1959

Group Discussion as a Medium for Qualifying Concepts of Social Behavior in the Junior High School

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GROUP DISCUSSION AS A MEDIUM
FOR QUALIFYING CONCEPTS OF
SOCIAL BEHAVIOR IN THE
JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

BY
JACK RANDALL

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF SCIENCE
IN
EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND
1959

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to determine what influence group discussion has on eighth grade students relative to changing their concepts and attitudes toward problems of social behavior.

An overview of the literature, and other possible sources that were pursued, indicated that the age of adolescence finds the youngster becoming more group centered. The thoughts and opinions of eighth graders shared with their peers have an effect in molding concepts of behavior. It was indicated that more emotional involvement takes place in student-centered rather than counselor-centered group discussions.

In order to sample the opinions and beliefs of eighth graders, two equivalent questionnaires of twenty-five questions each were prepared. The questions concerned problems that are common among junior high school youth. For each question the student was required to check one of three answers: "Yes," "Don't Know," and "No." The testing was confined to seven group guidance classes of eighth graders, totaling 194 students, from the Samuel Gorton Junior High School, Warwick, Rhode Island. Four of the classes served as experimental sections; the remaining three classes constituted the control sections.

The first questionnaire was administered to all seven group guidance classes. Each question was reviewed and discussed in the four experimental sections. With two of the experimental sections the discussions were student-centered; counselor-centered discussions were conducted with the other two sections. No review of the questions was allowed with the three control sections. After discussions the second questionnaire was given to all seven group guidance classes. A follow-up was made with two of the experimental sections during the early part of the succeeding school term, when the pupils were in the ninth grade.

The experimental sections having a higher median IQ exhibited more spontaneity in discussions. This general reaction was observed under both student- and counselor-centered leadership. The majority of students in these groups came from middle or upper middle class homes.

The comparison of answers which made up the total shift of group opinion indicated that, after discussion, the experimental groups in general seemed to be less certain in their choice of answers and more reflective.

Results of the study revealed that the response of experimental sections, after discussion when compared with those of the control groups, showed little change in the concepts of behavior attitudes. The study attempted to modify attitudes and concepts many of which had been formed prior to the youngster's entering junior high school. It may be appreciated these attitudes, like habits, are not easily changed, and discussions over a period of time may be

required in order to effect any modification of the pattern of the respondent's thinking. It appears more positive results can be expected if opinions and concepts have not become fixed before group discussions are held.

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CHAPTER I

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The junior high school, as an institution, has come under severe criticism in recent years. Group guidance in the junior high school program has borne its share of this criticism. It is the thinking of some that group guidance activities should be abolished or curtailed. It would appear that to strike out group process is to ignore the natural inclination of youth to talk over adjustment problems among themselves. The objective of this investigation is to ascertain to what extent concepts of social behavior can be qualified through group discussions. Whether or not to continue group guidance as a structured procedure in the junior high school is part of the problem of this study. More specifically, the investigations seek to determine the differences in modifications of attitudes between group-centered and counselor-centered approaches. For the purpose of implementing this study, seven groups of eighth grade students from the Samuel Gorton Junior High School, Warwick, Rhode Island were chosen.

At the junior high school age boys and girls are becoming an integral part of the community. At this age, they may or may not be aware of having to make adjustments.

Many of their attitudes and concepts of behavior are frequently not condoned by senior members of their families. The adolescents notice that they are becoming increasingly the subject of adult discussion.

The junior high years of preadolescence is a period of rapid growing up. At this time the pupils are beginning to find that group-importance supersedes self-importance. A new feeling of kinship has been awakened. There is a desire to share experiences with those of the same age group. Social concepts, formed during the interval of life when they were more individualistic, need to be reviewed in the light of the new desires for group identification.

The group has a profound effect in shaping the thoughts and actions of the adolescent. As Jersild¹ indicates, it outweighs the influence of the adolescent's parents or teachers in many areas of his life. Unstructured peer group interaction, involving such feelings as identification and belongingness, will contribute to the modification or development of attitudes of behavior that is not often realized in formal teacher class discussion. When confronted with certain situations, the natural tendency of this age group is to share confidences with their peers which makes them anxious to exchange views on choices of behavior. It is the conviction of Jersild² that young people have more capacity to inquire into the meaning and implications of

¹Arthur T. Jersild, The Psychology of Adolescence (The MacMillan Company, New York. 1957), p. 209

²Ibid., p. 89

their beliefs than is generally considered to be possible in the school program. The influence of group milieu, using structured material covering attitudes of social behavior, may result in some desirable modifications.

CHAPTER II

SURVEY OF LITERATURE

How concepts of behavior are formed. --The earliest experiences of the child are associated with his parents. It is during preschool years that concepts of behavior which are subsequently evidenced in the school and neighborhood atmosphere have their beginning. The neighborhood and peer group associations provide an arena for exercising, supplementing, or modifying these beliefs. Coleman makes this observation as a preliminary to his study of personality development:

The importance of the early years for later personality development has long been recognized, as evidenced by the common sayings "As the twig is bent, the tree is inclined" and "The child is father to the man." However, it remained for Sigmund Freud and later twentieth-century investigators to grasp the significance of the early formative years for later personality adjustment. For it is during this period that the foundations are laid for our adult environmental and self-evaluations, habits of thinking, and patterns of reactions. ¹

Jane Warters ² claims that behavior--its urges, drives, needs and motives--is basically biological and social. She classifies behavior into two groups: (1) the biological associated with individual survival and continuity of the species,

¹James C. Coleman, Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life (Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1956), p. 115

²Jane Warters, High School Personnel Work Today (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1956), p. 81

and (2) these motives that are socially learned through membership in a society. The socially conditioned needs develop from the biological as they are mingled and extended within the family.

