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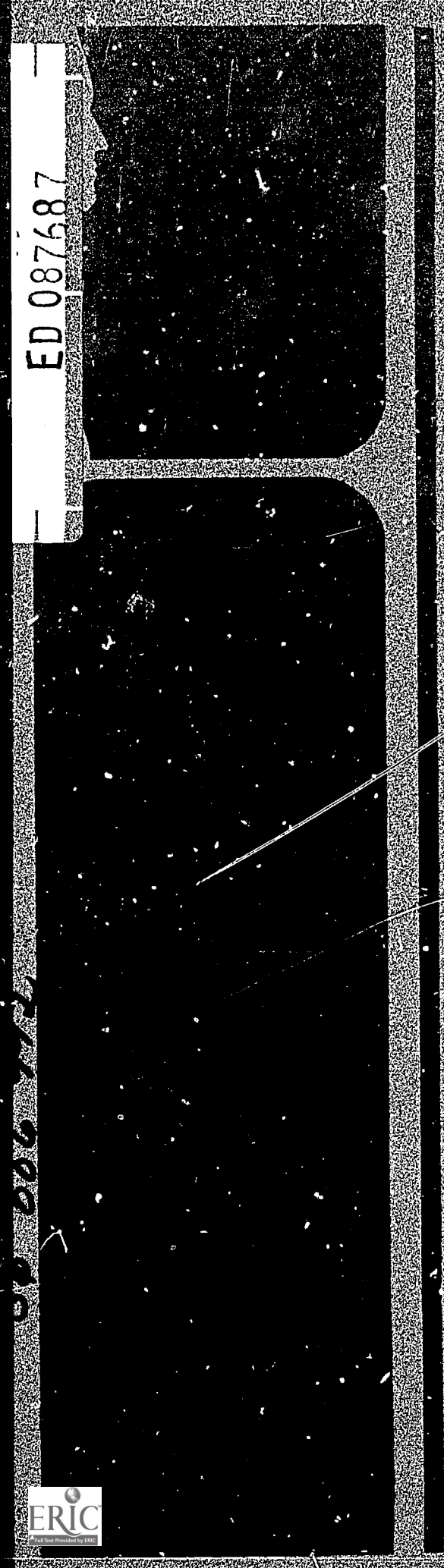
ABSTRACT

An American history class in Melbourne, Florida, provides an opportunity for tenth grade students to experience the reality of interpersonal interaction and small group cooperation in the classroom. The first three days of the year-long course are used to identify leaders and to assign groups, numbering five to seven students. In addition to covering course materials, the first three weeks are employed in gaining insight into group processes through discussion, films, slides, overhead transparencies, and handouts. Starting with the fourth week of class, a cooperative group state of development is entered by having students take over the responsibility for forming groups and assigning themselves more specific roles, while the teacher participates as consultant and observer. Day to day activities within this organizational structure include a day of preparation, three days of group work, and a day of evaluation. All group discussion of course content is based on the study of historical situations and social issues, drawing from textbooks, paper backs, films, and handouts. A questionnaire study of the students in this class and of a control class reveals that the group participation approach requires more effort on the student's part, increases peer group pressure, and results in higher attendance. Findings did not show an expected increase of confidence in handling interpersonal relationships. (KSM)



Cooperative Group Process

From General Motors to the neighborhood P.T.A., much of today's decision-making is done in small groups. The family, the office staff, the city council, the coffee clique--nearly everyone participates daily in some type of small group. Unfortunately, most adults have not had any formal training in the small group process. They have never been taught how groups function or how to make a group perform more efficiently.

At Melbourne High School in Melbourne, Florida, students are learning the skills of small group participation and practicing these skills on a daily basis--all while learning American history. The program is under the guidance of Elizabeth Wells, who has used the small group method in her tenth grade American history class for several years. The use of small group discussion is her primary teaching method, and students participate in groups several times each week.

Ms. Wells became involved with the small group method because she felt lecturing was ineffective. To her "a sea of faces is inscrutable," and she believes that "often failure results for a student because the teacher sees too late that he is not being reached." Ms. Wells preferred dealing with individuals and small groups, so she developed a plan for utilizing small group instruction to "teach" her regular American history class. Through several years of using the method she has developed her approach into a highly structured and organized form.

