

THE SOCIAL WORKER IN PARENT GROUP EDUCATION

An Examination of Social Workers' Participation
in Parent Education through the Use of Group Methods.

by

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ABSTRACT

Among the methods that have been developed to help parents in their important task of raising mentally healthy children, parent group education is of particular interest to social workers. This thesis examines the essentials of social workers' participation in parent education through the use of group methods. It is based on the writer's training in social work and experience in adult education, and on research into the programmes of a number of social agencies, child guidance centres, children's treatment centres and hospitals, school social services and recreation centres. A range of examples was chosen to show the ways in which social workers were key figures in the parent education projects.

The development of parent education on this continent is briefly outlined. Major principles of parent group education are stated, and an analysis is made of the knowledge and skills necessary for professional leadership in this field. It is observed that parent education principles correspond closely to those of social work itself. A good deal of the knowledge and skill required of parent education leaders is actually acquired through social work training. Furthermore, parent group education and social work strive toward the common objective of higher standards of mental health. It would seem, therefore, that social work agencies and social workers should be able to make significant contributions to parent education both directly, through sponsoring such programmes in their own agencies, and indirectly, through co-operating with other similarly-interested organizations and individuals.

The programmes selected for study support this assumption. They illustrate the variety of settings in which social workers are participating in parent group education programmes, and reveal similarities and differences in approach and methods. Specific questions relating to principles and methods are proposed as requiring further experimentation and study.

The thesis emphasizes the need for coordination and co-operation amongst all professional and lay groups interested in parent education as a method of promoting mental health, and suggests directions for development. It is concluded that social workers can and should participate in parent education programmes, with certain stipulations: before mass programmes are undertaken, careful experimentation on small projects is essential to augment the present limited knowledge of theory and practice, as well as to provide a basis for training workers.

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Chapter 1

THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARENT EDUCATION

The mental hygiene movement has come of age. It has emerged from the restricting confines of the mental hospital and the patient-physician relationship. It has advanced even beyond the child guidance clinic emphasis, with the client-team¹ focus. It has, in fact, made tentative steps into the home, the school, and the community, its principles no longer understandable only to psychiatrists, but made meaningful in everyday language that the man in the street can take in and digest. Since the man, and woman, in the street have star roles to play in the whole movement, remarkable advances may now perhaps be anticipated.

Dynamic psychology and psychiatry have pointed out the importance of experiences in the early years of life, in the development of healthy personalities. Children can be helped in different ways by different agencies. Pre-school centres, elementary and high schools, recreation and religious agencies all can contribute to healthy emotional and social growth. Child guidance clinics and similar institutions assist in cases where difficulties have already begun to appear. Of first importance, however, are the child's experiences with his own parents. It seems only logical, therefore, that no time should be lost in helping parents in particular, but also teachers and youth leaders to understand children's needs and to build the kinds of relationships with them that will promote healthy growth. In order to accomplish this purpose, it is necessary to work on several "fronts": on the development of parent education; on the task of getting mental hygiene principles and teaching

¹ Psychiatrist-psychologist-social worker.

into the schools and pre-school centres; on the provision of pre-marital and marital counselling services; and on the expansion of group-work, casework and psychiatric services. It is with the first of these, parent education, that this study is concerned.

Development of Parent Education in Voluntary Organizations

As Sidonie M. Gruenberg points out,¹ parent education has many roots, but its greatest impetus has come from the desire of parents to help themselves, making use of whatever scientific knowledge and expert advice they could get, in the business of "child training".

This interest in self-education has been one factor in the rapid development of parent-teacher organizations, both in Canada and in the United States. From the first parents' club formed in Nova Scotia in 1895 by Dr. and Mrs. Alexander Graham Bell, the parent-teacher movement has spread across Canada, now counting its membership in excess of 177,000. The Canadian Federation of Home and School and Parent-Teacher Associations (the national organization) recommends in its official handbook that every local association have a committee to promote parent education, especially through the use of the discussion method. Parent education is defined as involving

.....the study of human needs -- physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and social -- to enable parents to deal more effectively with all problems of home, school and community. It is the education of parents on the job. It is education for happy homes.²

The Handbook reinforces this with a statement of specific objectives:

¹ Gruenberg, Sidonie M., "Parent Education and Child Development", Social Work Year Book, 1945, pp. 296-299, Russell Sage Foundation, N. Y.

² The Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation, Handbook, 1951, p.41, published by the Federation, Toronto.

- To educate parents to a realization of the privileges and obligations of parenthood.
- To develop an understanding of the nature and needs of children.
- To develop attitudes that will bring about more satisfying relationships between parents and children.
- To lay a foundation for personal growth through continued study.¹

While, in practice, in many locals, any parent education attempted still takes the form of rather haphazard talks followed by a few questions, in others, discussion groups are encouraged apart from regular meetings, in a more systematic programme. Some of the provincial federations work with university extension departments or provincial education departments for the purpose of securing suitable discussion materials or of planning and offering leadership training programs for lay persons assisting groups. A good deal of experimental work is being done, with considerable differences as to emphases across the country, arising from the uncertainty in the whole field as to the most effective methods not only of assisting parents to absorb mental health principles, but of making use of the leadership personnel (either potential or actual) at hand to function in the job.

From the first small group of mothers sponsored by the Chicago Kindergarten College in 1894 has grown a great movement: the National Congress of Parents and Teachers now has an impressive membership of more than six million. Like its Canadian counterpart, this organization considers parent education to be one of its major functions. More and more emphasis is being placed on discussion groups as an integral part of parent-teacher programs. In 1949, the Congress hired five part-time professional regional consultants in parent education, to be responsible for the promotion of training of lay

¹ The Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation, Handbook, 1951, p. 41.

leaders in their areas. These lay leaders then encourage the formation of "study discussion groups" using as source material the articles and prepared study outlines in the Congress monthly magazine, The National Parent-Teacher.¹ The National Congress of Coloured Parents and Teachers, a similar organization with a membership of 50,000 in States where there are separate schools for Negro children, also includes parent education study classes as part of its programme.

On the international level, the World Federation of Home and School, organized in 1927, serves as a clearing-house for the various national parents' groups affiliated with it.

Another outstanding example of an organization originated by mothers is the present Child Study Association of America. The Association was incorporated in 1924, to replace the Federation for Child Study. As it developed, it began to include more professional persons, and was instrumental in bringing together in various conferences voluntary and government agencies concerned with parent education and child development, for the purpose of assessing programmes, resources, problems and needs. From this aspect of its activities came the formation of the National Council of Parent Education, which for ten years served as a central clearing-house and coordinating body, stimulated new projects, trained leaders and issued publications. Now known as the National Committee for Parent Education, this organization limits its membership to professional workers in the family relations and parent education field. It was, incidentally, responsible for the preparation of a special report on parent education for the Mid-century White House Conference on Children and Youth held in 1950.

¹ Kawin, Ethel, "Teachers and Parents United", Survey, Vol. 86, No.4, April 1950.

Many other voluntary organizations have developed in connection with the needs of parents for guidance in their relationships with each other and with their children. Influential at the present time is the National Council on Family Relations, established in 1938, and its regional bodies such as the Pacific Northwest Council on Family Relations, which has an active affiliate in the B.C. Council on Family Relations. Its membership drawn from many fields concerned with some aspect of family life, the National Council's committees deal with such areas as education for marriage and the family, group dynamics, leadership training, and marriage and family counselling.¹ The American Social Hygiene Association, formed in 1914, now sees its function as the conduct of "a broad continuous programme for family life education to develop personal responsibility and guide character growth".² Noteworthy among marriage counselling organizations is the American Institute of Family Relations, under the direction of Dr. Paul Popenoe. Engaged in marriage counselling since 1929, its activities also include the training of teachers and counsellors, summer institutes, lectures, and the publication of pamphlets and the Institute bulletin. The Association for Family Living in Chicago serves as a useful clearing-house for literature issued by many reputable organizations, in addition to its other functions.