Hollingshead concurs with Warters when he mentions:

...first, children's behavior patterns are established primarily by their early experiences in the family and secondarily in the neighborhood; and, second, similar experiences in family and neighborhood mold children in similar social types because their learning in both areas tends to be strongly associated with class.¹

There is evidence that the adolescents have certain opinions of right and wrong which have been fairly well established before entering school. Much has been learned from parents, playmates, and others to whom they have been emotionally attached. The school tends to play a more or less secondary role as an environment for fixing social attitudes.

The class room with its formalized methods of instruction tends to have little effect upon the preconceived patterns of thinking regarding choices of behavior. In discussing this point it is interesting to note what Havighurst and Taba state:

Moral beliefs are formed by accumulating reactions to immediate situations, not by a conscious formulation of generalized code of conduct. This reflects the fact that the teaching of what is right and wrong is done with reference to isolated, concrete acts of behavior; relatively little effort is made to help young people generalize from these situations or help them develop a coherent moral philosophy.²

¹August B. Hollingshead, Elmtown's Youth (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1949), p. 444

²R. J. Havighurst & H. Taba, Adolescent Character and Personality (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1949), p. 95

Havighurst, in collaboration with Neugarten,¹ disavows the claim that a child's character is molded by what he reads. Recent investigations have upheld his doubt of this influence. This is particularly true in a society where a child has personal relationships of some emotional intensity with a variety of people outside the immediate family. Havighurst and Neugarten conclude that it is doubtful that a child learns as much from characters in a book as he learns from the people with whom he interacts.

From evidence cited, it appears that concepts of behavior are not formed by a single dominant force such as environmental, biological, or sociological. It seems to be the combined effect of these three.

Modification of behavioral concepts through group discussion. --The adolescent is emerging from a self-centered to a group-centered level of development. The desire to be identified with a peer group through subscribing to their actions, speech, mode of dress, and thinking, is dominant with this age. Since youth has a distinct attachment to group activity, it could be through the dynamics of group action that the change in any one individual's behavioral concepts might be accomplished. Strang supports this point of view:

The member's habitual ways of thinking are challenged by new points of view by his peers. Thus, in many ways, through participation in group life, the student is aided in self-discovery and self-realization.²

¹R. J. Havighurst and B. L. Neugarten, Society and Education (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1957), p. 153.

²Ruth Strang, Group Work in Education (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1958), p. 19.

In another part of her book, Strang points out the probable value of group discussion in developing social attitudes and convictions:

A discussion may also have the personal value of building healthy mutual attitudes. It may relieve tensions, increase sociability, and lead to deeper convictions about one's own beliefs. It may clarify certain personal problems by obtaining the more objective viewpoint of others on them. ¹

It appears that group discussion can have a profound effect on the points of view of those who participate. In this connection Bennett makes the following statement:

Uniformly, the experiments established that group discussion is a more effective instrument for influencing attitudes than the lecture method. ²

Jones has this to say about influencing the moral knowledge of children:

Evidence has been presented to show that measurable improvement in moral behavior was affected through one of our teaching methods, namely, the experiencing plus discussion method. . . . Over against the positive finding, however, is the sobering fact that the amount of the improvement in this experiment even under our most successful method was small. . . .

However, it may be said that the results of this study lead us to believe that though all instruction in character should be indirect from the point of view of the learner, it should be direct or planned rather than incidental or unplanned from the point of view of the teacher. ³

It is understandable that the results of experiencing plus discussion cannot be great, owing to the brief period during the day that the youngster is in school. It can be

¹Ruth Strang, Group Work in Education (New York: Harper and Brothers, Publishers, 1958), p. 273

²Margaret E. Bennett, Guidance in Groups (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1955), p. 107

³Vernon Jones, Character and Citizenship Training in the Public School (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1936), pp. 180-81

imputed that the instruction should be indirect from the point of view of the student but direct and well planned from the point of view of the group guidance counselor.

The group approach. --Warters ¹ indicates that group guidance is designed to impart information needed by students and to help them socialize their attitudes, habits, opinions and judgments. It is to help them develop the power of self-direction. Students are often able to discuss in a group those problems they find difficult to discuss in a private interview. It helps the shy student to overcome the feeling of isolation and to verbalize fears and anxieties. Guilt feelings can be aired, tensions released, and issues clarified.

According to Humphrey ² there are two types of group guidance orientation, factual and attitudinal. With the factual approach, the counselor prepares information to be studied or discussed. With attitudinal approach, not only will acquisition of knowledge be stressed, but the students will be helped to develop attitudes that make for self-direction and self-management. The scope of this study will be confined to the results of attitudinal orientation in qualifying concepts of social behavior.

With this study, two different methods of group discussions were used. In the one method, the direct or counselor-centered, the counselor conducts the discussions, weighs and channels the responses. The other, known as student-

¹Jane Warters, High School Personnel Work Today (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1956), p. 239

²J. A. Humphreys & A. E. Traxler, Guidance Services (Chicago: Science Research Associates, Inc., 1954), pp. 189-90

centered, involves the students choosing a panel from their own group to handle the discussions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Subjects for this study were 194 eighth grade students from seven out of eleven group guidance classes scheduled for the junior high school. Of the seven classes, three (sections 5, 6 and 11) were selected to serve as control groups, and four (sections 3, 4, 7 and 9) were designated as experimental. Structured discussions were promoted with the four experimental sections, whereas none was conducted with the control.