GETTING STARTED

From the first day of class, Ms. Wells' students know that this American history course is going to be different. On entering the classroom--a former bandroom--students find that the traditional school room arrangement has been abandoned. Desks or tables are arranged in groupings. There is no podium and the teacher's desk is located off to one side. Bulletin boards and posters preview group styles. One prominently displayed sign reads, "The Small Group Teaching People to Care About Other People."

Getting students involved starts immediately. The initial groups are formed during the first three days of class. In order to make these first groups as effective as possible, Ms. Wells seeks out the natural leaders in the class by using sociograms and forms the groups by assigning other students to work with the leaders.

The size of the groups is important. Ideally they are small enough for the individual not to be lost in a crowd but large enough for participation and self-evaluation. Experience in Melbourne has indicated that groups function best with no less than five and no more than seven members.

The groups are set to work immediately. Activities in the first days are designed to give the students some insight into group processes and provide them with ideas to discuss. Principles of group process are demonstrated in films, slides, and overhead transparencies that Ms. Wells uses. These materials point out the value of cooperation and the necessity of participation by all members of the group. One film that works especially well is "The Marvelous Mousetrap." It not only teaches the concept of capitalism but also demonstrates the importance of working together as a team to produce the best results. After students have viewed the films or slides, they discuss the ideas that are presented.

Much of what a student learns about group processes comes from his participation in the group discussions. To stimulate discussion, Ms. Wells uses some specially prepared "value" handouts, which are short documents that briefly state specific issues of a controversial nature. Sometimes hypothetical situations are posed. Students are encouraged to express their opinions and become involved in the discussion about these situations.

During the entire process of developing group skills, subject matter is being taught. A text is not read chapter by chapter, but all the group discussion is based on the study of historical situations and social issues. The teacher makes certain that students adequately cover material which she feels is important during the course of the year.

Ms. Wells notes that the effectiveness of the first three weeks of the semester is crucial to the eventual success of the small group approach. During this time several things must happen. Students must begin to understand and appreciate the value of the small group method; they must develop beginning

skills in inquiry, and most importantly they must become involved in their own education. When this level of development is reached, the students are ready for a more sophisticated form of group process, which Ms. Wells calls "cooperative grouping."

COOPERATIVE GROUPING

When students enter the cooperative grouping stage of development three aspects of the class procedure change. First, students take over the responsibility of forming groups. Second, more specific roles are assigned to the students. Finally, the teacher participates less in the day-to-day functioning of the groups and begins to serve primarily as consultant and observer.

The first step in forming the cooperative groups is for the students to decide who will serve as chairmen, or Moderators as they are called in Melbourne. It is preferred that the Moderators volunteer for the job, since it carries a great deal of responsibility and is rewarded with extra credit. However, if volunteers are not forthcoming a class election is held.

Once the Moderators are selected, they move around the classroom and select or "sign up" students to be in their groups. Selection is quite competitive, because the Moderators realize it is necessary to have students who are cooperative and willing to contribute if the group is to perform well. Ms. Wells points out that, surprisingly, Moderators seldom select close friends or discriminate by race, but instead look for students who will work together well as a group.

The life-span of a cooperative group is six weeks. At the end of this time the class reorganizes into new groups, so students can have maximum experience in working with a variety of individuals during the school year. Within a six-week period the Moderator has the right to "trade-off" members who are not performing well. This is done by two Moderators agreeing to trade members. Similarly, if a group finds its Moderator ineffective, they are encouraged to explain their dissatisfaction to him. If he fails to improve, the group has the right to request a new leader.

ROLES IN COOPERATIVE GROUPS

As the first cooperative groups are formed, the teacher devotes one class period to explain the different roles to be played in the groups. Each group is composed of a Moderator, Assistant Moderator, Evaluator, and Antagonists and Protagonists. The functions and responsibilities of each role are specifically defined.

Moderator. The role of Moderator is the key role; it is the leadership position. Moderators have considerable authority and responsibility; they are central to the success or failure of a group. Because of the importance of this role, Ms. Wells holds a Moderator training session. In this session, she carefully explains the other roles to be played in the groups and explains the procedure for assigning students to these roles.

Each Moderator first selects an Assistant Moderator, usually someone with a high achievement level. Evaluators are selected next and the remaining roles are then filled. An attempt is made to balance sex and race in each group. Each Moderator announces his assignments to his group.

