in the wise use of committees. This role starts with the early consideration of the appropriateness of procedure to purposes to be achieved and ranges through helpful and sufficient—yet not suffocating—guidance during the total process of committee work to the final step of helping boys and girls evaluate the results of their efforts. At no point can or should the teacher abdicate completely her responsibility as mature guide. At times it is difficult to know when *not* to offer advice, but the teacher must be ever ready to serve as guide and resource.

At first glance all of these comments seem to place an unusually heavy burden upon the teacher. However, with an understanding of the purposes and function of committee work and some helpful ways of guiding its effective use by her classes, the teacher will find that the satisfaction and results far outbalance any apparent difficulties. In the following pages specific suggestions are given to guide the teacher toward a more satisfying use of the committee approach in her classroom.

## Learning the Ways of Committee Work

It is one thing to recognize the value of committee work, the need for it, and the advantages accruing from it. However, it is quite another thing to implement the idea of committee work in the classroom in such a way that the maximum values result. As with other skills, the ability to work together must be acquired, and young people need much effective practice if they are to learn this necessary skill.

Much of the following discussion regarding ways in which teachers can help youngsters learn the ways of committee work will focus upon the use of committees as the major approach to extended study of a problem area, topic, project, or unit, as the case may be. However, many of the suggestions and descriptions are equally applicable to the effective use of small groups for administrative routines, service functions, buzz-group purposes, and other occasions when small groups seem advantageous and feasible, whether for fifteen minutes or for longer periods of time.

There are four major areas of committee work deserving careful attention: (1) ways of getting started and establishing procedures; (2) on-going experiences in committee study; (3) reporting results of committee work to the class; (4) evaluating the effectiveness of group work and the achievement of youngsters.

### ORGANIZING THE COMMITTEE AND ESTABLISHING WORKING PROCEDURES

#### Need for careful preliminary planning

Before a class can begin work in small groups there must be careful exploration of the large problem under study as well as the subtopics to be handled by the committees. All the students should share in the discussion of the total problem and be aware of the over-all aims of the unit study and the scope of their small-group study. In addition, they should be helped to recognize the relationship between their committee studies and the larger framework of the class problem.

In some instances the students might explore all the major subheadings before making a single choice for committee study. They might, for example, spend some time browsing in the library to find the nature and extent of materials available on each subtopic; or they could rapidly scan a general discussion of the various topics to be found in one of their basic texts. As a result of this increased familiarity with the substance of the various topics, they can then make a more intelligent and purposeful choice for their committee study.

Before starting to work in committees it is important for boys and girls to be thoroughly aware of the limits of their autonomy. For example, if the teacher is bound by certain scope and sequence requirements set up by the administration, she should inform the students of these requirements and help them realize that they must operate within a particular content framework. In the same way, if school policy forbids their taking field trips, the students should be told of this limitation before they meet in their groups so that they will not take time to discuss and plan a worthwhile field experience only to have it vetoed by the teacher when she learns of it. If a group is set up to plan a decorating scheme for the junior prom, the members must know the amount of money available for this purpose, the amount of school time they will be allowed for planning and carrying out their ideas, any regulations regarding fireproofing and the use of certain kinds of materials, as well as any restrictions that might be put on some physical aspects of decorating, as, for example, a prohibition against covering overhead lights.

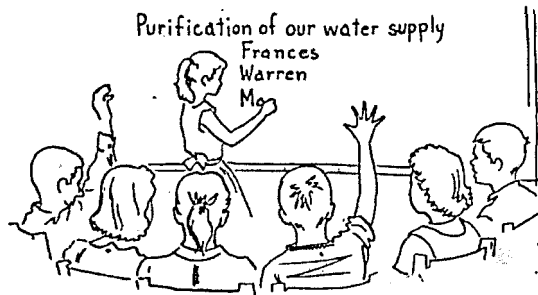
The greater the attention the teacher and class give to these preliminary discussions in the building of understandings and the clarifying of the goals and scope of their planning and activities, the less confusion and disappointment there will be during small-group sessions. When youngsters know what they can do and cannot do, and when they are clear as to the nature and purpose of their committee work, they are already well on the way to operating smoothly as they meet together for the first time.

#### Bases for membership in committees

Another aspect of small groups that needs advance consideration concerns the question of membership on various committees and the most effective means of determining such membership. The nature of membership varies with the type of committee, the task at hand, and other variable factors. However, in general there are three ways of forming committees: on the basis of student interest in a particular topic, through students' choices of classmates with whom they would like to work, or by the teacher's assignment to committees for one reason or another.

The most common approach is to let each student choose the topic or problem or task that interests him and work with those classmates who choose the same problem, topic, or task. The advantage of this procedure lies in the assumption that where interest is high, effective results will be achieved; and this is usually the case.

Another way of setting up committees is on the basis of pupils' choices of classmates with whom they would like to work. For example, they can indicate in writing the names of three class members they would like to



work with on a committee. This approach gives the teacher opportunities to learn much about peer relationships in her class and to identify youngsters who do not seem to be well accepted, as well as those to whom others relate well.

Such data can also serve as the basis for assignment to committees by the teacher as a way to help deal with problems of group relationships. For example, she may want to help a shy, retiring youngster by placing him in a committee with a more outgoing, helpful classmate and hope for good results. Conversely, there are times when it is wise to separate certain students to see if more effective learning will result when they do not work together.

A variation on this method lets the teacher or the class select the committee chairmen, who in turn choose their own group members. Such a procedure is not effective when the success of the group work depends on the specific interest of the youngsters involved. However, it could be used in an English class, for example, when pupils are meeting in small groups to hear one another's book reports and to select one or two for presentation to the entire class.

It is important that the business of choosing or assigning committee membership not become an involved process, consuming a disproportionate amount of time. When students make their own choices for group work, there are many techniques for handling this decision making swiftly and calmly. Sometimes a simple hand-raising technique is all that is needed. In other instances students can indicate their preference on paper and the teacher or the planning committee can then organize the committees and announce their membership. Sometimes it is a good idea to ask students to indicate their first, second, and third choices of topics, thus guaranteeing them at least one of their preferences.

Whatever the method of grouping used, there are certain guideposts that a teacher might well keep in mind:

1. It is helpful to keep a record of committee membership in order to notice any threads or patterns evolving in class relationships, any reasons for behavior and achievement problems.
2. In the course of a semester or a year it is wise to use a variety of procedures in determining committee membership.
3. It is best to permit free choices as often as possible.
4. Care should be taken to try to see that each student has an opportunity to work with as many different classmates as possible during the year.

#### Committee size

The question of committee size is frequently a troublesome one, and there are no hard and fast rules regarding it. Most teachers, however, believe that much is lost if a committee consists of more than seven or eight members. Probably the ideal number is from four to seven. However, the size bears a distinct relationship to the nature of the work to be done: If extensive decorating is to be done for a class party, a committee of three is obviously inadequate. When the task involves checking a film list with the audio-visual director, however, two or three students would be sufficient.