Student-centered discussions were permitted in two of the four experimental sections. That is, members of the group selected a panel to lead the discussion and formulate the views and conclusions of the members. In the other two experimental sections, the counselor led and moderated the discussion and summarized the opinions and judgment of the group.

The material used in the discussions consisted of two questionnaires comprising twenty-five questions, equivalent in content and response as far as it was possible. The questions referred to problems common to youth at an eighth grade level of social experience. Care was exercised to simplify the wording of the questions, inasmuch as the aggregate of the seven group guidance classes represented a spread

of intelligence quotients from superior to borderline. An attempt was made to word the questions so as to reduce to a minimum possible misinterpretation. The questionnaires were labeled List A and List B, and each provided a choice of three answers for each question: "Yes," "Don't Know," and "No." The respondent merely placed a check mark in the column of his choice.

List A was given in the spring of 1958 to seven group guidance classes. After four discussion periods List B was given. The students were instructed to read each question carefully and then place a check mark under the heading of the answer of their choice. Each question was to be answered before returning the questionnaire to the counselor. To minimize any influence the counselor may have had on the respondent's choice of answers, the groups were told not to write their names on the questionnaires.

In the four experimental groups, four consecutive group discussion periods were needed to review their initial choice of answers prior to retesting with List B. Each member of the experimental groups was allowed to use an extra unmarked copy of List A as a guide during the discussions.

In the school where the study was made, the entire eighth grade is assembled into eleven homogeneous ability groups. Pupils are grouped homogeneously according to individual scores made on group intelligence tests. As mentioned previously, this study was conducted with seven of these groups. Sections three and seven from the experi-

mental group were selected for conducting student-centered forums, and sections four and nine from the experimental group were held as counselor-motivated forums. Sections three and seven and four and nine were matched with respect to intelligence, as measured by an Otis Quick Scoring Mental Ability Test form EM. Sections five, six and eleven served as control groups

After testing, an item analysis was made of the choice of answers from each of the seven groups. The shift of opinion on each item from positive to negative, or vice versa, indicated by the examination of the answers made by the experimental groups, was compared with any apparent consistency of responses to the same questions from the control groups. Special note was made as to which technique, counselor-centered or student-centered forms of discussion, showed the greater shift in opinion.

From List A and List B ten corresponding questions were selected on which the experimental groups registered a shift of opinion. These questions were then analyzed in an attempt to discern possible or probable causes for these shifts. Later, it was decided to use these ten corresponding questions as a basis for follow-up.

Retests were conducted with two of the four discussion groups in the fall, after a time lapse of five months, or when the students were in the ninth grade. It was decided to reverse the order of items for the retests. Ten questions from List B were administered and followed by discussion. After one discussion period the two groups were tested a

week later with ten equivalent questions from List A. The overall shift of opinion evidenced by the choice of answers was again converted into percentages. These data were used as a basis for conclusions concerning the efficacy of each of the types of discussion in promoting attitudinal changes in social behavior. By reversing the order of retest, that is, in administering List B before List A, it was expected that a higher correlation of the effects of group discussion would be evident. This reversal was designed to equalize the effect of carry-over in choice of answer should one question have more emotional appeal than its corresponding equivalent. Empirically, by reversing the testing order, one oblique response would have a tendency to cancel out the other when comparing the answers to those given for the identical question earlier in the year.

A combined listing of the twenty-five questions from List A and List B are found in the appendix ¹ of this study. An asterisk marks the sets of ten questions selected for the retest.

¹See Appendix page 36

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

The results are based upon the responses of control and experimental groups to problems of social behavior that were presented to them. A method was devised for evaluating the response of pupils to the twenty-five questions on the equivalent questionnaires. An answer which was deemed logical, according to generally accepted standards, was selected for each question on List A and List B as the "Right." The results of the tabulation are shown in Tables 1 and 2. The percentages of the "Right," "Don't Know," and "Wrong" responses made by all seven group guidance classes are indicated. Included in the tables are percentage figures of pre- and post discussion tabulations for the purpose of facilitating observation of differences in the efficacy of forum motivation counselor-centered and student-centered discussion.

Student-centered sections 3 and 7 have the greater percentage of students choosing right answers on List B. Without exception, all seven groups show shifts of opinion during the period between the administration of List A and List B. The respondents of the experimental groups reveal an appreciable shift from positive to uncertain. The exception appears among members of section 7 where the shift

is to the wrong answer. Six of the seven group guidance sections show almost a ten percent shift from the "Right" column to the "Wrong" column between List A and List B. The only exception is section 3 which shows an increase of five percent.

A more definitive comparison of the merits of student and counselor-centered group discussions was attempted by making an item tabulation of the shift in responses between List A and List B. A notation was made of the "Wrong" and "Don't Know" responses that an experimental section made. The difference in total responses was established by subtracting the total of the uncertain responses on one list from that of the wrong on the equivalent list. For example, on List A a certain question had fifteen correct responses, five "Don't Know," and one "Wrong." After discussion the students responded to the same question on equivalent List B with ten "Right," nine "Don't Know," and two "Wrong." Adding the "Don't Know" and "Wrong" responses for that question on both lists and subtracting one from the other shows a difference of five. When twenty-one students answered the question there was an apparent shift of opinion of 23.8 percent.

Tables 3 and 4 show the total shift of opinion of all seven group guidance classes. Adjustments were made in computing percentages for all groups to compensate for absence of pupils on the different days List A and List B were given. With the exception of section 5, in which there was no change, attendance varied at all section meetings by only one or two pupils.