Of somewhat broader scope than any of these is the National Association for Mental Health, (a consolidation in 1950 of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, the National Mental Health Foundation, and the Psychiatric Foundation), which includes in its aims "the education and organization of citizens for work in the mental health field", and issues excellent literature of value in parent and family life education.³ Corresponding to this

¹ Social Work Year Book, 1951.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*, p.622.

organization is the Canadian Mental Health Association, which originated in 1918 as the National Committee for Mental Hygiene. Its purpose includes "promoting the development of positive mental health programmes in schools, health departments, social work agencies, industry, churches, parents' groups etc.mental health educational activities; and preventive activities".¹ It is at present engaged in certain very interesting experimental projects designed, among other objectives, to evaluate methods of mental health education.

Family Agencies and Parent Education

In the casework field, the interest of the Family Service Association of America in parent and family life education appears in a report issued in November, 1946, by its Committee on Current and Future Planning. This committee recognized the major focus of family service agencies as diagnosis and treatment of individual situations, but strongly recommended that they move on into "generalized family life education",² working through discussion groups, young couples' and mothers' clubs and parent-teacher associations. Dr. Marianne Kris, writing in the Journal of Social Case Work (May issue, 1948) pointed out the need for preventive measures in family casework agencies, and noted that this implied refining "the methods of our psychological family counselling services".³ Dr. Kris proposed that group counselling should prove economical by eliminating the need for individual discussion of some problems, as well as by cutting down the number of cases seeking agency help, through improving the conditions of family life. Several agencies reported on experimental projects in family life education at the Biennial Meeting of the Family

¹ Social Work Year Book, 1951, p.661.

² Parker, Earl N., "Family Social Work", Social Work Year Book, 1947, p.181.

³ Kris, Dr. Marianne, "A Group Educational Approach to Child Development", Journal of Social Casework, Vol.29, No.5., May, 1948, p.167.

Service Association of America held in Detroit in 1948, evidence of progression in interest from the pathological to the prophylactic, according to Gertrude K. Pollak in her article, "The Contribution of Casework to Family Life Education".¹ Finally, in 1951, the Family Service Association appointed "a new national committee to define the role of family life education in the family service programme and also in allied fields, to analyze their current projects of this nature and to suggest certain guiding principles and required skills for a sound programme of family life education",² Reference to the work of this committee is made elsewhere in this study.

Parent Education in Play-Group and Pre-School Programmes

A different approach is demonstrated in the work of the Play Schools Association, organized in 1917, which operates educational play group programmes for children of school age. The Association teachers consider work with parents an integral part of their activities; observation, group discussions, individual conferences and participation in the play school programme are methods used.

At a lower age level -- the pre-school years, kindergartens, day nurseries and nursery schools have at times contributed to the education of the parents of the children served, though there is great variation in the recognition given to this aspect of the work. Opportunity for progress in the whole area of research in child development came with the establishment of research centres at four American universities in 1923, on grants provided by the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial. The experimental nursery schools set up in

¹ Pollak, Gertrude K., "The Contribution of Casework to Family Life Education", Journal of Social Casework, Vol.30, No.9, November 1949, pp. 362-8.

² Social Work Year Book, 1951, p. 186.

connection with these provided impetus for the establishment of many others across the country, under both private and public auspices. In 1933, the WPA commenced its nursery school programme, and by 1936 there were 1,650 in operation under its jurisdiction. Casework services were introduced into some of these schools. In 1942, under the stress of war conditions, the Lanham Act was passed, providing funds for day care in war industry communities. Unfortunately, when the Lanham Act funds were discontinued in 1946, many projects were unable to continue, although some cities and states continued to make public funds available. In Canada, the Institute of Child Study - still the only one in Canada - was established in Toronto in 1925-6 by Dr. W. E. Blatz. From its inception, the Institute has considered parent education an essential part of its programme, although its research programme has been the centre of its attention. In the words of one of its staff members, "The Institute's contribution to parent education lies mainly in its available verified content. It has, of course, experimented with methods of presentation but these have been a secondary interest".¹ As in the United States, pre-school centres across Canada are operated under a variety of auspices, but the number is totally inadequate to meet the demand.

Because of parents' realization of the need for group experience of their pre-school children, there is an increasing use of another method of attacking the problem: the organization of co-operative play groups. While other pre-school centres frequently operate without attention to the possibilities inherent in their programme for parent education, a good co-operative play group implies parent participation and education. Like many projects that

¹ Northway, Mary L., "The Contribution of Research", Food for Thought, Vol.12, No. 2, November 1951, pp.15-19, Canadian Association for Adult Education, Toronto.

contain great potentialities for good, however, the play group frequently finds itself faced with serious obstacles, both within and outside its own membership. So far, in Canada at least, parents themselves have borne the brunt of the struggle, without much professional assistance. A question discussed widely is whether or not the play groups are a stop-gap (albeit valuable) on the way to state-supported pre-school centres, or have the potentiality to become, with professional assistance, something even better than such publicly-supported centres as they are now conceived.

Public Agencies and Parent Education

The U.S. Children's Bureau is one of the best examples of the interest of Government agencies in parent education. Since its establishment in 1912, thousands of parents (both individually and in organized groups) have made use of its educational publications on child development and parent-child relationships. It has, in addition, served as a consultative and at times supervisory body for various parent education programmes in the United States, and it acts as a clearing-house for information in the whole field of child and youth welfare. Another U.S. Government Department, the Office of Education, has had on its staff since 1913 home-education employees "to investigate methods of improving education in the home, and to bring about cooperation between the home and the schools so that they might work together for the welfare of the children".¹ The five White House Conferences have shown a steady progression of interest to include concern for children and parents generally, with the theme of the last, the Mid-century White House Conference on Children

¹ Supervision of Parent Education as a Function of State Departments of Education, U.S. Office of Education, Bulletin 1940, No. 6, Monograph No. 13, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D.C.

and Youth (1950) stated as follows: "how we can develop in children the mental, emotional, and spiritual qualities essential to individual happiness and to responsible citizenship, and what physical, economic and social conditions are deemed necessary to this development".¹ The Canadian Federal Department of Health and Welfare has recently begun to issue and distribute, through the corresponding provincial departments, attractive literature suitable for use in parent groups.

Certain provincial, state, and city departments are also showing some interest in the possibilities of parent education. Seattle, for example, maintains a family life education division in connection with its school programme, through which assistance is given to an extensive co-operative play group development. Among others, the New York State and California State Departments of Education conduct programmes in parent education. Nova Scotia, Ontario, and Saskatchewan have government adult education departments active in this field.

Funds provided to states as grants-in-aid on a two-to-one basis by the United States National Mental Health Act (1946) should eventually assist, either directly or indirectly, the process of parent education in mental health principles. As a result of this Act, all states now have mental health programmes of some sort, as against only twenty-six in 1947, and the number of full-time mental health personnel has tripled in three years. The purpose of the Act is stated in the Social Work Year Book (1951) as follows:

To provide a method of financing research and training programmes, and to assist states in establishing community mental health services.²

¹ Social Work Year Book, 1951, p. 93.

² *ibid.* p. 324.

Also under public auspices is the development of school social services, exceedingly limited in scope in Canada, but somewhat more extensive in the United States. The U.S. Office of Education estimated that approximately 450 cities had full-time service in 1950. In some centres, the school social worker assists parents' groups "to increase their knowledge concerning the motivations of human behaviour and development of personality".¹

As already mentioned, certain universities in both Canada and the United States conduct parent education programmes through their Extension, Agriculture, or Home Economics Departments; they work with parent-teacher associations and other interested groups, preparing pamphlets and discussion materials, conducting training courses and offering consultant services, sometimes engaging in research projects in child development.