One of the problems involved in student choices of committee membership is the possibility of imbalance in committee size, with some consisting of too many, others of few or none. Usually it is enough to call the problem to the attention of the class, and some boys and girls will volunteer to shift. Sometimes, when ten or twelve youngsters want to work on the same topic, it is better to divide them into two groups studying the same thing than to try to force so many changes in choices. Then, too, when an important topic or aspect of a problem is chosen by no one or by only one or two, it is sometimes wiser to drop that committee entirely and handle the learning of that subject in some other way, probably through total class work, with the teacher assuming responsibility for it.

**Environmental conditions**

Before students can work together in committees much careful thought needs to be given to environmental conditions for effective group meetings. Unfortunately, today's average classroom still leaves much to be desired in the way of size, although progress has been made toward the use of functional, movable furniture.

If it is necessary to have a class of thirty-five or forty students remain in one room for its group work, it would be well for the teacher and students to work out the best way of arranging desks or chairs to provide for a maximum of quiet as well as freedom from interference between groups. Together the class members should also work out quick and efficient ways of arranging furniture for group meetings and rearranging it at the end of the hour. Much time is wasted and much energy consumed, to say nothing of the unnecessary noise, if the youngsters make a "big production" out of moving the furniture. This skill, too, must be learned.

Because many rooms do not lend themselves to group work on the part of all the students at the same time, teachers have found it helpful to explore the possibility of having some groups meet elsewhere. If some rooms nearby happen to be vacant, arrangements can be made for some of the groups to meet in these more quiet surroundings. Also, by careful planning it is possible during many of the committee sessions to have one or two of the groups doing research work in the library. Their absence from the classroom thus helps to ease the crowded conditions. In those schools that are fortunate enough to have classrooms that open onto the outdoors, another solution presents itself through letting some groups meet informally on the nearby grass, weather permitting.

**"Rules of the game"**

As has been said earlier, working together is a learned skill, even an art, and requires careful guidance and help at all times. Before letting students meet in committees, there are many things that a teacher can do to help them understand the ways of group work. A good start can be made by discussing carefully certain basic "rules of the game," simple agreements to guide them in working together smoothly. As a result of such a discussion one seventh-grade class drew up the following list:

1. We should select a chairman and secretary.
2. Only one person should speak at a time.
3. Everyone should contribute ideas and do his share of the work.
4. When we run into trouble, we should ask the teacher for help.
5. We must take good care of all books and materials.

A list like this one sounds simple and a little naïve, but we must remember that a new experience requires building understandings and skills slowly. There is a need to discuss with students ideas and procedures that a more experienced person takes for granted. Also, there is an advantage in having boys and girls state ideas in their own words. In this way they become more closely identified with the ideas and will more readily put them into practice than if someone else had stated them.

For inexperienced classes, teachers sometimes like to have a "demonstration" group meet in front of the class so that she can help point out to all the students some of the fine points of working together. One teacher has used another direct technique by writing a letter to her class members in which she gives very specific suggestions for their committee work. Here are excerpts from her letter.

Select your permanent chairman carefully. She has to have all the characteristics we've talked about. But remember it is not her job to tell you *what to do*, or *what to do next*. That is really something for you all to discuss together and agree on.

Be sure to collect a *lot of information* on your special topic! Just your personal opinion on a subject isn't enough. Your audience will also want facts, because they hope to learn something they didn't know before. They are going to be very interested in what you have to tell them.

Every day during your planning period, you must make sure all the other girls in the group are making progress. If some girl is having trouble, you could all discuss whatever her problem seems to be and so help her solve it. If even one girl in your group is unhappy or unsuccessful, it's really everybody's business, isn't it?

Another approach is to have a list of reminders on the chalkboard or on a poster to direct attention to the skills of group work. Such a list might contain suggestions like the following:

1. Select a chairman and a secretary.
2. Discuss the over-all problem.
3. Decide upon important questions or subtopics.
4. Explore ways of gathering information.
5. Plan your procedures.
  - a. Decide upon individual responsibility.
  - b. Agree on any necessary note taking.
  - c. Plan ways of sharing information at future committee sessions.
6. Meet periodically to pool information and discuss any difficulties in doing research.

<sup>1</sup> Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, *Creating a Good Environment for Learning* (1954 Yearbook; Washington, D.C.: National Education Association (1954), p. 123.



7. Have a comprehensive sharing session to bring together all your information.
8. Plan a report for the class.

Along with guidance regarding ways of handling themselves in groups and moving forward their plans and study, youngsters also need help with handling routine matters. The matter of furniture arrangement has already been mentioned. Procedures should be worked out for the use of other rooms and school areas, as well as the use of the library. If it is possible for students to have some freedom of movement, a system must be worked out whereby they can be found at any given time. Sometimes it is sufficient to have them list their names on the board or on some sign-out sheet.

It would be a mistake to assume that, once all these preliminary steps have been taken, no further assistance will be required as the committees start functioning. On the contrary, as boys and girls move into their group studies, there will be much need for help from the teacher, and probably frequent reminders regarding the smooth functioning of classroom groups. More will be said about continuing assistance to committees when we look at the role of the teacher in guiding group work.

## STUDYING IN COMMITTEES

### Scheduling committee meetings

One of the first tasks faced by a teacher and students who have embarked on group procedures is that of effectively scheduling time for committee meetings. Such scheduling depends on several factors—the physical facilities available, the experience the youngsters have had with group work, the length of time needed for completion of the group studies, the nature of other class undertakings and projects.

For classes inexperienced in working in small committees and for classes whose rooms offer limited opportunity for simultaneous group meetings, there is the possibility of having committees meet in rotation. This can be done by staggering the work sessions of the committees so that while one is meeting in discussion sessions, the others are doing research work in the library or are engaged in individual study in the classroom. Where the work under study is such that the various groups can organize their planning, research, and discussion sessions in the same sequence, this approach can be feasible. Such an approach, however, implies a set order of operations and an equal amount of time for each step in the study process, regardless of the nature of the topic being studied.

Another possibility tried by some teachers is to have only one group meet at a time while the rest of the class is engaged in studying other aspects of the problem or perhaps other topics; or the rest of the class might be doing individual work. The disadvantages of this solution are obvious. First, there is the time problem. It would take the various committees an inordinate amount of time to complete their work under a one-committee-a-day system. Then, too, there is a major planning problem in providing learning experiences for the rest of the class which individuals could easily miss as their turn for committee meetings comes around. It would, of course, be unwise as well as impossible to expect a class to work on an individual basis for the number of class periods that would be required for the various committees to complete their work satisfactorily.



Ideally it should be possible for the various committees to meet at the same time, either in the classroom or in various parts of the school. There would still be a problem of scheduling, however, in that some thought should be given to providing time for the class to meet as a whole. During these class meetings there can be discussion of some common problems that have arisen in the course of the committee work; some sharing of plans and findings so that committees do not engage in fruitless duplication; some common learning experiences of benefit to the entire class. These last may be planned by the teacher or by teacher and students at the

beginning of the unit study and may include watching a film, listening to a speaker, working on needed skills, seeing a demonstration, or the like.

Whatever form the scheduling of committees takes it is well for teacher and students to face the problem at the beginning of the class study and to formulate the most effective plans for their own particular situation. Some teachers find it helpful to set aside some time on Mondays or Fridays for consideration of class scheduling for the following week.