TABLE 1

PERCENTAGES OF RIGHT, DON'T KNOW, AND WRONG RESPONSES TO TWO MATCHING
LISTS OF QUESTIONS BY STUDENT-CENTERED AND COUNSELOR-CENTERED
EXPERIMENTAL SECTIONS OF EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS.

	Section 3 Student-Centered List A List B		Section 4 Counselor-Centered List A List B		Section 7 Student-Centered List A List B		Section 9 Counselor-Centered List A List B	
W	78.0 13.7 8.3	65.2 21.5 13.3	60.0 17.2 22.5	46.7 21.5 32.0	65.2 17.2 17.2	55.5 17.4 27.0	54.5 30.0 15.4	54. 21. 24.

TABLE 2

PERCENTAGES OF RIGHT, DON'T KNOW, AND WRONG RESPONSES TO TWO MATCHING
LISTS OF QUESTIONS BY CONTROL SECTIONS OF EIGHTH GRADE STUDENTS

	Section 5*		Section 6*		Section 11*	
	List A	List B	List A	List B	List A	List B
Right	56.0	49.0	64.0	54.0	60.0	51.0
Don't know	21.5	21.0	18.8	18.7	21.7	23.0
Wrong	22.3	30.0	16.6	27.0	17.8	25.2

*No Discussions were held with these sections.

TABLE 3

COMPARISON OF PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN RESPONSES AMONG EXPERIMENTAL SECTIONS BETWEEN ADMINISTRATION OF LIST A AND LIST B

Student-Centered Section 3 Section 7		Counselor-Centered Section 4 Section 9	
Number of Pupils	21	32	21
Total Responses*	525	800	525
Number of Shifts	73	65	83
Percent of Change	13.9	8.1	15.8

TABLE 4

COMPARISON OF PERCENTAGE CHANGE IN RESPONSES AMONG CONTROL SECTIONS BETWEEN ADMINISTRATION OF LIST A AND LIST B

	Section 5	Section 6	Section 11
Number of Pupils	28	31	20
Total Responses*	700	775	500
Number of Shifts	65	104	35
Percent of Change	9.3	13.4	7.0

*Responses are the product of the number of pupils multiplied by the number of questions (25).

When comparing the experimental sections with control sections the percentage of shift in opinion appears to be negligible. For example, control section 6 presents a shifting of opinion of 13.4 percent against 13.9 percent in experimental section 3. Upon referring to Tables 1 and 2, it is observed that the shift of opinion in section 6 is from "Right" to "Wrong," whereas the major shift of opinion of experimental section 3 is toward the uncertain category. The same apparent conclusion can be inferred from experimental sections 4 and 9 and control sections 5 and 11. When the control and the experimental sections are contrasted, it would seem that discussions conducted with the experimental sections have little effect in changing the behavioral concepts of eighth grade pupils.

Table 5 reveals a contrast in change of opinion in percent between the student-centered and counselor-centered types of group discussion. In addition, the average in percent for these experimental sections is compared with the average of the three control sections. The percentages were obtained by adding the total shifts of opinion for each group guidance class and dividing by the total number of responses for each section. The control groups indicate a shift of opinion of 10.3 percent against a 10.6 percent in the experimental classes. A difference of only .3 of one percent is evident. Likewise, the same difference in percent exists between counselor-centered and student-centered forums. With this experiment each appear about equal in motivating over-all changes in attitudes.

TABLE 5

AVERAGE PERCENTAGES OF CHANGE FOR COMBINED EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL SECTIONS

Sections	Percent
Student-Centered.	10.4
Counselor-Centered.	10.7
All Experimental.	10.6
All Control.	10.3

For interpreting these percentages it is important to refer again to Tables 1 and 2. The slight advantage of the experimental over the control sections, in terms of opinion shift, is supported in the instances of sections 3 and 4. In these two groups there is a tendency to swing toward the "Don't Know." At least, in these two groups, discussion may have had the effect of encouraging the students to be more reflective about behavioral problems.

Table 6 shows the mental ability scores of all seven group guidance sections along with number, quartile, and range of each section. The basic intelligence of each section is but one of several factors which might be related to the results of group discussion. The range of intelligence scores of the combined experimental sections is 71 to 120 in contrast to 74 to 113 for the sections serving as control. The mathematical middle for the range spread of all the experimental sections is 95.5, while that of the control sections is 93.5. The average median score of the experimental sections is 99.9 in contrast to an average of 96.8 for those designated as control.

TABLE 6

COMPARISON OF MENTAL ABILITY SCORES OF ALL SEVEN
GROUP GUIDANCE SECTIONS

Section	Number	Quartile ₁	Quartile ₂	Quartile ₃	Range
E x p e r i m e n t a l					
3	24	104.0	110.6	113.2	98-120
4	24	100.0	105.0	111.0	94-117
7	32	90.5	96.0	102.6	80-104
9	26	82.6	88.0	94.3	71-100
C o n t r o l					
5	31	99.0	102.0	105.0	83-113
6	34	94.0	101.0	103.0	74-112
11	20	84.0	87.3	93.0	77- 99

As mentioned previously, ten questions each were selected from matching Lists A and B. It was decided to administer these two matching lists the following school year, when the students would be in the ninth grade. Sections 3 and 9, on the basis of extremes of average intelligence, were chosen for this study. The results are shown on Tables 7 and 8. Table 7 gives a breakdown by percents of the "Right," "Don't Know," and "Wrong" responses for the ten selected follow-up questions. It should be noted that the percent shifting from "Right" to "Wrong" is not so high as when the pupils were in the eighth grade.