During recent years even elementary and high school curricula have begun to feel the influence of mental hygiene teaching: home economics classes are including education for family living or for "responsible parenthood" as well as the more mechanical aspects of home-making; courses on human relationships are being introduced in some form or other - a forward step, though much remains to be done in the matter of selecting and training suitable teachers for such courses. Colleges, too, are offering courses on marriage and family living. There is considerable evidence to show that the discussion method has proven particularly helpful in both high school and college activities in this field. One wonders if it would be possible to utilize social workers to assist with in-service training programmes for teachers engaged in this important work.

Use of Mass Media in Parent Education

As a final point in this brief survey of activity in the parent

¹ Social Work Year Book, 1951, p. 449.

education field, the increasing use of mass media should be noted. The last few years have witnessed a remarkable increase in the number of sound and interesting articles on various aspects of mental health (including child development and family relationships) appearing in popular magazines and newspapers. Radio and movie programmes¹ incorporating some aspect of mental hygiene, while not always wholly desirable, at least seem to indicate an increase in general interest in the field, and perhaps may be influenced to improve the quality of their product when necessary.

Perhaps enough has been said to demonstrate the development of interest in the parent and family life education field, and the variety of emphases and approaches resulting from the specific concerns of the many organizations and groups which have entered it. Through the diversity, however, there are evident certain broad trends in programme content and method that are of importance: at first, the centre of interest was the child, with his problems; this was in the behaviourist era, when habit training and discipline were all-important. Gradually it has been realized that parents are part of the picture, and parents are citizens, so today the emphasis in up-to-date groups is on family relationships, with a recognition of the place of the family in the community. With greater understanding of the necessity for emotional as well as intellectual acceptance of mental health principles, the lecture method is giving way to others offering more opportunity for involvement - group discussion, socio-drama and other techniques by which parents can participate actively in the programme. Methods providing opportunity for participation are

¹ In this connection the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the National Film Board of Canada are to be commended for their initiative and interesting productions.

especially important now, since many parents have read so much mental hygiene literature -- sometimes apparently contradictory in intent -- that they suffer considerable anxiety about "what is right". Discussion and other participation techniques help them to sort out what they have absorbed through reading, and to make it more meaningful through relating it to their own and others' experiences.

Possibly because the factors involved and the results attained in parent education are frequently intangible and therefore exceedingly difficult to measure, comparatively little research has been reported that goes beyond the purely descriptive. Jean Carter summed up the development of parent education in the United States and indicated important principles and methods in her thoughtful booklet, Parents in Perplexity, published in 1938. Dorothy Baruch described a parent education programme in connection with a nursery school in Parents and Children Go to School, 1939. A particularly helpful handbook, Leading Parents' Groups, appeared in 1946 under the joint authorship of Evelyn Millis Duvall and Sylvanus Milne Duvall. Descriptions of state and city parent education programmes have appeared from time to time, along with accounts in professional journals of experimental programmes undertaken by private welfare agencies. In Canada, the Canadian Association for Adult Education devoted the whole November, 1951, issue of its magazine, Food for Thought, to articles describing parent education projects in this country and dealing with such topics as the importance of parent education, the contribution of research, and leadership.

There is, consequently, a real need for some co-operative thinking in the whole field, to work out research projects which could provide material on basic questions such as the following:

1. What are parents' needs in the field of mental health teaching applied to family living ? Research is necessary here to determine helpful content, and to evaluate methods by which this content can become meaningful in terms of everyday living. Further, what differentiation - if any - in content and method would be advisable to meet the needs of various individuals and groups ? What effect, for example, do socio-economic status, or education, or concern for particular difficulties such as specific handicaps have on desired content and method ?
2. What are effective ways of reaching parents ?
3. What professional resources can best be used to provide assistance to parents and others in education for family living ? This would include research as to the roles of the various agencies concerned with the family, and how best they can co-operate in meeting needs.
4. What resources of lay leadership can be utilized in parent education programmes ? What are effective training programmes for lay leaders, and how may they be implemented ?

The Focus of This Study

As evidenced in the foregoing material, many groups, both lay and professional, are interested in parent education and in various kinds of individual, pre-marital, marital, and family counselling. This thesis is primarily concerned with the education of parents in groups, conducted personally by social workers, and using group discussion methods.

Parent education may be simply defined as a process by which parents are helped to increase their understanding of their children, themselves,

and their interpersonal relationships either within or outside their own families, for the purpose of enabling both parents and children to live more effectively as members of families and of communities. "Parent group education" implies that the educational process takes place with parents in groups. Some confusion exists as to where the line should be drawn between parent group education and group therapy. Parents' discussion groups, which place their emphasis on education, usually also have certain therapeutic values. However, in these groups, the focus is on the healthy elements in personalities; in therapy groups, it is on the deviant aspects of personality structure. The ^{group} therapy/is conducted by a trained therapist and the members are selected so as to form a unit that is planned for its therapeutic possibilities. It is the primarily educational group with which this study is concerned. "Family life education",¹ another term frequently used to describe this type of programme, may be assumed to include programmes for children and young people not yet parents, as well as for parents themselves. Agencies conducting programmes described as family life education in this investigation, for the most part, are engaged in the education of parents, through the use of group discussion methods.

On the basis of the writer's experience gained through participation in parent education programmes in an adult education setting, combined with training in social work, an analysis is made of the objectives and fundamental principles of parent group education, and of the knowledge and skills

¹ Defined as "a process by which people are helped, through group discussion, to broaden their understanding of family relationships... The aim of such education is the prevention of unhappy family relationships and the strengthening and enrichment of family life", by the Committee on Family Life Education of the F.S.A.A., in "Family Life Education", Highlights, Volume XII, No. 5, May 1951, Family Service Association of America, N.Y.

necessary to a professional leader functioning in this field. The basic aims of the social worker, and what is applicable to parent group education in social work training and experience are then checked against this analysis, for the purpose of clarifying the advisability of social workers' undertaking leadership in parent education programmes either within or outside their agencies. This theoretical study is supplemented by an investigation of actual parent education activities carried on by fourteen agencies and institutions, programmes in which social workers assumed either total or partial responsibility for leadership. Information for this investigation was obtained either direct¹ from the agencies included or from articles in current journals² in which their programmes were described. It is proposed to examine their experiences, to ascertain their opinions on the value of the participation of social workers in parent group education programmes, and to note similarities and differences in their methods. This study of social workers in action should suggest important questions which require further experimentation and research, in general, on the whole question of parent group education, and, in particular, on the participation of social workers in such programmes.

¹ Appendix A provides a copy of the outline of questions which accompanied letters requesting information.

² Social Casework, The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Mental Hygiene, and The Child proved most helpful.

Chapter 2

AN ANALYSIS OF PARENT GROUP EDUCATION AS A FIELD FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Social workers are concerned with the welfare of the individual person, with helping him to become a more mature personality. They recognize the importance of the family unit and of other groups vital to the healthy development of the individual. Effective parent group education programmes assist parents to help their children achieve healthier social and emotional growth toward maturity, and frequently assist the parents themselves to get along more happily in their everyday relations in their families and communities. It would seem, therefore, that such programmes provide a legitimate and important medium through which social workers can multiply their effectiveness in contributing to the welfare - specifically, the mental health - of parents and children. Furthermore, it may be expected that much of the knowledge and skill now considered to be required by the professional person engaged in parent education is already part of the social worker's equipment, through his training and experience. These assumptions are investigated in this chapter.

Objectives of Parent Group Education

The over-all objective of parent group education is to assist parents to help their children develop into mature, healthy adults. This objective carries a number of implications which may be stated in the form of subsidiary aims:

1. Parents need to know the characteristics of "normal" child development and how they can help to promote healthy growth; they should have some understanding of behaviour deviations. Parents usually are attracted to a group education

programme because of concern about their children's behaviour. Frequently, they want specific questions answered. The parent group leader should be able to assist parents to acquire the knowledge they need in relation to growth, personality development, and parent-child relationships. If they are relatively mature people themselves, parents can then clarify, test, and revise their ideas as to what is "normal" behaviour generally, what is normal for their particular child, and how to help him grow into healthy maturity. They can increase their awareness of the kinds of behaviour that reveal maladjustment and, when confronted with these, can take appropriate steps to right the situation, with professional guidance, if necessary.