#### Assuming individual and group responsibility

During the first meeting of a committee its members usually select a chairman and a secretary-recorder. If a good job has been done before the committee sessions, the students will be aware of the functions of each job and will be able to handle their selection intelligently and expeditiously. Care must be taken to help youngsters understand that all of them have a responsibility for making their committee work successful, that the brunt of the work should not fall on their two chosen leaders. This recognition of individual responsibility for the attaining of group goals is one that needs careful nurturing and is, in fact, one of the major *raison d'être* for committee work.

In the course of committee study there will be times when the members will work together as a group, other times when each member will pursue his own assigned or assumed tasks. The work of the committee generally falls into four phases: determining scope and ways of studying the topic, gathering information, pooling findings, preparing a report for the class. Let us follow through the work of a hypothetical committee in a science class that has taken for its unit study "A Sanitary Water Supply and Our Health."

This particular committee had as its subtopic, "Purification of Our Water Supply." During their first meeting or two the students decided to investigate four aspects of their topic: uses of water, the nature of impurities, the effect of natural disasters on sanitation, methods of purification. They decided that for two days each committee member would gather information regarding all four subareas; then all would meet for discussion of what they had learned. During this sharing session they decided that they still had much to learn and began to explore ways of getting information through other sources than their reading. Various suggestions were made, and further plans agreed upon. The students decided that the entire committee should visit the local purification plant. In addition, two members agreed to obtain samples of water from nearby sources to be sent to the state health department for laboratory analysis. One youngster volunteered to interview the city health commissioner to learn about the effects of impure water on health. Two others were inspired by their

study of purification processes to try to duplicate one of them in simplified form. They even thought that they might come up with an original method of their own.

After the visit to the local purification plant and discussion of it, committee members pursued their agreed-upon individual tasks for three more class sessions. By this time they were ready to organize their findings and decide upon effective ways of reporting to the class their most significant learnings. Some members of the committee believed that the entire class should visit the purification plant; one student remembered that the man at the plant had mentioned a sound film available for free distribution. It was decided to show the film rather than plan for a class trip. The students also decided to demonstrate to the class the working model of the water purification plant which two of the committee members had constructed. Finally, they agreed that two members would speak to the class on the topics of water uses and the effect of disaster on sanitation.

As can be seen from this illustration, the work of a committee includes both individual study and group study. Sometimes in the course of six or seven sessions responsibility can shift back and forth between individual work and group meetings, as was true of this science committee. In other instances work can be so planned that individual responsibility is allocated very early and the committee does not then meet as a whole until most of the research work is completed. Whatever form the work takes, boys and girls need to recognize their responsibility for carrying out agreed-upon tasks and meeting their responsibilities to the entire committee.

#### Learning skills and using resources

Effective use of books and other resource materials is often the key to the success of committee work. The students must be encouraged to use a wide variety of sources for their study and need to be taught how to use them effectively. Books, magazines, pamphlets, charts, maps, models—all have their contribution to make to the pursuit of knowledge and understanding. In addition, human resources in the form of various school faculty members and community people will prove fruitful sources of information.

There are several ways in which books and materials can be gathered and utilized. In some situations, along with basic texts and the like, the teacher may prefer that the students do most of their research work in the school library. In other situations a classroom library is built up through student and teacher contributions of books and materials from home and public libraries. Such a classroom library will, of course, be supplemented by appropriate materials taken from the school library for

the duration of the unit. In addition, through the facilities of university extension services, libraries, and curriculum materials centers, many state as well as county and local governmental units provide reference service and resource materials on specific topics.

Whatever the approach, youngsters need to be taught a great deal about research methods—how to locate information, how to take notes, how to compile data, how to evaluate sources. The librarian is an invaluable aid at this time, and the classroom teacher and students should call upon her early and then often.

Even before work starts on any given unit of study the teacher should consult with the librarian regarding the availability of materials. Much care should be taken to provide materials of varying difficulty and at different maturity levels in order to meet the needs of the wide range of ability in any given class. If a classroom library is to be utilized, the librarian might be called upon to help a class set up a simple check-out system for books and materials, so that boys and girls develop orderly procedures for their use and gain respect for property.

In gathering information for committee study, human resources should be used as much as possible. Teachers, parents, and other community members can provide helpful information on almost anything that is studied. Youngsters should be taught skills of interviewing and the manners appropriate to conferring with individuals. The tape recorder might be called into use in order to bring back to the class the reality of the interview or conference.

#### Reporting progress

A technique that many teachers have found helpful for group work is the progress report. Such a report can take many forms. Sometimes it is well to have each committee report briefly to the class after every meeting, especially for the first two or three days of group work. In this way the students can discover whether there is any overlapping in what they are doing in their committees, as well as identify problems with which they might help each other, as in the case of needed books and materials.

In other instances teachers like to have each committee secretary turn in a written progress report each day so that she can keep a closer check on committee needs. Occasionally it is helpful to have each student keep a brief record of what he has done each day.

Whatever system is used—and it is possible to use all three at the same time—the progress report serves an important function in helping boys and girls realize that committee work has substance to it, that “something” must be accomplished. As they try to report what they have done, they see more and more clearly whether time has been wasted or not.

Such a system of reporting is also an excellent evaluative technique for the teacher as she tries to note constantly the growth of her students—

### REPORTING TO THE CLASS

#### Planning the reports

In many ways the most difficult aspect of committee work is sharing with the entire class the results of extended group study. It is no easy matter to select, organize, highlight the information and understandings gleaned from committee research, and then arrive at an effective means of presenting to others the real meat of the study. If teachers are not careful, such reporting can deteriorate into monotonous reading of uninteresting reports or hilarious presentations at the expense of learning.

It will be helpful if teachers (and students) keep in mind the various reasons for reporting by small groups to the total class. There are five important ones:

1. Where a class has been engaged in committee work in a variety of interest areas unrelated to a major, over-all topic or problem, the reporting makes it possible for the entire class to become at least a little familiar with the varied interests, concerns, and findings of other class members. This exchange of information serves to widen the horizons and stimulate the intellectual curiosity of young people.
2. In instances where committees have assumed responsibility for different aspects or phases of a broad topic or problem, reporting to the total group becomes essential. In no other way can the class achieve a coherent and comprehensive understanding of the problem.
3. Reporting to the class makes it necessary for the members of each committee to pull together their work, to bring some order and organization to their findings, to reach conclusions, and to arrive at generalizations. The ability to transmit one's understanding to others is, in the final analysis, perhaps the most valid test of learning.
4. Reporting affords opportunity for the choice of and practice in a great variety of communication activities that help individual boys and girls grow in the skills of speaking, discussing, and listening.
5. Similarly, through such sharing students are given opportunities to exercise leadership as they find themselves in situations where they must guide discussions, chair panels, introduce reports, and the like.