Two factors should be considered as contributing to the loss in percentage of wrong answers. One is the reversal of the order in which the lists were presented.

TABLE 7

THE PERCENTAGES OF RIGHT, DON'T KNOW, AND WRONG RESPONSES MADE BY TWO EIGHTH GRADE EXPERIMENTAL SECTIONS ON TWO LISTS OF TEN MATCHING QUESTIONS SELECTED FROM LISTS A AND B WITH SUBSEQUENT FOLLOW-UP WHEN THE PUPILS WERE IN THE NINTH GRADE.

	Section 3 ^a Student-Centered List A List B		Section 3 ^b Student-Centered List B List A		Section 9 ^a Counselor-Centered List A List B		Section 9 ^b Counselor-Centered List B List A	
	73.3 18.0 8.5	56.0 23.5 20.5	62.5 21.2 16.0	52.0 24.5 24.0	45.3 39.6 15.0	32.9 34.5 32.5	54.0 17.2 28.7	50.3 14.0 35.0
Know								

a. Eighth Grade.
b. Ninth Grade.

TABLE 8

COMPARATIVE SHIFT OF OPINION OF TWO EIGHTH GRADE EXPERIMENTAL
SECTIONS USING TWO LISTS OF TEN MATCHING QUESTIONS FROM
LISTS A AND B WITH SUBSEQUENT FOLLOW-UP WHEN
PUPILS WERE IN THE NINTH GRADE.

	Student-Centered, Group 3 ^a Group 3 ^b		Counselor-Centered, Group 9 ^a Group 9 ^b	
Number of Pupils	21	23	26	26
Total Responses*	210	230	260	260
Number of Shifts	34	22	21	25
Percent Change	16.0	9.6	8.1	9.6

a. Eighth Grade

b. Ninth Grade

*. Number of pupils multiplied by number of questions (10).

In the follow-up, List B preceded List A. Another factor is the maturation of the pupils.

In the eighth grade, youngsters generally are in a period of adolescent development when some of the major physical changes take place. The interim of five months between the initial testing and the follow-up should be considered.

It is shown in Table 8 that section 3 had a greater shift in opinion (16 percent) when the two tests were initially given. The follow-up shows that section 3 had a drop in percentage of 6.4, whereas, section 9 had an increase of 1.5 percent. It is observed that section 3 and section 9 have identical percentages (9.6 percent) in shift of opinion on the follow-up test.

Throughout this study no attempt was made to identify the respondents. In keeping all responses anonymous, it was assumed that the pupils' choice of answers would reflect their convictions with little attempt to please the counselor.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has investigated some of the attitudes, beliefs, and concepts of eighth graders related to problems involving decisions of personal and social behavior. This investigation has attempted to reveal some of the values which might be attributed to group discussion as a medium for the modification of social values and attitudes. From the data presented in the previous chapter a number of conclusions may be properly drawn.

1. The apparent influence of group discussion, as measured by responses of students to two sets of comparable questions on social attitudes, does not follow a consistent pattern with students having the discussion experience.

The data of this study revealed that experimental sections 3 and 4 moved slightly from "Right" to "Wrong" in their responses, but also increased in the percentage of responses on "Don't Know" on List B. Experimental section 7 shifted also from "Right" to "Wrong" but remained constant in the "Don't Know" column. Experimental section 9 remained constant in the "Right" column, increased in the "Wrong," and decreased in the "Don't Know" columns. In contrast, the the three control sections shifted quite consistently from

"Right" to "Wrong" and remained constant in the percentage of "Don't Know" responses.

This conclusion is further substantiated by comparison of the percentage change of attitudes among four experimental sections. The percentages of change vary widely from 6.6 to 15.8 percent. The control sections show slightly more consistency with a range from 7.0 to 13.4 percent of change in responses from List A to List B. It might be concluded that group discussion was received and assimilated in widely varying ways by the four experimental sections.

2. Group discussion appears to have the effect of making the relatively more intelligent students more reflective in making choices regarding problems of social attitudes.

When experimental sections 3 and 4 were compared with sections 7 and 9 it was shown that the former two sections had an increase of "Don't Know" responses on List B. In contrast, section 7 showed no increase in the "Don't Know" response and section 9 showed a decrease. A logical inference from these limited data is that sections 3 and 4, with relatively high IQs became more reflective about the questions as a result of group discussion and were more cautious in their responses. This is further substantiated by the fact that both sections 3 and 4 showed a much higher percentage of shift than sections 7 and 9. In other words, they may have been thinking more about the questions and

the group as a whole made more item shifts among the three possible responses.

3. With regard to the influence of leadership followed in group discussion, there is no appreciable difference between the student-centered and counselor-centered leadership.

One would have expected a student-centered discussion with active involvement of a majority of students to have had greater influence upon values important in the peer culture, than the counselor-centered discussion. The data of this study revealed little difference between the two types. The counselor-centered actually had a slightly larger average percentage of change of attitude. The results on this point are quite inconclusive, since the precise differences between the counselor-centered and student-centered patterns were actually not as pronounced as they might have been with a more autocratic, highly directive, counselor.

4. The differences in change of attitude between the experimental sections subjected to discussion and the control sections who held no discussion were negligible as measured by the two test instruments.

It might have been anticipated that the discussion groups would move from a lower to higher percentage of "Right" upon the administration of List B. Actually, all four experimental sections scored a lower percentage of "Right" answers on this second list than they did on the first one. This trend was also indicated in the same

relative proportion for all three of the control sections. One may infer that List B choices were more thought provoking than those in List A. Even if this were the case, the experimental sections did no better on List B than the control sections, even with the benefit of four organized discussion periods. It may have been true that the control sections discussed these items informally outside of class, perhaps not to any great extent since they did not have the questions in their possession outside the class room.