2. Parents need help in fortifying their own morale - in finding enjoyment in parenthood, and in strengthening their own self-confidence, self-reliance, and faith in their ability to be good parents. Striking evidence of this has been noticed by Dr. Luther E. Woodward,¹ in the replies which he receives in response to his radio programme, "Inquiring Parent". Hundreds of letters, he states, say with amazing consistency, three things:

- (1) We listen to the programmes consistently and like them because you never blame parents and it is very good to be assured rather than blamed. So many people have blamed us for so many things.
- (2) The programmes help us to see through the eyes of our children and understand better why they do the things they do.
- (3) You never end a programme without giving two or three suggestions of things which we can do that will help.

An attitude of interest in children and enjoyment in having them is essential

¹ Woodward, Luther E., "Discussion of Miss Fraser's Paper", Presented at National Conference of Social Work, Atlantic City, (1950) as a discussion of "Methods of Public Interpretation in the Psychiatric Social Work Field", Paper by Grace E. Fraser.

to emotional growth. Merely knowing the "right" techniques is not enough. Parents can find comfort in the idea that even though they make mistakes in handling problems at times, their children can weather a great deal if the feeling is warm and friendly between them and their parents. If, through his acceptance, the leader can foster a feeling of confidence in themselves, parents are more likely to be relaxed and this often brings a direct response on the part of the children in the direction of more co-operative behaviour.

With skilful guidance, this feeling of increasing competence on the part of parents has a further constructive effect: they are able to make more intelligent use of the findings and opinions of experts. Instead of attempting to apply indiscriminately an answer that may or may not fit their case, parents can learn to think critically about what they read or hear and, in addition, to observe their own children both as a method of educating themselves and as a guide in dealing with specific behaviour.

3. Parents need help in learning to understand themselves and others. While they come to the group, generally, with their interest focussed on their child's problems, parents usually realize fairly quickly that they themselves have an important part in those problems. They recognize that it may be necessary for them to change their own attitudes or behaviour in the family group so as to evoke more constructive reactions from their children and mates. In other words, they have to become more mature people themselves. The discussion group provides a somewhat less emotionally-charged atmosphere than does their own family group. In the discussion group, members can test out their ideas, have the benefit of other members' experience and suggestions, and learn that they can change their opinions and attitudes without "losing face". In addition, they have an opportunity to see the effect of their behaviour on other people

and, with wise leadership, to consider the causes of their behaviour in the group and ways in which they might improve. It may be possible for them to apply this learning in the family group.

4. Also concerned with the necessity of helping parents to be more mature people themselves is the objective of assisting them to get a broader perspective on their problems by helping them to become aware of the social setting in which they live, of the economic, social and psychological pressures to which they are subjected, and of the inter-relationships of their lives with those of other people in the community and in the outside world. It is largely parents who, by their own attitudes and behaviour, shape their children's values. The importance of constructive attitudes and behaviour in the rapidly-changing, present-day world cannot be overestimated. In addition, quite apart from the value to the community, of citizens who are interested in doing their share for the advancement of the common welfare, there is the advantage of diffusing the parents' interest somewhat so that their own personal family relationships are no longer the focal point of unhealthy preoccupation.

5. Parents need help in using and in building community resources. Through parent education programmes, parents can be assisted to learn more about the educational, health and welfare, and religious resources of their own community. For example, through satisfying experiences with social workers in parent education groups, parents not only become aware of the existence of agencies and of their function, but gain the feeling that the agency workers are approachable as people to whom they can turn when they need casework help, or to whom they can refer their friends and acquaintances. Since early detection of mental health problems determines the degree of success of treatment, the importance of programmes which contribute to prompt referral is obvious. Furthermore,

as they become more aware of community needs and gaps in resources, parents are more able to give strong support to the development of additional services or the improvement of existing facilities.

Principles of Parent Group Education

The following three principles may be considered basic to any good parent group education programme:

Respect for the individual parent, for his ability and right to think and plan for himself, is essential. The parent group education worker recognizes that methods used in the group should be governed by the final objective, i.e. the enhancement of the mental health of parents and children within the democratic framework of our society. Since, in addition, he recognizes the validity of the principle of "learning by doing", the worker attempts to encourage in parents' groups an increasing measure of democratic experience. This implies that he assists group members to participate in the planning and conduct of their own programmes. Democratic practice in their own group setting becomes far more meaningful to members than merely listening to lectures emphasizing the importance of respecting children or adults as individual persons in their own right, especially if such practice is accompanied by skilful interpretation by the worker or by his guidance in helping members to see the similarity between attitudes and relationships in the group and attitudes and relationships in their own families. Because of his basic respect for people, the worker is careful to encourage and assist both members and the group as a whole to develop their own skills and to accept the utmost responsibility of which they are capable at their particular stage of development. For instance, when the group is to continue through a series of meetings, members can gain

valuable experience through participating in choosing the topics to be dealt with, on the basis of their own interests. Integrating their ideas in drawing up this tentative outline of topics may be the first real co-operative endeavour undertaken by the group. The worker's skilful leadership at this time can make this experience a stepping stone to the assumption of more responsibility in revising, carrying on, and evaluating their programme. Being aware of his own personal needs, the worker can, if necessary, guard against a possible tendency to retard the development of members or of the group by keeping them dependent upon him through denying them the opportunity to grow in ability or to give to the group from their present resources of knowledge and experience. On the other hand, the worker knows when they need his help in order to make progress toward their goal.

The parent group education worker recognizes that people have individual characteristics, that they come from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, that they have different needs which must be met in different ways. When working with a parents' group, the worker sets an example by accepting each member as he is. Gradually, the worker helps group members to appreciate and to accept differences in behaviour, opinions, standards, and values both within their own group and in the community. Interacting with this acceptance of differences in each other is an increased appreciation of the differences among individual children, even in the same family - a fact which many parents find it difficult to believe. Related also is the acceptance of each child in the family as a person of value having an important place in his own right, instead of being compared to his detriment with others either in or outside the family. If one side of the coin is this acceptance of differences,

the other is the development of the parents' perception of likenesses, of the general need of human beings for affection and self-respect, for recognition and a sense of enjoyment and worthwhileness in living. This again has several applications - in the group itself, in the family setting, and in the wider community.

The third basic principle is the importance of relationship in the process of helping people. This concern for relationship is resulting in the favouring of work with small groups, of perhaps eight to fifteen people, over a series of about six to twelve meetings held weekly or fortnightly. In such a group, members and leader gradually develop meaningful relationships not only between the leader and each member, but amongst members themselves and in the group as a whole. It is within the supporting framework of these group relationships that members are able gradually to express fears and worries and to find comfort in the knowledge that their problems are common to others; with encouragement they are able to investigate causes and to seek ways of resolving their difficulties; frequently the group's support is crucial while a member struggles with new ideas. Through the use of "buzz sessions" or other methods of dividing large groups into smaller face-to-face units, some degree of relationship can be built as members become individualized through their participation.¹ Some workers have found it possible to develop a feeling of group unity even with a comparatively large group;² however, it does seem as if only a limited degree of relationship could be achieved with numbers in excess of twenty or so.

¹ An interesting use of buzz sessions is described by Mrs. Elizabeth Reichert, Consultant on Family Life Education for the Family and Children's Service of Minneapolis and Hennepin County, in "Family Life Education 'Buzz Sessions'", Highlights, Volume XIII, No.3, March, 1952, published by the Family Service Association of America.

² Dreikurs, Rudolf, "Family Group Therapy in the Chicago Community Child Guidance Centres", Mental Hygiene, Volume XXXV, No.2, April 1951, p.296.