If pupils will keep these reasons in mind, they can avoid one of the more common pitfalls of the inexperienced—deciding on the manner of presenting a report before having learned anything to present. Such a “cart before the horse” procedure often results from the failure of the

youngsters to understand the real goal of committee work—their own learning. Reporting to the class is but a culmination of the learning process; it should not take precedence over the learning itself. Also, students should be taught from the beginning that more often than not the content of their study will suggest appropriate means of reporting, and that, in any case, a method of presenting cannot be planned in a vacuum without knowing what is to be presented. If they can be guided into spending their first few work sessions in real study and search for information, their later efforts at organizing a report will prove relatively easy and certainly more successful.

Another area in which youngsters need help is in accepting the idea that not every member of a committee needs to participate orally in the presentation. Some very good reporting techniques require only a few persons for their greatest effectiveness, although the ideas and information utilized in the presentation will have come from the joint efforts of the entire committee. Youngsters can make contributions to the final report in a variety of ways, through drawing maps, writing songs or dramatic sketches, handling the recording of a tape, to name only a few. It is the job of the teacher to see to it that certain students do not consistently avoid or are not kept from participation in the oral aspects of the report, and that others do not monopolize the opportunity. At the same time the teacher must help all of them recognize that each individual can contribute to group goals in his own way and that this can vary from one committee project to another.

#### Ways of reporting

It would not be possible to list completely the various ways in which group study can be shared with a class, since the ingenuity of youngsters will constantly create new and appropriate techniques. Some of the more common methods, however, can be noted:

#### DRAMATIC PRESENTATIONS

- original plays
- role playing
- skits
- parodies of radio or television programs or movies
- monologues

#### PANEL TYPE OF DISCUSSIONS

- panels
- forums
- debates
- round-table sessions
- town meetings

#### WRITTEN MATERIALS

- newspapers
- notebooks
- scrapbooks
- duplicated material
- creative writing—poems, stories, plays, songs

#### VISUAL DEPICTIONS

- slides
- maps
- pictures
- graphs
- posters
- models
- exhibits
- murals
- bulletin board displays

#### OTHERS

- tape recordings
- action projects: open house for parents, party, presentation to P.T.A. or civic groups

There are many variations of these main suggestions, and it is often possible and desirable to combine two or three for effective results. Regardless of the technique used, students must remember to put proper emphasis on the substance of the report and not sacrifice the transmittal of adequate understandings, ideas, and information in the attempt to entertain or amuse.

The ingenuity of youngsters in arriving at appropriate and varied means of presenting their findings to their classmates can be illustrated by the work done by several groups in an eleventh-grade class studying a unit titled "Exploring Vocations."

One group, concentrating on jobs in industry, made a tape recording of an interview with the vice-president of a local industrial concern. The interview focused on matters relating to the kinds of jobs open in that particular field, the qualifications necessary, the possibilities of advancement, and the like. In addition to playing the tape for the entire class, the committee members told of their experiences during a tour of this plant, guided by the plant manager.

A second group reported by way of a panel, consisting of three persons associated with the communications field in one way or another. One panel member was manager of the local television station, another

was city editor for the local newspaper, and a third was a free-lance writer whose work appeared in various national magazines.

A third committee showed a film that gave a picture of work in one of the professional fields. Another group planned a trip for the entire class to one of the local department stores, where the students spent a profitable morning seeing the behind-the-scenes activity and learning about the wide variety of jobs available in the merchandising field.

Several students made helpful graphs, charts, and maps, giving statistics regarding job opportunities in the community, state, and nation, as well as relevant data about various professional and occupational categories. Other students had sent away for materials and were able to provide the class with copies of pamphlets on careers published by various commercial companies.

Another committee wrote to people in various jobs asking them what they liked about their work and what advice they might give to teen-agers considering their particular occupation. The students summarized the replies and reported the results to the class.<sup>4</sup>

Three students engaged in a very practical application of their study by actually applying for summer jobs. They told the class of their experiences—about the letters they had to write, the application forms they filled in, the interviews they had, and what they learned about the nature of the work they would be doing. All three of them succeeded in getting a job and said that they would tell the class in the fall about their summer work and what they learned from it.

### EVALUATING GROWTH AND ACHIEVEMENT

Measuring growth and achievement in and through committee work poses some special problems and requires the use of some well-conceived evaluative techniques. Because the work, both in process and in result, is essentially a group endeavor, it is not easy or even necessary to judge the specific contribution made by each individual in the group. At the same time students must feel that their individual efforts and contributions have been recognized and are valuable.

Since we are concerned with *process* as well as with *product*, obviously it is not sufficient to evaluate only end-learnings. If we are to achieve the values we claim for group work, we must help students to assess their own progress in learning the ways of working together successfully.

With these two problems in mind—the need to recognize individual growth as well as group accomplishment, and the need to measure growth in group processes as well as achievement in “content” learnings—let us look at some aspects of evaluation that need to be considered by a teacher and class. Some of these suggestions have been mentioned in other connections and will be touched on only briefly at this point.

#### Analysis of individual work

If committee work is to achieve one of its goals—ability to engage in effective research—attention must be given to each student's growth in the skills related to such research. In order to identify an individual's needs and guide his growth a teacher should from time to time examine some of the work he has done—notes taken on his reading, an outline of his findings, or the like. Sometimes it is helpful if the teacher indicates that she would like certain records kept so that she can better assist individual students and judge their progress. For example, notes on reading can be required, bibliographies with brief annotations might be requested, individual progress reports can be called for, and self-evaluations at the conclusion of group work can be assigned.

#### Progress reports

Periodic reporting of committee progress has already been discussed. Mention should be made here, however, of the importance such reports have, whether written or oral, for evaluative purposes. The teacher should take advantage of oral progress-reporting sessions to help the class recognize its successes and shortcomings, to guide students in redirecting their energies where necessary and in overcoming weaknesses. Written progress reports are a rich source of information for the teacher as she keeps in constant touch with the work of each committee. They indicate to her those committees that can move forward with little or no help from her, and those that need much guidance from her and the nature of the help needed. Students must be shown the usefulness of these reports so that they do not deteriorate into routine chores with little real meaning.

#### Tests and questionnaires

If committees have been at work on aspects of a major topic or problem it is reasonable to utilize some form of testing in order to discover the effectiveness of their study. Some tests can be constructed by the teacher after all committee work has been done and reported; others might be drawn up by having each committee submit questions considered important by the group members. A planning committee could then formulate the test.

In addition to testing “content” information, various inventory and reaction questionnaires can be used to help students evaluate the success of their committee meetings and the over-all work of their committee study. At the conclusion of a unit of work an eighth-grade class used the list of questions on the following page to evaluate the progress of each group:<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For a more intensive and comprehensive questionnaire of this type, see Appendix A.

## EVALUATION OF YOUR GROUP

1. How effective was your leadership?
2. Did your group work smoothly and efficiently?
3. Did all the members participate in the planning?
4. Was your planning well organized?
5. Did your group make the best use of its time?
6. Do you think you used the library well?
7. Do you think that you worked well with the other members of your group?
8. Did you make the best use of your time?
9. Were the results of your work "in line" with the amount of time spent?
10. What seemed to be the chief weaknesses of your group and your presentation?