A further check on the comparability of List A with List B was made by a follow-up with experimental sections 3 and 9, approximately five months later, when the students were in the ninth grade. Ten selected items from List B were given first, followed two days later by ten comparable items from List A. These items were also discussed, but the same pattern of decrease of "Right" responses for both sections prevailed. These results would further substantiate the conclusion that group discussion per se does not exert a measureable influence upon attitudes in the direction of conforming to the more established social mores.

5. The extent of group interaction during group discussion may be a factor in stimulating a more reflective response among group members.

Level of intelligence has already been indicated as a possible factor in a more deliberative and cautious reaction to problems involving social attitudes. An additional factor, closely related to the brightness of students, is the extent to which they interact in the sharing of ideas.

It was observed by the writer that both sections 3 and 4 engaged in discussion with comparable enthusiasm, even though one was student-centered and the other counselor-centered. Both showed a relatively high percentage of change in responses between administration of List A and List B in contrast to sections 7 and 9.

When the degree of interaction in section 7 was subjectively compared with that of section 9 it was observed that students in section 7 showed much more enthusiasm for interacting with each other in the discussion of items on List A. The data revealed that section 7 remained constant in the "Don't Know" column while section 9 decreased appreciably in the selection of "Don't Know" and increased correspondingly in the "Wrong" column. This might be inferred as an indication of somewhat unreflective responses among members of section 9 who did not interact dynamically with their peers. The median IQ of section 7 is eight points higher than section 9. It may be expected that pupils with higher intelligence are better equipped to verbalize their thoughts and problems, and therefore interact more meaningfully and with greater facility.

It is recommended for a future study of this kind that the following be considered:

1. Each question should be carefully matched as to content validity and reliability. For example, questions from List A and corresponding counterparts from List B will illustrate.

4A. You are with a friend in a store and you see him pick up an article from the floor and put it in his pocket. It was something that had fallen from the counter. Your friend explained he had not taken anything. The article was on the floor and dirty. Perhaps, it would have been stepped upon and broken. Would you overlook this act of your friend?

4B. Your friend picks up a pen in the hall. You see him quickly put it into his pocket with no explanation to you. You both know to whom the pen belongs. Would you overlook this act of your friend?

The basic concept of these questions is "finders keepers." After discussion, there was a change of opinion away from the correct answer "No." The first question involved an article that fell from the counter; whereas the item in question 4B was a lost pen. The group feeling about a lost pen should be considered in analyzing the response to this question. Some students would not censure a friend for picking up a useful article like a pen in the hall, yet, the same pupils may be critical of the same friend for finding an unnamed article that has fallen off a counter in a store.

5A. You purchase something at a store and the clerk gives you 25¢ too much in change. The store is busy and they appear to be doing a big business. It can be assumed they will never miss the 25¢. Would you go back and call the mistake to the clerk's attention?

5B. You purchase some milk at the cafeteria. you are given four cents instead of three cents in change. Is it necessary to go to the trouble of returning one cent?

The accepted answer for question five is "Yes." A noticeable shift from "Right" to "wrong" was observed when the equivalent question on List B was scored. In "A"

question, twenty-five cents has been overpaid. In contrast, only one cent is involved in question "B." The difference between the two amounts could be instrumental as a cause for the shifting of opinion from "Right" to "Wrong." Perhaps, a material rather than a moral value colored the decision causing a shift to the "Wrong" answer for the question. It was the thought of most of the respondents that one cent was not worth returning.

2. Norms should be established for the two sets of questions. This could be accomplished by a pilot administering of the questions, without discussion, to seventy or eighty eighth grade students other than those selected for the experiment.

3. The questionnaires should be coded so the answers of each respondent could be identified. A check list of individual responses could be prepared and individual differences in opinion shift could be noted and evaluated.

4. Since this study sampled attitudes and opinions about problems of social behavior many of which were conditioned in early childhood, it is understandable that it takes more than a few brief discussion periods to effect any changes in concepts. It would be advisable to lengthen the discussion periods and reduce the number of questions.

5. A sociogram should be prepared to identify the "star pupil or pupils" for student-centered discussion sections. The selection of students to whom the major portion of the room is attracted might serve to sharpen the

interest of the participants. Most attitudes exhibited by children are those that have been fixed by strong emotional involvement through interaction with others. Havighurst and Taba make this observation:

...It need hardly be said that the development of character, as is true of any socializing process, takes place in an emotional context and in relation to other personalities. The byplay of feelings and emotions has profound influence on the nature of moral beliefs and their efficacy in influencing conduct.¹

The selection of a "star of the group" to lead the discussions might create more emotional influence, thus affecting deepseated fixations that could result in changes in opinion.

6. Role playing should be used for motivating and enlivening the discussion periods.

An opportunity would be thus afforded for gaining emotionally colored impressions through seeing the problem acted out and participation in the acting process.

7. Selected human relation movies or slides should be utilized during discussions to portray scenes that are not easily described in words.

Impressions may be made by visual aids that would be difficult to produce with group discussions alone.

Though nothing actually positive in favor of group guidance has been revealed in this study, it should not be construed as an indictment against it. The investigation attempted to determine if group discussion could change any

¹Robert J. Havighurst and Hilda Taba, Adolescent Character and Personality (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1949), p. 95

existing concepts eighth grade boys and girls have on social behavior.