Knowledge Required by the Parent Group Education Worker

The worker's democratic conduct of the parents' group depends on his thorough familiarity with current knowledge about child development and on his understanding of individual and group behaviour, including his ability to recognize ego defences and to treat these appropriately. The worker who is conversant with "content" is free to put his attention to the best method of helping the group at any specific moment. He is able to introduce information when it is required, or advice as to where the information may be found; he can help the group to see a logical order in its plan of topics; he can suggest an interesting method of presenting a problem; perhaps of most importance, he can keep silent while members think through a question, in the confidence that he can, if necessary, help them out at the appropriate time. In short, the worker is able to encourage maximum member participation and responsibility and yet is capable of drawing contributions together, pointing up relationships in situations, and suggesting thought-provoking questions, so that a sense of direction is maintained and the group has a feeling of accomplishment. Furthermore, the worker can respond immediately to questions or interests, if immediate response is desirable. He does not have to postpone discussion in order to do some research on the topic. (This is not to say that he may never do this, or propose that it be done by members). This point is of special importance if he is working with a group that is as yet unaccustomed to planning its programme, and thus looking ahead, since in this group it is best to catch questions while they are "hot", if they are of interest to most of the members.

The range of knowledge necessary to the worker engaging in parent group education may be suggested by the following headings:¹

¹ Examples of titles of discussion topics are given in "Summary of Data on Family Life Education Activities of 81 Private Member Agencies, from July, 1948 Questionnaire", mimeographed report by Family Service Association of America Information Service, dated September 23, 1948.

Child Development, at the infant, pre-school, school-age, and adolescent levels; Parent-Child Relationships, through all stages of the child's development; Family Relationships; Husband-Wife Relationships, throughout marriage; Problems of Special Concern to Specific Groups, e.g. pre-natal problems, problems connected with handicapped children. Though not technically parent education, topics coming under the general heading of Preparing for Marriage are closely related and may be considered in this connection. In addition, in order to be able to assist in extending the horizon of members' interests, the worker will need some knowledge of economic, social and psychological forces operating in our society, and of human relationships in the wider community outside the family.

Familiarity with the dynamics of individual and group behaviour is essential to the group leader, in order that he may help members to understand their children, themselves, and their family relationships, and also so that he may utilize to the full the inter-relationships in the discussion group itself. At all times, the worker must be ready to use his knowledge of the symptoms of emotional disturbance. He must be able to judge, for instance, when a child's difficulty or a family problem is too complicated to be handled advantageously in the group, and how best to help the member concerned. He must be sensitive to signs that the discussion is becoming too threatening to a member, and know how to dilute or otherwise relieve the pressure. The importance of the leader's support on occasion is evident in the following excerpt from an actual record; the group was discussing adolescents:

Mrs. H. then said that there was another aspect too to this matter of adolescence. People tend to over-protect their children and try to hang on to them. She referred to the fact that she is living in with her mother after having lived on her own for a year. It's plenty rough. She hastened to explain that her

mother is very good and she gets along with her well, but her mother is always telling her, do this, don't do this, or the baby is going to get cold, cover her up, feed her now, and that sort of thing. After she said this, there was some guilt and the group played into it. Some of them said that they wished that they had mothers that would be there to take care of their children and give them a chance to get out occasionally. Wait until you are really tied to them and no one to turn to. I injected the remark at this point that this was a pretty important point that she was bringing out. She added that some parents never really develop the feeling that their child is capable and then at adolescence when children do try to establish themselves, the parent and child are thrown into a good deal of conflict. The parent thinks the child is not capable and the child needs to think that he is capable. He must work towards more management of his own affairs.¹

Knowledge of the principles of learning is an important qualification of the leader of a parents' group. Such principles as "beginning where the members are", relating new learning to present experience and understanding, anticipating resistance to new concepts, presenting new learning in appropriate amounts that parents can absorb without being overwhelmed by the resulting disequilibrium they suffer, providing opportunity for integration, frequent testing and reiteration of new ideas and, finally, putting the new learning into practice in everyday living, in the group, the home and the community -- all of these may be applied in parent group education.

The worker's knowledge of community resources is a real asset in his activities with parents' groups. Members are usually interested in educational resources and frequently are concerned about treatment resources available to themselves or to others in the community. Knowledge of the area

¹ Record of a Settlement House group conducted by a staff member of the Family Society of Greater Boston.

of various specialists - doctors, nurses, ministers, social workers, teachers, psychologists, psychiatrists and others - as well as acquaintance with the particular representatives of those professions who are available to the group, enable the worker to help the members select the right person for the job to be done. Familiarity with relevant and reliable books, pamphlets, films and film-strips also increases the worker's ability to serve the group. Likewise, the worker's awareness of the various community agencies concerned with health and welfare, their organization, function and operation, is of value to the group not only in broadening their knowledge of community resources but also in providing guidance for members wishing to use these resources.

Skills Required in Parent Group Education

Although the principles, knowledge and skills applied in effective parent group education are thoroughly integrated, for the sake of clarity in discussion they have been dealt with separately. Furthermore, since it is possible to have an understanding of principles and the necessary knowledge without automatically having the skill to put such principles and knowledge into practice, a separate treatment of the application of skills in parents' groups seems advisable, even at the risk of apparent duplication of certain material in the previous two sections.

Much of the parent group leader's skill is bound up with his ability to work with people in a helping role. This ability has several constituents which are common to both social work and adult education skills, and a few which will be recognized as specifically belonging to social work.

Related to the principle of individualization is the worker's skill in finding out where each member is, in his understanding of the concepts

in which he is interested. The reason that so many man-hours are wasted by the lecture method is that usually the lecturer has no way of finding out what the listener knows, what he wants to know, what he is capable of learning, and what he needs to know in connection with the particular problem confronting him. Provided that the worker is skilful in promoting a permissive, accepting atmosphere in the group, in which relationships can begin to grow, he will be able, in the beginning, to encourage members to verbalize their interests and problems. He can thus find out what, at least, are some of their concerns. (They may very likely not verbalize the problems that worry them most, in the early stages of the group, much as clients may take time to test a caseworker before entrusting to him their intimate fears). The worker can also get some impression of members' attitudes, knowledge and general understanding of the subject area, by encouraging their participation. In this way, he learns more about individual members, not only about their families, their socio-economic status and other environmental details, but also about what they know, understand and practice; about what they know intellectually but do not practice, and about what they misunderstand or simply do not know. As he becomes thus acquainted with the members, he is better equipped to give them the specific kind and quantity of assistance they need in planning and conducting the programme, taking into account such factors as their similarity or diversity as to interests (assumed, expressed, or implied), age, maturity, socio-economic background and status, education, and previous experience in groups.

Throughout the series, the worker uses his skill to help members identify their problems and needs. At first, they may not be conscious of their real problems and, as these appear, the programme will require revision to accommodate the new interests involved. Like clients, parents frequently

come to groups to find out what to do about their child's behaviour, or their mate's lack of co-operation, only to realize sooner or later that they themselves have a large share of responsibility for the problem. It is the special contribution of the worker to help the group concentrate on problems about which they can do something constructive, and to avoid the possibility of arousing unproductive anxiety by discussing situations requiring expert individual attention. Assuming, however, that the problem is appropriate for discussion in the group, the worker then uses his skill to help members analyze and understand it. He encourages them to look back into the history of the difficulty, to recognize possible causes, to note the importance of feelings and to develop their capacity to identify with the various persons involved, thus seeing the problem from different points of view. (Socio-drama, plays and films are useful for this purpose). The worker assists the group to think through the pros and cons of various ways of solving the problem, to evolve new ways in the light of their increased understanding of the difficulty, and to propound possible ways of testing out the solutions they consider most desirable in particular cases. Later, it may be in order to help the group evaluate these solutions in the light of subsequent developments.