In leading his group, the Moderator has specific responsibilities. He makes certain that each member understands his role and function. He keeps the discussions moving. He encourages all members to participate. He leads in the evaluation of individual members as well as of the group itself. In short, the Moderator assures that his cooperative group works together to achieve its objectives.

Assistant Moderator. The Assistant Moderator is primarily responsible for taking over the Moderator's duties should the Moderator be absent.

Evaluator. The Evaluator observes and records the participation of each group member. His record of each member's performance is used during evaluation sessions to help assess their overall contribution.

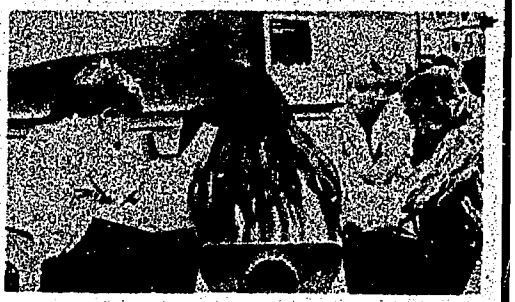
Antagonists and Protagonists. Group members who are not functioning as Moderator, Assistant Moderator, or Evaluator are classed as Antagonists and Protagonists. Group discussions are often generated by controversial topics. The material provided to students for the basis of their discussion holds a certain position to be true. Protagonists argue in support of the position; Antagonists argue against the position.

Teacher. What happens to the teacher while students are participating in the groups? Clearly, she does not take a coffee break. Her role in the group process is to serve as roving consultant and observer. Being relieved of the role of information-giver, she is free to interact with the groups when her counsel is needed or with individual students when they have particular problems. Her presence, however, is far less prominent than that of the traditional teacher.

One traditional function the teacher continues to serve in the cooperative group process is that of evaluator. The difference in this case is that the teacher is only one of the evaluators. The students also evaluate, both themselves and each other. The teacher evaluates their evaluations. Ms. Wells always reserves the right to ask group members to reevaluate themselves if she feels they are judging themselves too favorably or too severely.

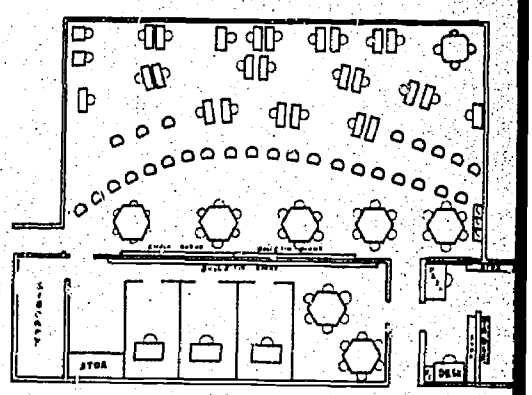
Deciding what subject matter will be taught and what materials will be used is another function of the teacher. Ms. Wells uses a basic text for each class and supplements the text with assignments from the schools' paperback library. Films and filmstrips are used for sessions when the whole class meets

GUIDE TO RATING	
Rating No. 5:	Outstanding lead involved, listen performance in e
Rating No. 4:	Above average in informed about t assigned role.
Rating No. 3:	Participates onl listens with a m
Rating No. 2:	Fails to particl not totally invo doesn't do make-
Rating No. 1:	Absent a great d make up missed w



Ms. Wells assists a temporarily "leaderless" group.

The optimum group size for cooperative group discussion is five to seven students.



The physical layout of the classroom graphically (left) and pictorially (

p, knowledge about the issue,
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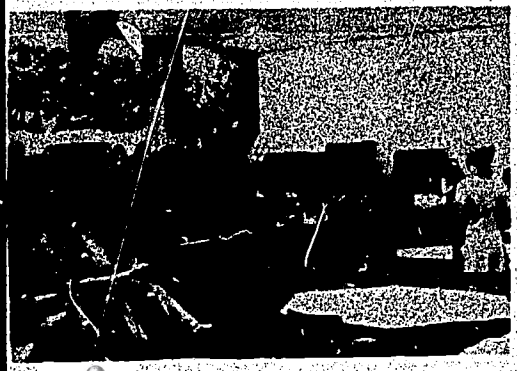
no participation, doesn't
asleep.

While the students are busy in cooperative groups, the teacher prepares for a future session.