## Class discussions

At appropriate times the teacher and class should discuss the effectiveness of their group work. During their free exchange of ideas students should be encouraged to express how they think the work of their groups could have been improved. As a result of one such discussion an eighth grade and the teacher agreed on certain generalizations regarding their work. Their conclusions are reflected in the following summary drawn up by the teacher as a result of such a give-and-take:

## GENERAL EVALUATION

*Strengths:*

1. Every group met the deadline.
2. Every member of the class participated.
3. Many of you gave up out-of-class time to work on your project.
4. There was much more success in presenting valuable information to the class instead of merely entertaining.
5. A good deal of hidden talent was brought to life.
6. You were able to do a good job without relying completely on written scripts.

*Weaknesses:*

1. There was a general tendency to stress isolated facts and events instead of relating them to one another. There might have been a greater attempt to organize them into broad areas.
2. Not many of you really made the most of the information and understanding you had gained from your research.

3. There are still many of you who need to think seriously about your ways of working with other people.

On the whole, this was the best piece of group work you have done in the eighth grade. It was a highly successful project of which you should be very proud. There is every reason to believe that you will continue to show this remarkable improvement.

## Written evaluations of group reports

In addition to oral evaluations of group work it is sometimes helpful for students as individuals to write their reactions to committee reports and for teachers to give to the committees a fair evaluation of their work. Here are some examples of some eighth-graders' evaluations of committee reports dealing with the causes of the American Revolution. (In this particular case all groups were studying the same topic.) These reactions were taken from the evaluation papers of five different students, and each one refers to a different group report.

Group One had a very interesting way of presenting their information. With a little more time for preparation they could have done a very good job. They seemed to know their script fairly well, although not all of them spoke too clearly. The presentation showed evidence of careful planning.

However, from what I saw of the way they worked together, they did not do too well and there was a lot of fooling around. The skit was a little mixed up in places, and not too much information was given. I think that if there had been more time, they could have done a much better job.

I thought Group Two's skit on "You Are There" was very good and it held your interest. Every member knew their part well and their speech was clear and loud. The charade in their second skit was very clever and told a little about each act which gave a pretty good over-all view. The skit showed that they had put in a lot of thought and planning in their act.

Group Three had a very good idea and it was humorous besides. The poem dragged out a little, but it was very good otherwise. The group and the class enjoyed it immensely. It was well planned and I think the group worked well together. One difficult thing at times was that you had to look all around the room. But that couldn't be helped. Sometimes the members didn't know their information. It would have helped if some members had not been chewing gum.

The idea of the panel discussion [Group Four] of today peopled with famous personalities of Revolutionary War times is very clever and original. Unfortunately there were only two really good speakers in this group, and one of them had a very small part. Because of this, the class did not get what was said. This was mostly bad luck, but bad planning also contributed to the poor presentation. What we eventually caught were largely mumbblings of

indifferent "I don't know" or "I have nothing to say." I cannot picture people like Washington, Hale, and Franklin having nothing to say about important acts. Neither can I imagine Benjamin Franklin not knowing about the Stamp Act because he "wasn't in town at the time," and Washington being the only one with any knowledge of the Intolerable Acts.

I think that each member of the group had studied one event leading up to the Revolution, and knew that one thing quite well. In itself this seems to be a very good procedure, but evidently they failed to pass on their information to the other members of the group, so it was practically impossible to carry on an intelligent discussion. Their strongest point was the announcing, which was not only interesting and clever, but could be heard.

The group members do not seem to be satisfied with their work; they felt they could have done better. As for the class, we had to make quite an effort to hear what was being said, and the attention lessened toward the end of the presentation. Speaking for myself, I didn't learn anything new.

It seems to me that the real test of a presentation is whether or not a committee can pull together information, etc., without a script. The presentation of Group Five gave good information and I think all the members could be understood. At various times, though, the committee talked among themselves when it didn't seem necessary. A lot of thought was put into the presentation, which goes along with the fact that it gave a lot of information as well as famous names.

Group Six had one of the best presentations given. The members were sure of their material and they spoke clearly and loudly. There was a lot of information given and it was given in an interesting manner.

In the little skit, a few of the people got their lines mixed up, but this only served to make it more clever. They gave more information on their subject than did any of the other groups, although as with the rest of them, there could have been more given. Very good use of their time was made, but they could have done better with more of it.

Several values of this kind of procedure should be noted. By having to write out their thoughts and opinions students are helped to develop skills of critical analysis and of effective communication of their thoughts in written form. By reading the opinions and suggestions of their peers class members gain much help with regard to their committee work. The teacher gains added insight regarding her students and how well they are learning to think critically, to observe intelligently, and to write constructively.

For this process to be most effective students should be made aware of the teacher's opinions of their work. In addition to the oral give-and-take following committee reports the teacher can also write evaluations of group work and committee reports. Copies of her evaluation can be distributed to the class so that all students may benefit from her suggestions and reactions.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B for the teacher's evaluation of the same reports just discussed.

In this chapter we have examined the important elements of committee functioning in the classroom without giving specific attention to the job of the teacher in guiding these learning activities. In the pages that follow we turn our attention directly to the role of the teacher in committee work.

## The Role of the Teacher

The role of the teacher in committee work, especially in extended unit study, is not easily defined. If the hoped-for values are to be derived from student planning and execution of committee plans, the teacher must be careful not to dominate, not to outline in meticulous detail what is to be done, not to rush in at the first sign of indecision on the part of the pupils. On the other hand, the teacher must not abdicate her responsibility, assuming that once youngsters are in committees, there is nothing left for her to do until their work is completed.

In effect, the role of the teacher is a skillful blend of resource, guide, expeditor, listener, evaluator. At no time should she be a manipulator. The distinctions between guidance in cooperative planning, manipulation, and direction need to be clear and to be thoroughly understood.

In some situations a relatively large degree of teacher direction may be needed. For example, where a class has been unaccustomed to group ways of learning, the teacher in the beginning may have to be very specific in telling the students step-by-step procedures, listing kinds of content to be found, or setting up a pattern for reporting. Or, in the case of a particularly difficult unit of study, the teacher may find it helpful to give more specific directions than usual.

Where such teacher direction is needed, it should be given clearly and openly. At no time should the teacher give the students the impression that they can make decisions for themselves, only to veto idea after idea until someone suggests the one that she had in mind all along. Such action is only manipulation. The manipulator has already decided what she wants a committee to do and the ways in which the group is to handle its study; her purpose is then to get students to arrive at these preconceived plans. There is nothing wrong with being honest with boys and girls. If the teacher wants certain things done a certain way, then she should say so, rather than worry a class through a sham problem-solving situation which can lead only to a predetermined end.

Neither total direction nor manipulation should be confused with real guidance in cooperative planning. The guide is ever-ready to offer suggestions, ideas, alternatives, to help students look at various procedures

and plans but allows the decisions to rest with them. Much depends, of course, on the understandings and expectations that have been developed before actual committee sessions. Even in cooperative planning situations certain limitations are found to exist. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the wise teacher will discuss with the class whatever limits need to be accepted by the students.

### PRELIMINARY PLANNING

One of the major jobs of the teacher lies in the area of her preliminary planning. This involves her own understanding of the content being studied, familiarity with materials and resources available in the school situation, awareness of community resources of various kinds, and, of course, knowledge of her student group. Resource unit materials can be very helpful to a teacher in her planning, offering, as they do, a wealth of suggested activities and procedures, along with lists of numerous books and other materials.