By and large, many of the problems in List A and List B, stimulated patterns of thinking that had been developed prior to attendance at the junior high school. Group discussion was attempting to modify some erroneous concepts that may have been made rigid through habit. If the problems had required only superficial decisions and opinions were unformed, the results of the brief discussions may have been more gratifying. Along this vein, Utterback has this to say about conferences:

...Those who entered the conference with opinions still unformed shifted most; those whose views were pronounced but yet not held with complete confidence ranked second in amounting of shifting; those who held opinions with complete confidence shifted least. ¹

Due to the relatively small amount of time the child spends in school, Jones ² points out it is probably impossible to achieve, through instruction, any worthwhile improvement in what he terms character and citizenship. The good that may be done is grossly influenced by such factors as home background, mental ability, culture, and subculture.

It appears group discussions could create more changes in attitudes and concepts if those attitudes and concepts have not become fixed through use or action. If group discussion is indicted, it is because a sudden change in the

¹William E. Utterback, "The Influence of Conference on Opinion," The Quarterly Journal of Speech, XXXVI (October, 1950), 365-70

²Vernon Jones, Character and Citizenship Training in the Public School (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1936), p. 312

concepts of the participants is expected immediately after a discussion period rather than a slight change made in progressive steps through a series of organized group discussions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a pleasant task for the writer to acknowledge the gracious cooperation of Dr. Frank M. Pelton and Dr. E. Kenneth Carpenter in the writing of this thesis. Their considered suggestions during the "drafting" was indeed helpful.

Special thanks are due Dr. S. Marvin Rife for his encouragement and assistance during the "hoe and spade" period in the development of this study. His guidance in the handling of data made it all possible.

J.R.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS OF EQUIVALENT LISTS A AND B COMBINED THOSE MARKED * WERE USED IN THE FOLLOW-UP.

		Don't	
		Yes	Know No
1A.	If you belonged to a dramatic club and you did not get the part in a play that you felt you could do better than the one chosen, would you quit the club?	_____	_____
1B.	If you belonged to a camping club which never camped at spots of your choice, would you quit the club?	_____	_____
2A.	It is a stormy night. The streets and roads are covered with ice and it is dangerous. There is a basketball game to be played ten miles away. You have decided not to attend but remain at home and finish a social studies assignment. A close friend drops by and asks you to go. Would you refuse?	_____	_____
2B.	If you have made up your mind to stay home and work on a school assignment and a close friend drops by and asks you to go out with him. Would you refuse?	_____	_____
3A.	You are with a gang and they decide to break street lights. You throw rocks with the rest of the gang but you are careful to aim so as to miss the lights. Are you doing anything wrong?	_____	_____
3B.	Boys you are with decide to destroy some property in the neighborhood. You pretend you are breaking and destroying things but you do no damage. Are you doing anything wrong?	_____	_____
*4A.	You are with a friend in a store and you see him pick up an article from the floor and put it in his pocket. It was something that had fallen from the counter. Your friend explained he had not taken anything. The article was on the floor and dirty. Perhaps, it would have been stepped upon and broken. Would you overlook this act of your friend?	_____	_____

		Don't	
		Yes	Know No
*4B.	Your friend picks up a pen in the hall. You see him quickly put it into his pocket with no explanation to you. You both know to whom the pen belongs. Would you overlook this act of your friend?	_____	_____
*5A.	You purchase something at a store and the clerk gives you 25¢ too much in change. The store is busy and they appear to be doing a big business. It can be assumed they will never miss the 25¢. Would you go back and call the mistake to the clerk's attention?	_____	_____
*5B.	You purchase some milk at the cafeteria. You are given four cents instead of three cents in change. Is it necessary to go to the trouble of returning one cent?	_____	_____
6A.	You do not like to carry your lunch, so your mother gives you 30¢ a day so you buy warm food at the cafeteria. You spend most of it for soft drinks and candy. Your mother does not ask how you spend the money. Is it all right for you to continue to do this?	_____	_____
6B.	You are given some money for a church offering each Sunday. You have developed the habit of keeping a small portion of it to spend on candy and soft drinks; the rest you give to the church. If no one has told you to give all of the money to the church is it all right to continue doing this each Sunday?	_____	_____
7A.	You run around with a crowd of boys all of whom you like very much. Two of the boys occasionally steal small inexpensive items from a corner drug store. Would these acts make any difference in your preference for being part of the group?	_____	_____
7B.	Two boys in a club you belong to occasionally take small amounts of money from their mothers' pocketbooks to buy candy, some of which they give to you. Would this make any difference in your belonging to the club?	_____	_____
*8A.	You like Betty but you know that Betty's habits, in some instances, are not good. For example, she slips out of her house at night and meets some friends at a certain corner. These friends are of questionable character. Would you continue the friendship?	_____	_____

		Don't		
		Yes	Know	No
*8B.	You have a friend you like very much but he fools his parents and slips out at night to run around with a gang. This gang is often in trouble with the police and neighborhood. Would you continue the friendship?	_____	_____	_____
9A.	A boy in your crowd, who is 16, gets permission to use his father's car with the understanding he is to drive carefully. You know about this but you also know he drives recklessly. Since it is not your father's car would you be concerned about it?	_____	_____	_____
10A.	You have a friend who continually uses foul and obscene language and repeats dirty stories. Would you continue the friendship?	_____	_____	_____
10B.	A good friend of yours continually makes foul remarks about people and tells dirty stories. Would you continue the friendship even though he is popular with some boys and girls?	_____	_____	_____
11A.	Small articles around the school and in the gym. are being stolen. You know the thief. Nothing of yours has been stolen but the principal is anxious to catch the one responsible. Do you have an obligation to identify the thief?	_____	_____	_____
11B.	You know a person who steals and is not to be trusted. Something is taken from a classroom he attends. Do you have an obligation to identify him?	_____	_____	_____
12A.	A friend of yours bunks school. You can write him an excuse that will get by and save him from being suspended. Would you write this excuse?	_____	_____	_____
12B.	Is it all right for you to write an excuse for a friend if it will keep him from being suspended?	_____	_____	_____
*13A.	You are a good student in school liked by the teachers and classmates. Your name is among the list of those who are to be elected by the school as the "best citizen." At home you are surly, disrespectful, and neglect household chores. Would you allow your name to remain on the candidates list?	_____	_____	_____