Students concentrate hard on the self-evaluation process.



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together. The "value handouts" which she writes herself, are frequently used as the basis of small group discussions.

WHAT HAPPENS DAY-TO-DAY

Once the groups are formed and everyone understands his role, what happens? In a typical week, Monday is preparation day. Moderators meet with the teacher to plan their activities, group approaches to new material, problem students, leadership processes, evaluation of materials, and evaluation of groups. At the same time, the rest of the students prepare for their participation in the groups under the direction of a team-teacher or a student aide.

On Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday students participate in their cooperative group discussions. The amount of time allotted to these discussions is controlled so the groups adjourn when interest begins to wane. The last 10 or 15 minutes of each session are used by the Moderators to report to the entire class. The reports are stated in the form of hypotheses and supportive evidence.

At least part of Friday's class time is typically used for evaluation. During this time group members are asked to evaluate themselves individually and to evaluate their group as a cooperative unit. This kind of regular evaluation and feedback is an important motivator for the students.

EVALUATION

In describing the Melbourne program, evaluation has been mentioned several times. Since one of the most common criticisms of the small group approach is that evaluation of such groups is difficult, Ms. Wells has put considerable emphasis on evaluative methods. She now uses several forms of evaluation, with much of the evaluating done by the students themselves. The Moderator of each group is responsible for leading an oral evaluation period at the end of each group session. Daily records of these observations are kept.

At the end of a week or two, members make written evaluation of their performances. Again each member is evaluated by the Moderator, the other group members, and by himself. The guide for these evaluations is shown in the box below. Should a student be dissatisfied with the rating he receives, he has the right to ask for a private meeting of his group and for the teacher to re-evaluate the rating.

While students are evaluating themselves, the teacher is also evaluating them. During a cooperative group session the teacher rates students using the following criteria:

1. How the group self-evaluates
2. How the members carry out assigned roles
3. Meeting of stated objectives
4. Skill in analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating issues
5. Moderator's skill in promoting group effort

Each student's ratings are averaged to get a single score. The numerical ratings are later converted to letter grades (one equaling an A, five equaling an F) to obtain the student's final grade. The teacher's ratings are always posted, a practice that leads to considerable competition among the groups.

One-third to one-half of a student's final six weeks' grade is dependent on his performance in the cooperative group process. Ms. Wells determines this part of the grade by considering the role played by the student in the group, his peer evaluation, his self-evaluation, and her own observations. The remainder of a grade is based on testing, use of independent study time, class participation, project work, and written work.

STUDENTS' VIEW OF COOPERATIVE GROUPING

To determine how students feel about their participation in the small group process, Ms. Wells, in conjunction with researchers from Johns Hopkins University, has done a questionnaire study of student views. The responses of the students were compared with those of students who took a more traditional, lectura-type course in American history. Comparisons of the two sets of questionnaires turned up some expected and some unexpected results.

In their overall view of the cooperative group method, students reported that their group participation required "quite a bit" of effort and was important to their final grade. They did not consider the class to be a "push-over."

As might be expected, cooperative group participants felt the pressure of peer group expectation much more keenly than did the control group students. Forty-seven percent of the control students said they did not care what their fellow students thought about their class work; 29% of the cooperative group students said they did not care.

Since one of the advantages of the small group method is thought to be the interpersonal relationships which it promotes, the researchers were interested in how students felt about their group contacts. While cooperative group students reported working more often with other students, this class interaction did not carry over into their out-of-class lives. They did not build up friendships in the classroom and maintain them outside of class. When asked if being in small groups enlarged her friendship circle, one student replied, "No. It only enlarges your number of acquaintances. I mean even people I've been in small groups with before, half of them I've forgotten their names." One explanation given for this finding is that students in the cooperative

groups are required to be so task-oriented that there really is not much opportunity for socializing.

The most unexpected finding came to light when students were asked to evaluate their self-competence in interpersonal relations. It was expected that their small group experience would make the cooperative group students feel more competent in group situations than their control group counterparts. The opposite proved true. Cooperative group students, especially the Moderators, viewed themselves as less effective in group participation. It may be that the cooperative group process produced "reality" situations in which students were forced to recognize their limitations in group dynamics. Without similar reality confrontations, the control students seemed to have higher, but untested, opinions of their abilities.