The worker's functioning in helping a group to think through a problem is illustrated in the following excerpt from a record.¹ The worker had started the group thinking in terms of parents' concern when children do not meet their expectations, and the difficulties entailed by this. One member immediately launched into a description of the non-conforming behaviour of her

¹ Record of a Settlement House group conducted by a staff member of the Family Society of Greater Boston. This was the first meeting of the group following the introductory meeting when the discussion procedure was illustrated.

two-year-old. "She was afraid that her child was going to grow up and be this way in life". The leader questioned if we expect too much from children and there was a good deal of agreement on this from the group. He led the members on to consider how they felt about children showing resentment against parents for making them conform, and related this to their own feelings. Did they themselves get angry ?

They picked this up and there was a good deal of joking about it; they certainly did get angry and they also had resentment. One mother brought out that we expect children to be loving cherubs most of the time. We forget that they too have feelings and can get mad. I wondered if we were bowled over when we received anger from children. They went along on this and the mother who had brought this up said, should children show anger directed at their parents. I asked the group how they felt about it and a few of them jumped in and said that it was inevitable, that in the relationship parents live with children, there is bound to be resentment.

Through more discussion, the group became aware that children, like they themselves, might displace onto others (e.g. siblings) the anger they feel toward the parents.

The mother who had brought this up didn't go along too much and she said that she felt if this were not curbed in her child, she would grow up and become a selfish and undisciplined person who wouldn't follow the rules. Someone at this point introduced the matter of, should children be permitted to strike their parents ? I wondered how they felt about this and they generally agreed that it was not a good thing for youngsters, that they become guilty when they can do this; then I went into the fact that there was a difference between accepting a child's feeling of anger and letting him act it out toward another person. Someone asked if I believed in freedom of expression and I waited the person out; then she brought out that at one time there was all of this emphasis of letting the child express himself completely. They took this up and within the group themselves worked out that freedom didn't mean lack of limitations. We spoke of the fact that children are comfortable when they have defined limits. I brought it down to the group itself and asked them if it was one of the things that we were looking for here today -- to

define limitations. How far can you go ? How much can you bring up in this group ? There were some knowing smiles about this.

The mother who had brought up the question gave further examples of her child's activities -- playing with lipstick, etc. "The group took this very lightly and spoke of their own children doing this and Mrs. F. seemed to relax a good deal". There followed considerable discussion about whether or not things of value should be put out of reach of small children, and what should be the rules. The leader enlarged their thinking on this by reminding them that at this age children are first starting to reach out, to investigate, and to learn; so often they are punished for attitudes that they will be expected to have later, in school ! He also encouraged the parents to express how they felt about rules and they said they didn't mind when the rules were real, but when there were too many of them, they resented it.

I went on at this point as to why did we worry so much about children in terms of rules, and in terms of the need to discipline them. I wondered if all the way through in a sense, we were indicating that we are afraid that children don't have the capacity to grow up. In a sense, we depreciate children. I went on and brought out that the thing that was so important with youngsters was their capacity to grow, to master themselves and their environment. Do we expect tremendous conformity at this age of two because of our fear that a child is not, in the process of growing up, going to learn how to conform and how to develop a sense of self-discipline ? The mother said that she thought she perhaps had been a little too strict at this point and that she hadn't faced these difficulties with her older child.

At this point another mother broke in to apply the discussion to her teen-ager.

Through his understanding of the members and their needs, the worker is more able to help them meet their needs at any specific time during the discussion. He can distinguish, for example, as to whether a member who

appears to be talkative is gaining relief or strength through verbalization or whether she is indulging herself in "acting out" her problem at the expense of the other members with no benefit to herself. In the latter case, he uses his leadership skill to assist the person to terminate this useless activity; in the former, he has to decide whether the group is willing to "go along" for the sake of the member, or is becoming too restless and impatient, necessitating intervention and the provision of other avenues to the member in question. The worker may be able to judge when the group is ready to use information on the topic under consideration. He can increase the effectiveness of information "aids" (experts, books, pamphlets and other printed material, films and filmstrips, etc.) by skilful use: he can assist the group in deciding exactly what is their need and which aid is most appropriate to meet it; he can help them plan the method of using the person or material they select. For example, too often a doctor or other expert is invited to a group and given the topic, on which he proceeds to talk for forty minutes, when it would be much more valuable to the group and more satisfying to him if he were asked to sit in on the discussion and contribute only at points where his knowledge is needed during the meeting. Films are also often badly used: the group should be prepared for what they are to see and should have plenty of opportunity to clarify points and discuss their ideas following the showing. Printed materials have value if members are helped to put them to good use.

At times, the worker may see that information would be of no value to some members because real understanding is blocked by emotional problems. If the problems are not too serious, further discussion may clarify difficulties and point up causes. As mentioned previously, socio-drama is often useful in this connection. Generally speaking, it seems inadvisable to have a

member play her own real-life role as in psychodrama, in this type of group; she can learn by watching others or by taking a different role. If the worker becomes aware that casework or psychiatric treatment is required, he may then use his skill in limited individual interviews with the member concerned, in an effort to assist her to seek appropriate treatment. Sometimes another member will suggest application to an agency, and the group will give support.

Often in parents' groups, workers need to apply their skill in meeting resistance to new concepts. Some parents become quite hostile if they feel their ideas are questioned or disapproved. The worker may find it necessary to protect a member who is considered too reactionary (or too progressive) by the others, by pointing out that member's right to his own opinion. Like clients, group members are lost if attendance brings too much discomfort. Like clients, too, they need to feel that the worker can accept their hostility and still care enough about them to provide a sustaining relationship during the period of anxiety while new ideas are being integrated. The process of changing attitudes usually involves considerable struggle. Sympathetic understanding on the part of the leader can do much to keep group members moving to new levels of achievement.

The worker's success in developing the potentialities inherent in the small informal group is dependent upon not only his understanding of individual and group behaviour but his actual skill in guiding the group process. Gertrude Wilson's statement with reference to the dynamics of group relationships can be directly applied to parent education groups and is relevant here: "The individuals interacting within the group create an experience which because of their relationships to each other is different from anything else each of them has".¹ These relationships are guided by the skilful worker in

¹ Wilson, Gertrude, Group Work and Casework, Family Welfare Association of America, 1941.

such a way as to make participation in the group process itself a constructive and educational experience. That this can be accomplished is evident in the comments of parents who have had this kind of experience.¹ Early in the development of the group, for example, parents feel the reassurance that comes from discovering that they are not alone in their difficulty - not by being told this by an expert, but by hearing from other parents the story of similar problems. After possible initial resentment at not being given a formula by the worker to apply to their "case", members frequently find unexpected satisfaction and new self-confidence as they are helped to use their own knowledge and understanding and to work together on problems. Following the worker's example of acceptance, they may arrive at a greater appreciation of each other's ability and experience, in spite of (or perhaps because of) external differences of cultural backgrounds or socio-economic status. The reactions of other members may provide a support which a parent badly needs and receives nowhere else at the time. A sharp comment from a fellow member may jar the complacency of one who thought he knew it all, and result in a re-examination of his position on the question at issue.

As the group continues to meet, different members may "move" at different rates in their perception of their children's needs, their ability to identify with children or mates, and their capacity for looking beyond their immediate interests. Frequently sub-groups may develop on the basis of these differences. The leader has to use his own judgement in helping the members to grow past this stage to a higher level of ability to co-operate for

¹ Chapter 3, especially p.60, contains evidence.

the benefit of the whole group. Some leaders,¹ by analyzing with the members what has happened in the group, increase the parents' awareness of the effect of their own behaviour on other people. Relationships in the discussion group are compared with those in family groups, and new perceptions may result which affect both the members' participation in the group and their behaviour in the family setting. In actuality, the group process provides a medium in which members learn, by experience, to get along better with themselves and with others both within and outside the discussion group.

A worker's effectiveness in parent education groups is determined not only by the knowledge and skills at his command, but by his own personality and his attitude to people. Of primary importance is his genuine respect for parents and his confidence in their ability generally to learn how to handle their own problems. His success in parent group education will be as markedly influenced by his interest in learning from parents and children, as by his skill in inspiring in the members of the group a desire to grow -- intellectually, socially and emotionally. Parent group education is still in its infancy. The knowledge and skills suggested in the preceding pages mark the present stage in its development. The professional leader has a real responsibility to use his initiative to add to this meagre knowledge through experimental work planned often in co-operation with parents themselves, evaluated and recorded so that others may learn from his experience.