*Good planning will prevent this.*

Responsibility for providing suitable and sufficient materials cannot be overemphasized. In fact, before permitting a class to move into a committee procedure, the teacher must be very sure that adequate resources can be made available at the proper time. Otherwise, there is a grave danger that she will face the same frustrating situation experienced by a student teacher who failed to give sufficient consideration to this problem of materials.

This teacher's seventh-grade class was studying about the various agencies in the local community that provide services for its citizens. Each committee was responsible for a particular agency. On the day in which the supervisor happened to observe this class the students were meeting



in committees for the second or third time, trying to gather information regarding these agencies. After a few minutes the room became full of purposeless chatter, and it was evident that little work was being done. Youngsters could be seen doing nothing; others were talking about unrelated things; a few wandered aimlessly around the room. The student teacher had his hands full. In conference later he recognized that the fault for this state of affairs rested with him. Since the class was studying about its own specific locality, there was little help to be derived from the general civics text. However, nothing had been done to obtain materials of a local nature, such as pamphlets, charts, and leaflets, or to plan with the students how they might obtain such material or gather information through other means; for example, making visits into the community or asking outside guests to speak to them on a given topic.

The teacher should also consider the possible ways in which committees might best be formed for a particular study—on what basis members shall be selected or assigned, the number and size of groups, and the like. She should also take into consideration any environmental problems that the class might face, such as available space, possibilities of using the library, and furniture restrictions.

In addition to her own preliminary planning the teacher must guide the students carefully as they plan with her how they will move into and handle their committee work. The better this advance cooperative planning, the better the committees will function. Together teacher and students must develop clear understandings of the purposes of their work, the length of time to be devoted to it, and actual operational procedures. As was mentioned earlier, it is often helpful to make a tentative schedule and keep it on the chalkboard so that students can readily see the allocation of time for committee work and the various activities planned for the different committees each day.

#### INDUCTING THE CLASS INTO GROUP WORK

The wise teacher gradually inducts the inexperienced class into the ways of group work. Often a successful start can be made by having only one committee assume a relatively easy task in which the members can gain some experience and confidence in working together. Some of the administrative tasks lend themselves to this kind of cautious beginning.

Another point of departure is to have buzz-group sessions for a short period of time, perhaps fifteen or twenty minutes. Moreover, youngsters' first experience in such groups should relate to something of interest to them that does not require much planning on their part. For example, a first experience like this might involve the sharing of book reviews in buzz groups. Each student would have planned something specific to tell the

others, all of them would have some degree of interest in hearing the others, and the only decision involved might be the selection of one or two reviews for presentation to the entire class.

The important thing to keep in mind is to help boys and girls become at ease in group situations and to guide them in learning some of the basic rules that facilitate good group work—rules relating to behavior, to the orderly arrangement and rearrangement of furniture, to respect for others' ideas and opinions. As they move toward increasing skill in handling themselves, they can then take on more and more difficult tasks, leading eventually to an ability to work in committees on unit study over longer and longer periods of time.

#### GUIDING STUDENTS DURING COMMITTEE STUDY

As committees proceed about their work, the teacher serves in many capacities. She meets with each committee as soon as possible in order to help the members get work under way. She soon learns which youngsters are likely to need her assistance as they start new units of work, and schedules her time accordingly. One of the major responsibilities of the teacher is to discriminate carefully between those groups that need much guidance and those that need relatively little. With a certain group of students, many of whom tend to disdain suggestions from the teacher, however tentative, it might be wise for her to let the group proceed under its own steam. If the members begin to flounder, they can learn much from the experience—not least of all the realization that sometimes boys and girls are not as omniscient as they like to think but can sometimes actually benefit from an adult's helpful guidance. But it might be very unwise to let other students flounder, lest the resulting frustration interfere with any future progress. These boys and girls would benefit from an occasional and tactful helping hand so that they can experience a sense of achievement in moving toward their goals.

As the teacher moves from group to group she often finds it necessary to clarify for the students just what it is they are supposed to be doing. No matter how careful and thorough the preliminary discussions may have been, as boys and girls start exploring together the specifics of their work, they often discover that they have lost or confused their original guideposts and directions. The teacher must be alert to situations like this in order to help any committee avoid heading down the wrong road. As she helps to clarify ideas, she can at the same time suggest possible alternatives for the committee members to consider, making sure that they realize they do not have to accept any of her suggestions.

Much of the teacher's time can and should be devoted to helping individual boys and girls. Guidance must be given toward suitable reading

material. Some individuals need encouragement, others need to be guided so that their efforts are not diffuse and haphazard. Occasionally, conferences are necessary with an individual student who has real problems in handling himself in a group situation—the overly aggressive, the monopolizer, the shirker, the withdrawn youngster.

Teaching students how to work in groups requires great tact and understanding on the part of the teacher, who with sensitivity and patience can be at hand when needed and where needed. Sometimes a word or two at the right time suffices to head a group or an individual in the right direction. At other times a teacher may find it necessary to halt committee meetings for a heart-to-heart talk about group manners. Or, if she finds that more groups are having trouble with similar problems, she may call the class together for general discussion and help.

Another major responsibility of the teacher is to help the chairmen and recorders of the groups understand and carry out their jobs efficiently. If they meet as a planning committee, the teacher can clarify their roles for them, but she should always be ready to guide individual chairmen and recorders and help them with specific problems as these arise.

#### PROVIDING OTHER WORTH-WHILE LEARNING EXPERIENCES

When work by committees constitutes the major approach to a unit of study, it is often mistakenly assumed that the class engages in no other kind of learning activity during the course of the committee study. Although it is true that committees may sometimes meet for as many as five or more consecutive sessions, it would be unwise to permit a class to meet in committees for much longer without some time for total class meetings; nor should the teacher overlook the need for individual study and the wisdom of providing some class hours for just such work.

On days when the class meets as a total group, the students may have an opportunity to view appropriate films or listen to helpful records; to discuss certain major concepts related to the unit that will help them pursue their group work better and to gain understandings of relationships, issues, and the like; to take field trips; or to hear interesting authorities from the outside speak on various aspects of the unit they are studying. The wise teacher will do much preliminary thinking regarding opportunities like these but she will also discuss them with the class in order to achieve the greatest range of possibilities. Schedule planning becomes an important task for teacher and class so that adequate time is provided for committee work and for total class meetings.

Often during the planning of a unit of study the teacher will observe that an important area of information or understanding is not chosen by students for study. The teacher, with her mature judgment, knowing that

this area is essential to the rounding out of the problem, can accept the responsibility for bringing this information to the class. This is another example of total class activity which should be provided for within the context of ongoing committee work.

The teacher, of course, also has a responsibility for helping students with certain basic skills: reading, spelling, note taking, outlining, and organization of material. She should help them learn the correct spelling of words used during their committee study, as well as plan lessons for the direct teaching of other language skills.