Apparently, the reality quality of the cooperative group method did not "turn-off" students. At least in terms of attendance, cooperative group students showed more commitment than control students. Sixty-three percent of cooperative group students reported "never" purposely staying away from class as compared with 46% of the control students. Whether they attended more regularly because they liked the class or because peer expectation compelled them to attend is not known.

TEACHER'S VIEW OF COOPERATIVE GROUPING

With cooperative groups and large groups, Moderators and Evaluators, peer evaluation and self-evaluations, training sessions and Moderator sessions, how does the teacher manage to keep on top of the situation? In reply to this concern Ms. Wells says,

> If a teacher is well organized, knows her material, understands the group process, presents the process correctly, demands attention and respect, is serious about evaluation of the process, reinforces, makes objectives clear, gives the students a feeling of accomplishment, and doesn't have a nervous breakdown, all should progress well.

A formidable undertaking to be sure, but Ms. Wells firmly believes that the end results are worth the effort for both the students and the teacher.

An important benefit for the teacher employing the small group approach is that she is no longer the sole motivator in the class. Because of the peer pressure inherent in the group process, she can depend on the students to motivate each other to perform and achieve. Students also become instrumental in their own socialization and relieve the teacher of the constant need to encourage the shy and discourage the boisterous class members.

No method assures success with all students; however, Ms. Wells contends that the small group approach cuts failures to a minimum. As support for her contention, she states that in a control class using traditional teaching methods, 18 out of 150 students failed. Using the cooperative group process, only 12 out of 280 students failed. In some years she has had students fail the first semester under traditional methods but pass the second semester under the group approach.

For other teachers who would like to try the small group method, Ms. Wells suggests the following steps:

1. Inform yourself and the students of the techniques and styles of grouping
2. Create confidence by experimentation
3. Be sure to use total group and teacher evaluation
4. Think positively with students and be as relaxed as possible

Despite the enormity of the task, Ms. Wells' final assurance is that "all hell will not break loose."

PREPARATION FOR THE "REAL" WORLD

This is an age when more people want to be heard, when much of daily life centers around small group activities, when we are all admonished to care about one another. Are school systems adequately preparing students to function effectively in the demanding situations found in this "real" world? The small group method of education does provide specific preparation for interpersonal interactions. It forces students to relate to one another. It involves students in their own learning. It gives experience in small group participation. In short, it requires students to become involved. Whether a student becomes the president of General Motors or the head of a family--or both--surely experience in human relations will be valuable to him.

profiles of promise
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For further information concerning the subject of this paper WRITE:

Ms. Elizabeth Wells
Melbourne High School
1050 Babcock Street
Melbourne, Florida 32901

READ:

DeVries, David L., Donald Muse, and Elizabeth H. Wells. The Effects on Students of Working in Cooperative Groups: An Exploratory Study. Report No. 120 of the Center for Social Organization of Schools (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, December, 1971).

SEND FOR:

The film, "The Marvelous Mousetrap." 16 mm., sound, color, 24 minutes. Distributed by the Bureau of National Affairs, Inc., 5615 Fishers Lane, Rockville, Maryland 20852. Rental cost $45.00 for one week.

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ED 074 827 - We Learn Together: A Small Group Process Manual for Secondary Schools. 58 pp. MF - $.65, HC - $3.29. The purpose of this manual is to illustrate the application of the small group process approach to bilingual education at junior and senior high school levels. Chapters include 1) "The Group Process Approach," 2) "Skills Required in the Small Group Process," 3) "Learning Environment," 4) "Grouping Procedures," 5) "Activities and Materials for Small Groups," and 6) "The Teacher's Role."

ED 074 027 - Analysis and Synthesis of Teaching Methods. Supplement 1. 12 pp. MF - $.65, HC - $3.29. This document presents a brief analysis and synthesis of seven teaching methods including small group instruction.

ED 073 024 - An Organizational Pattern for Small Groups in an American History Course. 22 pp. MF - $.65, HC - $3.29. Elizabeth Wells describes the framework she uses for approaching an issue-oriented American history course through the small group technique.

ED 069 604 - Small Group Inquiry. 60 pp. MF - $.65, HC - $3.29. Two units designed to assist the teacher in implementing the small group process are presented. They have been used in grades 3, 5, 8, 11, and 12.