Parent Group Education - A Field for Social Workers

There is nothing new to social workers in the objectives

¹ An interesting analysis of group development is given in "Group Work with Mothers in a Child-Development Centre", by Wilma Lloyd, in Mental Hygiene, Volume 34, No. 4, October 1950, pp. 620-640.

of parent group education. Those who deal with families work toward these objectives, to the extent of their clients' capabilities. Likewise, the basic principles of parent education are fundamental in social work: respect for the person, for his ability and right to plan and make decisions for himself within the limits of his capacity, recognition of individual differences as well as of common human needs, utilization of relationship as a medium through which to help people to better adjustment within themselves and in the environment in which they live -- these are principles that should underlie the practice of every social worker. There remain to be considered the knowledge and skills required for work in parent group education. What part of these do social workers already have as a result of their training and experience, how can they gain what they lack, in order to be more effective parent education workers ?

The experienced social worker may be assumed to have at his fingertips a knowledge of child development and personality growth, as well as an understanding of individual behaviour. Some of this knowledge and understanding is acquired in social work training; experience in practice adds greatly to its extent and to facility in its use. Since, as pointed out previously, it is important for the worker to be thoroughly familiar with the content he will need, it would seem advisable for only experienced social workers to undertake parent group education activities. Furthermore, it may be necessary for workers to supplement the knowledge they already have by a study of certain age-groups or of special groups, such as children with cerebral palsy or other handicaps. A period of training and experience in casework would be valuable to group workers engaging in parent education, while training in group work principles and methods plus experience under supervision would assist caseworkers to gain some

understanding of the dynamics of inter-relationships in groups and a measure of skill in assisting in the group process. Without this familiarity with the principles and methods of group work, the social worker may fail to realize the potentialities inherent in the group situation, potentialities which make possible to parent group education much of its essential value. Caseworkers, and probably most group workers, would benefit by training and supervised experience in the special field of discussion leadership in parents' groups.

Fostering and using constructive relationships with people should be one of the social worker's special skills. In the parents' group, this is extended to include inter-relationships within and outside the group: training in group work should enable the caseworker to develop his skill in utilizing the relationships between members and the dynamics of the total group for the benefit of the individual members as well as the group-as-a-whole. He should, for example, be able to accept the hostility of members and to help the group grow through the crisis situations that may arise. Casework training should help him to judge how much strain a member can profitably endure, and how and when pressure must be alleviated. Skill in group work should assist him to help group members develop sensitivity to each other's needs and to ways of meeting those needs in the group.

The fundamental skills involved in "finding out" where the client is and how he sees his problem, helping him to identify his problems and needs, assisting him to find constructive ways of satisfying his needs -- all of these can be adapted to use in parent education groups. The worker's effectiveness will be enormously increased if he is skilful enough to make these group tasks, so that members together identify their problems, seek causes and find appropriate ways of resolving their difficulties or of meeting their needs.

Many social workers are already familiar with the basic principles of learning; supervisors, especially, make continuous use of these in supervision. Others, however, might benefit from an opportunity to observe and practise the application of these laws in parent education discussion groups. Some social workers may also need to extend their knowledge of the resources of audio-visual aids that are of value in parent group education, and to increase their skill in the use of various educational aids and techniques: films, film-strips, socio-drama or informal dramatizations, panel discussions and other methods of presenting material -- all of these have their place. Social workers should already be acquainted with community educational, health and welfare, and religious resources, and have the skill to assist members as individuals to make use of these. They may, however, benefit by training as to effective ways of enabling the group to make good use of these resources.

Presumably social workers would not be in their profession if they were not personally interested in people. However, there is considerable difference between casework and parent group education and it is likely that some caseworkers would not be happy in the latter field. Since the worker's attitude is of particular importance, it is essential that only those social workers who are interested in the possibilities of parent group education, and enjoy taking part in it, be encouraged to undertake it. Furthermore, they should be experimentally-minded, ready to examine and try out new ideas, able to consider themselves as partners in a new venture with the parents, lay leaders and other professional people who are similarly interested; and, finally, they should be keen to apply their training in the use of scientific method to thinking and practice in this new field.

Social workers at present engaged in parent group education appear to have acquired their special skills for this work in a variety of ways: through the school of experience; by attending in-service seminars or courses in group dynamics; by participating in group therapy training programmes; or by joining with adult educationists in leadership training courses under various auspices. Perhaps, in time, schools of social work will provide training opportunities that will specifically prepare workers for participation in this type of programme. In the meantime, much could be accomplished through in-service training courses. Here, again, the need is for initiative and professional "know-how" in experimenting with different types of in-training courses in order to discover methods that accomplish most in the limited time available. In addition, such courses might themselves provide a medium for adding to existing knowledge of the theory and practice of parent group education. Actual experience in a group under expert leadership, exemplifying the principles and methods of group work, practice in leadership of a parents' group with the help of a supervisor, and development of skills in the use of resources would seem to be essential elements in a training programme.

The view that social workers have a contribution to make through participation in parent group education, is supported by the F.S.A.A. Committee on Family Life Education, with a note of caution:

Complete and uncompromising recognition should be given to the principle that it is unsound for a family agency to embark on a programme of family life education until its casework services are on a sound and solid footing. A programme of family life education is closely related to existing casework services but is distinctly an addition in terms of time and staff requirements. Given these latter assurances, agencies should not hesitate to

assume this new function.¹

The Committee then proceeds to propose certain principles and guides for the development of family life education programmes which will be helpful for agencies entering this area of activity.²

It is true that participation in parent education programmes would take up staff time which normally would be given to casework or other group work services. Some agencies may object that they are hard pressed and cannot now meet the demands made upon them. Assuredly, it is for each agency to judge its own capabilities; better not to attempt any new effort than to enter upon it half-heartedly. However, it would seem that the devotion by established agencies of at least a small portion of staff time to the development of this preventive work would in the end pay dividends in terms of improved mental health in the communities served, and could eventually result in a general expansion of preventive services more in keeping with the theoretical knowledge even now available. It is assumed that staff engaging in parent education should be given the necessary time for preparation, attending meetings, recording, and evaluating, as well as for reading, sharing experiences, and thinking, with others interested in the field. Too often, in the past, workers have contributed to programmes on their own time, with a resultant loss of value because of lack of opportunity to do little more than meet with groups after a minimum of preparation.

An objection that may be raised by persons outside the social work profession to caseworkers, in particular, undertaking work with parents' groups, is that social caseworkers, being accustomed to dealing with maladjusted individuals and problem situations, are not the best people to parti-

¹ F.S.A.A. Committee on Family Life Education, "Family Life Education", Highlights, Volume XII, No. 5, May 1951, p. 71.

² *ibid.*, pp. 70-73.

cipate in programmes for "normal" parents concerned about the everyday difficulties of family life. This concept of a clear distinction between normal and abnormal persons is erroneous. The division between the two is blurred. Social workers are keenly aware of the broad range of normality. They know that "normal" parents often have potential or actual personality difficulties which seriously impair their functioning as parents. Furthermore, qualified workers are equipped to assist such parents. True, in group discussion the emphasis will be on normal behaviour rather than on serious deviations. It enhances the value of social workers as group leaders that they can distinguish between problems amenable to being dealt with in the group, from those requiring individual casework or psychiatric treatment.