		Don't		
		Yes	Know	No
*13B.	You have a good reputation at school and your name is among those to be chosen "all-around citizen." At home you are surly, selfish, disrespectful, and just an "all-around heel." Since there is little resemblance between your conduct at school and at home is it right to let your name remain on the ballot?	_____	_____	_____
14A.	You are not 16 but a friend who is comes by in his father's car that he has been allowed to have of the afternoon. You go for a drive and he asks you to take the wheel. You have learned to drive your uncle's car around a farm. You have never driven on the highway. You are anxious to drive your friend's car. Would you drive it for a mile or two?	_____	_____	_____
14B.	You are not 16 but you know how to drive a car. A friend who is 16 gives you permission to drive his car for a few miles down the highway. Would you accept the invitation?	_____	_____	_____
15A.	A mistake is made in your favor by the teacher in grading midterm exams. If you report the mistake it will change your grade from a "C" to a "D." Would you call the mistake to the teacher's attention?	_____	_____	_____
15B.	A mistake is made by the school office in checking marks and your name is placed on the honor roll. Are you doing anything wrong in neglecting to call the error to the attention of the office, if to do so, would keep you from getting the bicycle promised by your father?	_____	_____	_____
*16A.	You find a pocket dictionary and you do not make an honest effort to find the owner. You use the dictionary and it helps you with your school work. Are you doing anything wrong?	_____	_____	_____
*16B.	You find a ball point pen the kind you have always wanted, and it is a great help with your school work. Are you doing anything wrong in not trying to find the owner?	_____	_____	_____
17A.	You hear gossip about a friend which you know is untrue. It is so funny that it makes you the center of attention when you repeat it. Would you continue telling the story when your friend is not around?	_____	_____	_____

		Don't		
		Yes	Know	No
17B.	Is it all right to say unkind things behind a person's back just in fun?	_____	_____	_____
18A.	A good friend of yours is trying to copy from your paper during a test. Would you cover your paper?	_____	_____	_____
18B.	Your friend keeps looking at your paper during the midyear exam. Would you cover your paper?	_____	_____	_____
19A.	Your teacher is giving a midyear exam. Your friend has the subject first period and you have the class third period. Would you ask your friend at the end of the first period what questions were used?	_____	_____	_____
19B.	Would you ask a friend what questions were asked on a test if you are going to have the same test later in the day?	_____	_____	_____
*20A.	You go to the movies. You can get in for half price if you tell the ticket seller you are eleven. Would you do this when you have had your thirteenth birthday?	_____	_____	_____
*20B.	A conductor lets you ride a train to New York for half fare because he thinks you are under age. You decide to buy your mother a present with the money you will save. Would you tell the conductor that you should pay full fare?	_____	_____	_____
21A.	You find a wallet at the railroad station. It contains ten dollars but there is no identification. Would you turn it over to the lost and found?	_____	_____	_____
21B.	You find a wallet at the bus terminal with some money in it but there is no identification. Are you obligated to turn it into the lost and found?	_____	_____	_____
*22A.	You and your friend are the last off the bus. Your friend has been bawled out by the bus driver for shoving. To get even with the bus driver he cuts some seats with a pocket knife. It will be hard to find out who did the damage as the bus carries both high and junior high school students. Would you insist that he tell the guidance counselor or principal what he had done?	_____	_____	_____

		Don't		
		Yes	Know	No
*22B.	You see a friend of yours deliberately damage school property because he is mad at a teacher. Would you insist that your friend see the guidance counselor or principal and tell why he did the damage?	_____	_____	_____
*23A.	The teacher allows you to grade each other's papers after a true and false test. Your friend whispers he did not do so well and asks that you change a few answers so he will make a passing grade. Since it will be easy to do and the teacher will not check the marks, would you do this for your friend?	_____	_____	_____
*23B.	You are permitted to grade a test paper for a friend. In order for him to make a passing grade you change some of the answers for him. If there is hardly any danger in being caught, would you do this?	_____	_____	_____
*24A.	Your father has agreed to let you stay out until 11:30 on Friday nights. The next morning, while you are eating a late breakfast, he what time you came in. You answer, "a little after 11:30," when actually it was 1:30. Have you been untruthful?	_____	_____	_____
*24B.	You have been assigned to cut some small pieces of wood at home for a club project. At the next meeting the club president asks if you have finished with your part. You tell him you have a few to do when you have not even started the work. Is this being untruthful?	_____	_____	_____
*25A.	During a football game you catch a pass and run down the side lines and make what everyone thinks, including the referee, is a touchdown. You know, while making the run, you stepped out of bounds about the five yard line. As you return the ball to the referee you see that your footprint is just outside the white chalk line. Would you point this out to the official?	_____	_____	_____
*25B.	During a baseball game, at a close play at home plate, the umpire calls you safe. You know the catcher tagged you with the ball before you touched the plate. Would you mention this to the umpire?	_____	_____	_____

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