Another responsibility of the teacher is to help students use their time wisely, not only during their committee study but also during those times when one group may have completed its work while others are still busy. The problem of how to use this time efficiently should be carefully explored by teacher and students before they embark on their unit study. In some instances students can be encouraged to use this time for individual reading or writing experiences. Occasionally it might be possible for them to join the other groups and offer their assistance in the completion of these other projects. Perhaps each group as it completes its own work might do some reading in the areas on which other groups are working. In this way, when reports are given, the student audience will be better able to understand and appreciate them.

#### FOLLOWING UP COMMITTEE WORK

After committees have completed their work, the teacher has a responsibility for forwarding the learning of the class. She can and should do several things.

After each committee has reported, she has the task of clarifying, elaborating, correcting errors, and pulling out major ideas. Sometimes this can be done with the help of class members through a guided discussion. In other instances the teacher may have to plan a lesson or two in which she develops new understandings of a particular topic or question. If a really poor job was done by one committee, she may have to do careful reteaching of the material.

After the reports of all the committees have been given, they should be followed up in a more general manner: this means showing relationships, tying ideas together, helping to organize various threads of knowledge, and the like. For example, a class may have been studying in committees about the explorers of the New World, with one committee concentrating on the Spanish, another on the English, a third on the French. After the reports have been given, the teacher then guides the students through a discussion of the various reasons for the explorations sent out by the various nations and the extent of national claims in the New World.

The discussion will also bring out an understanding of the time sequence of important events. In this way the information does not remain fragmented but becomes part of a coherent whole. With very bright students or those with much experience in discussion techniques, this kind of summing up and pulling together can be handled by some of the students rather than by the teacher.

As a result of the teacher's close observation of students during the committee study she should know of any areas in which special help must be given. For example, she may have discovered that the students were not so skillful in taking notes as they might have been or that they had great difficulty in using the index of a book to secure specific information. Before permitting them to move into another experience involving extended committee work, she should take time to do some direct teaching for the correction of weaknesses she has noticed. In the same way she can help them with improving the effectiveness of their speaking before the class, their pronunciation and spelling of unfamiliar words and names, and their outlining skills.

Wherever possible the teacher should provide opportunities for conferences with individual youngsters. It would be desirable to have individual conferences with all class members two or three times a year. However, such an arrangement might be impossible for classes that meet for only brief periods of time each day. Nonetheless, the teacher can and should meet individually with a few students after every unit study of the kind we have been discussing. In this way during the course of the year she will have spoken with all students at least once.

In these conferences the teacher and student can discuss the latter's growth in the skills of research, in understandings of the information being studied, and in skill in working with others. Some of the data gathered for evaluative purposes can and should be used at this time to help guide individual students toward improvement.

An important part of this follow-up process relates to helping students improve their skill in the entire process of committee work. Mention has been made in Chapter 3 of ways of evaluating the effectiveness of the groups' experiences. Students must be helped to understand that such evaluation has a "forward" look to it, that they will be expected to do a better job the next time. As a result of such careful examination of their working procedures and their reporting techniques, the teacher and class might draw up a list of emphases that they will keep in mind during their next experience in committee work. One class might find it important to concentrate on using materials and resources better and might set up some guiding procedures to be followed. For example, they might agree that in their next study each person must use at least one reference book besides the encyclopedia if the tendency has been to rely on encyclopedias

for most of their information. In the same way they could set up a specific form for taking notes that would help them in gathering information.

Another class might need help with improving skills of reporting. Students and teacher could agree on a certain kind of reporting to be used the next time, perhaps emphasizing panel discussion in order to help students break the habit of reading individual reports to the entire class. If committees have overused the technique of quiz shows for their reporting, they may agree to strive for different procedures another time.

The role of the teacher in guiding students at this stage of committee work is a crucial one. In order to make future experiences more worthwhile and successful, she must use all the means at her disposal to help her students draw upon the experience through which they have just passed. The suggestion was made in Chapter 3 that a teacher provide students with her written reaction to their committee reports. One teacher used this technique in order to help her class examine carefully their ways of reporting to the class. Her evaluation of one of the group reports shows an interesting way of helping students with their skills of sharing with the class.

Your presentation showed thoughtful planning and some good research. You seem to have caught the main features of a quiz show and adapted them admirably to your own use. The use of printed material containing your questions and answers was a good idea. A very helpful feature of your quiz was the provision for additional factual information furnished by your Answer Board. In fact, here was the real "meat" of your offering, as far as conveying to the class certain basic knowledge is concerned.

Actually it seems to me that most of you had done some intensive and more than adequate research about the specific explorers assigned to you. As a result you probably have a fine individual understanding of this particular period in the history of the Americas. However, it occurs to me that all of this background preparation was not very evident in the presentation itself. This brings up the matter of the form you decided upon for your project.

There is a great question in my mind concerning the value of a quiz program of this type as a means of teaching the rest of the class certain historical concepts and facts. The following weaknesses of a quiz such as this might be pointed out:

1. It is rather contradictory to claim to be teaching the class about a certain topic and at the same time ask members of the class to serve as contestants. Obviously they would scarcely be expected to know all of the answers or even many of them.
2. Even though you provided long and satisfactory answers through members of the Answer Board, there is always a danger that your audience will become so attracted by the "quiz" aspects of your presentation that they will scarcely notice the more important "teaching" aspects.

3. A quiz program usually lacks a logical organization of material which would be basic to effective teaching. There seemed to be some attempt on your part to group your questions according to the country for which the explorers sailed, but this was not evident to the audience, and it was not specifically brought to their attention during the program. It was very difficult for your listeners to grasp the significance of the contributions of these various groups as a whole.

4. A quiz program necessarily places emphasis on the *isolated details* of knowledge, not on large ideas or logical organization or basic understandings. A quiz such as this might be a good review device after the class has studied and thoroughly understood the areas under consideration, but it is a weak device for teaching purposes.

5. An unrehearsed quiz program which relies on the audience for contestants naturally faces certain dangers. Although it gains from being spontaneous, it may lose some of its value if the contestants get out of hand and the quiz master does not retain control of the situation. Something like this happened with your presentation, and as a result, the whole idea of a radio show was almost completely shattered.

It is true that some of the apparent weaknesses of your presentation resulted from the unexpected circumstances which arose to interfere with your plans. However, these particular problems would not ordinarily weaken an effective performance.

There are several devices which you might have used to make your material clear to the class. A map certainly was necessary; unfortunately there was some rather vague geographical understanding on the part of your listeners. Pictures would have been most effective. A chart, listing the explorers, the countries for which they sailed, dates, and accomplishments would have been one of the clearest forms possible. Finally, your material was admirably adapted to writing skits and plays.

In view of the fact that there was marked difficulty in gaining the cooperation of every member of your group, it is encouraging to note that your work was as effective as it was. Your leadership was good, and helped to overcome the weaknesses resulting from this lack of cooperation on the part of some.

To sum up, it seems to me that your presentation did not show to the best advantage all the time, effort, and thought which went into your group study. It may be that the reluctance of some members to help with the planning is the chief reason for this.

Since all the students received copies of this analysis, they benefited from the teacher's comments on the use of a quiz program. Whether as a result of her reactions or not, the teacher was interested to notice that no more quiz programs showed up in succeeding committee reports that year.

It can readily be seen that the teacher has continuing responsibility during committee work, starting with her own preliminary thinking and planning and ranging through the entire process of committee activity

to the all-important stage of evaluation. If she maintains her role of guide and resource person, she will be amply rewarded by seeing her students develop into responsible individuals, capable of working together on the solution of problems, the performance of responsibilities, and the pursuit of interests and information. It is very likely that she herself will grow and develop into a more effective teacher as a result of her work with students in learning situations that offer such a challenge to all concerned.

## Appendix A

### Evaluative Instrument for Determining the Effectiveness of Group Work

#### EVALUATION OF GROUP PROCEDURES

Name of group project or study: \_\_\_\_\_

1. How did you select a chairman? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How effective was the chairman's leadership? \_\_\_\_\_
3. How did the committee work as a group?
  - A. How quickly did the group "get down to business"? \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. How many members of the group actively participated in the planning? \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. Was (too much, not enough, sufficient) time spent in planning? \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. Did everyone accept the task assigned to him? \_\_\_\_\_
  - E. Did the chairman find it difficult to keep everyone's attention in group meetings? \_\_\_\_\_
  - F. How often did the group wander into irrelevant topics of conversation? \_\_\_\_\_
  - G. In your opinion were there enough meetings of your entire group? \_\_\_\_\_
  - H. What specific suggestions would you make for improving group cooperation? \_\_\_\_\_
  - I. What do you consider to be your personal weaknesses as a member of a group? \_\_\_\_\_
4. How did the members of the group work as individuals?
  - A. Did each one complete his assignment on time? \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Did each one do a satisfactory and complete job? \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. Was there anyone who did not complete his responsibility? \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. Could you have done a better job with your own particular assignment than you did? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Evaluate the length of time spent on your group project.
  - A. Was there sufficient time spent to do a good job? \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Did you feel that there was not enough time to do a good job? \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. Did your group make the best use of its time? \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. Give specific suggestions for improving our use of time. \_\_\_\_\_

6. List some of the specific problems that came up in your group—problems relating to ways of working together as well as problems of materials and information. \_\_\_\_\_
7. How did you handle each of these problems? \_\_\_\_\_
8. List any unsolved problems. \_\_\_\_\_
9. List any continuing problem in unit group work that you think the class should discuss. \_\_\_\_\_
10. List your own personal difficulties such as locating material, understanding what you read, note taking, etc. \_\_\_\_\_
11. List any further suggestions for the general improvement of group and individual work. \_\_\_\_\_
12. Did the teacher give (enough, too much, too little) assistance?
  - A. In group planning? \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. With individual assignments? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Do you think more guidance and assistance could have been given by the teacher? If so, give specific suggestions. \_\_\_\_\_
14. List the types of assistance and guidance you individually would like to receive from the teacher. \_\_\_\_\_
15. What seems to be your understanding of the information which you handled?
  - A. Did you understand what you read? \_\_\_\_\_
  - B. Did you understand what others read and presented to the group? \_\_\_\_\_
  - C. What specific things might be done to help increase your understanding of factual information? \_\_\_\_\_
  - D. Suggest other ways of learning that you might like to try besides this group method we just used. \_\_\_\_\_

The chairman only will answer the following:

1. How were you chosen? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Were you willing to be chairman? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Did you enjoy being chairman? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What were some specific difficulties you had in guiding your group? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What suggestions would you make for improving group relationships? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Were there any individuals who did not seem to cooperate with the group? If so, what might be done to help them in the future? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What do you consider to be your personal weaknesses as a group leader? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### A Teacher's Evaluation of Committee Reports

These are the teacher's comments about the small-group reports of an eighth grade studying about events leading to the Revolutionary War (see p. 37).

#### GROUP 1

Your presentation showed evidence of careful planning, and it was gratifying to see that you had no written script. Your attention to detail, such as the red coats and the muskets, was very noticeable and worth while. Your chairman showed excellent understanding and wisdom when she suggested that you start your program over again because of lack of control, and you did very well in getting hold of yourselves.

Your choice of the *reminiscence* type of presentation was a good one and offered us a chance to see how enjoyable a different style can be. You kept in the spirit of the idea and had some good information. Another time you might want to develop a scene such as that a little more thoroughly with possibly more "give-and-take" among the participants.

#### GROUP 2

Your presentations were well done and showed careful planning. Apparently there was a rather good group attitude in the preparation of your program. The *You Are There* skit was well planned and presented, and you kept it in the spirit of a radio program from beginning to end.

The idea of charades was original and clever and gave the class a chance to take part. Possibly your introductory remarks to each charade gave too much detail and too many clues. Perhaps the class could have guessed them first and then heard the explanations afterward. Sometimes you spoke too rapidly and not loudly enough. In general, though, you did a good job.

#### GROUP 3

Your idea of using the poem *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere* was a good one and gave a novel touch to the presentations, and your pantomime with it was different and interesting. On the whole you had some rather important information to offer the class.

However, it was rather evident, it seemed to me, that not much sincere and careful planning and preparation had been made by your group. It was difficult to detect any over-all theme to your second presentation, and the

## Appendix B

various parts of it were not up to your ability. Your attitude was entirely too informal with unnecessary attempts at humor and too much "give-and-take back talk" among group members. Much attention should be given to speech; too often yours was too fast and not clear.

It would be wise for you to give careful thought to ways of working together in a group and to more serious consideration of your work.

## GROUP 4

Your idea of a panel discussion was good and your selection of persons to be represented was varied. Unfortunately, you never really carried through any of your ideas, and you missed many possibilities that would have been helpful.

For example, you might have explained who each member of the panel was and given a little background on each. You did not really get into the spirit of a radio program of this kind, and, on the whole, it seemed evident that there was little real understanding and preparation.

Much attention should be given to speaking clearly and loudly. It would be wise to think over more effective ways of working together as a group and overcoming the weaknesses you met in preparing this project.

## GROUP 5

Yours was a very fine piece of work on the whole and would probably have been even more effective with further rehearsal. The radio program was excellent and presented a well-rounded, connected view of the events leading to the Revolution. The fine attention you gave to important details in both your skits—such as sound effects and props—was very noteworthy. In your dramatic skit it was quite evident that you had thought through some characterization; it would be interesting to see what you could do with that with more time at your disposal.

It would have helped if everyone had spoken a little more loudly. However, it seems that all of you worked very well together in preparing and carrying through a difficult assignment.

## GROUP 6

Both your presentations were excellent from the point of view of information and style of performance. There were very careful preparation and an understanding of your material which resulted in a smooth, easy-flowing production.

In both skits you did a fine job of getting into the spirit of the shows. The *Town Meeting* idea was convincing down to the last detail of including questions from members of the audience. The *Boston Tea Party* was an enjoyable and well-thought-out skit and revealed some hidden dramatic talent that should be developed.

You spoke clearly and loudly and produced some good characterization. It was pleasing to see that you did not use a script. There evidently was some very good group interaction in your week of preparation. There were a few minor slips, such as the use of the word *persecute* for *prosecute* and a reference to the *United States* at a time when the states were still *colonies* of England.

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# THE END

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