There seems little question that social workers should have a vital interest in parent group education programmes. Such programmes offer an important avenue for positive action toward improved mental health. The same basic philosophic principles underlie parent education and social work practice. Social workers should have no reluctance in subscribing to the objectives of parent group education since these parallel the objectives of social work itself. Furthermore, by their training and experience, both group and caseworkers already possess much of the knowledge and skill desirable in a professional leader in parents' groups. Already a beginning has been made in the matter of determining what additional knowledge and skills are needed, and how these may best be acquired. As in other fields, emphasis is increasingly placed on positive and preventive services, similarly in the mental health field, it is logical that parent education services will eventually occupy an important place. Well-established social work agencies, equipped as they are to contribute so

much to this development, would be wise to begin now careful experimental projects on a limited scale which could provide a sound foundation for their future participation in parent group education on a more extensive basis. Already, a number of agencies have recognized this and are undertaking activities in parent education as part of their regular programme. In Chapter 3, brief descriptions of selected projects are given. These descriptions illustrate the variety of agencies under whose auspices social workers are engaging in parent group education, as well as the similarities and differences as to approach and methods to be found in this comparatively new area of activity. They also point up some of the problems facing workers in this field.

Chapter 3

DIRECTIONS TAKEN BY SOCIAL WORKERS AND SOCIAL AGENCIES

The Committee on Family Life Education of the Family Service Association of America, set up to study the place of family life education in family service programmes, found that a considerable number of agencies (forty-eight out of eighty-one reporting) were already giving leadership to discussion groups interested in this field.¹ Replies to enquiries made for the present study and recent articles in social work journals indicate that many family agencies are now including in their services the leadership of groups concerned with family life education topics. Occasionally such discussion groups are composed of clients of the agency; more frequently they consist of persons who belong to voluntary organizations such as parent-teacher associations, or persons who have come together for the specific purpose of discussing certain topics of common interest.

Social workers in other settings are also participating in parent group education. Psychologists and psychiatrists in child guidance centres are using social workers in conducting discussions with groups of parents using the agency. Programmes are being conducted in co-operation with doctors and nurses, with the parents of handicapped children. A few children's aid societies are experimenting with discussion groups for their foster mothers, with case-workers as leaders. Some social workers in nursery school projects recognize in group discussion an excellent medium for the parent education that should be a

¹ F.S.A.A., "Family Life Education", Highlights, Volume XII, No. 5, May, 1951, p.66., New York.

part of every good pre-school programme. A few school social workers are accepting work with parents in groups as a means of multiplying their effectiveness. In group work settings, too, tentative attempts are under way to encourage parents to use agency workers to assist with the discussion of family relationships.

In order to make more concrete the picture of the social worker in action, selected projects illustrating parent education with both client and non-client groups in various settings are briefly described in this chapter.

(a) Parent Education with Client Groups

In a Family Service Agency

Family life institutes conducted by the Jewish Family Service, New York, are described by Jerome D. Diamond in a recent issue of Social Casework.¹ These consist of four to eight weekly meetings conducted by a caseworker, with a group of not more than twenty-five husbands and wives. Broad family life topics are selected for discussion on the basis of the worker's experience as a family counsellor and his knowledge of the children of the parents concerned. Topics include "How the Child Sees the Parent", "The Parent Discovers his Child", and "The Place of Feelings in Family Living". These titles allow scope for the parents to bring up their own specific problems and interests, and they are encouraged to do so. The schedule followed during the hour-and-a-half meetings is planned to provide fifteen minutes for orientation and continuity, twenty minutes

¹ Diamond, Jerome D., "Group Counselling in the Family Agency", Social Casework, Volume 32, No. 5, May 1951, pp.207-214, Family Service Association of America, Albany, New York.

for the presentation of content by the leader, forty minutes for the discussion period, and ten minutes for summing up and giving assignments. Selected parents are invited to attend the group, and no new families are allowed to join after the institute begins. Emphasis is placed upon both partners attending, since it has been found that their relationship is strengthened when both participate.

Mr. Diamond's use of the group method is based on his conviction that "an intellectually accepted concept is not truly a part of a parent's equipment until he has resolved his feeling about it sufficiently to try out his new knowledge".¹ The group provides support and protection as the parent tries to apply the content of the discussion to his own situation.

In a Social Group Work Agency

An interesting account of the development of a parents' group in a Y.W.C.A. setting is given by Helen Northen, in an article entitled, "Parents Can Be Helped to Do a Better Job".² With the assistance of a social group worker, a few young married women who had been "Y" members in their teens, gathered a number of their friends and formed the Y-Actives Club. All fourteen members were of Polish or Irish background, were in their twenties, and most of them had children. They came together once a week, originally for recreation, "to have some life of our own" and "to do more things". The worker helped them to have fun, in basketball, dancing, playing cards and eating. Then they began making rag dolls for children who had no toys. They enjoyed their meetings so much they decided their husbands should have fun too, so they had monthly parties to which husbands were invited, with dancing and other activities enjoyed by everybody. Interest in handicrafts was the next stage, and the mothers gained much satis-

¹ Diamond, Jerome D., "Group Counselling in the Family Agency", Social Casework, Volume 32, No. 5, May 1951, pp.207-214, F.S.A.A., Albany, New York.
² Northen, Helen, "Parents Can be Helped to Do a Better Job", The Child, April, 1951, Children's Bureau, Federal Security Agency, Washington, USA.

faction from making small gifts or articles for their homes. Gradually, in the relaxed atmosphere of the group, they began to discuss problems -- low-cost vacation trips, baby-sitters, the care of children, and difficulties with "in-laws". At this time, the group worker helped them to make use of resources in the community that could assist in their thinking -- films, and printed material, a staff member from the child guidance clinic, and a nurse. Finally, when the group was ready, the worker helped them to see that their problems were related to broader concerns affecting the whole community, and they discussed housing, the roles of the family and the school in sex education, and the provision of child-guidance services through the community chest.

The worker's role with this group was to strengthen friendliness among members, and to encourage an atmosphere of mutual appreciation and support. She helped the members face up to their real feelings and desires, to recognize their needs and to do something about satisfying them. While, for the most part, the inter-relationships in the group brought about support for members and growth in adequacy as mothers and wives, the worker took advantage of individual interviews to help certain members who needed this special attention. In addition, she assisted two members, in private appointments, to come to the point of seeking aid in a family agency and a child guidance clinic.

Miss Northen concludes, "Thus, social group workers can use their skills -- based on an understanding of how human beings behave and why, on the dynamics of group life, and on knowing about other services in the community that may be called on for co-operation -- to assist young married couples in such a way that the quality of their family life brings satisfaction to themselves and

provides a home atmosphere in which their children may develop healthy personalities".¹

In Child Guidance Clinics

During the past several months, the Judge Baker Guidance Centre in Boston, Massachusetts, has conducted a pilot discussion group with parents in an effort to determine the effectiveness of such groups with clients in treatment at the Centre.² The staff social workers were asked to submit names of the mothers in their case-load who in their opinion would be able to benefit by group experience. The group members were selected from these names on the basis of their ability to participate in and contribute to the discussions, and the probability of the group experience meeting their specific needs. For instance, several had difficulty in relating to other persons in outside groups, and several needed first-hand reassurance that other mothers shared their problems. This group was conducted by a psychiatrist, with a psychiatric social worker serving as observer and recorder; future groups may be conducted by the social workers.

The group began with eight members, but two dropped out soon after the meetings began. The women ranged in age from 33 to 46 years, and came from middle-class families. One had finished only a few grades in grammar school, one was a registered nurse, another was a high-school graduate and three were college graduates.

Goals of the leader and the observer in undertaking the project were (1) "to further understanding of sound principles of child development

¹ Northen, Helen, "Parents Can be Helped to Do a Better Job", The Child, April 1951

² From letter dated December 28, 1951, from Mrs. Eleanor Rosenblum, Psychiatric Social Worker, Judge Baker Guidance Centre for Childhood and Youth, Boston, Mass.

and training" and (2) "to help therapeutically with the mothers' own problems". The validity of these goals was confirmed in the mothers' spontaneous comments and statements of their needs. No prepared material was used as a stimulant to discussion, except brief summaries of the topics discussed at the previous meeting. Subjects included both generalized and specific problems of child-parent relationships, with the mothers frequently contributing from memories of their own childhood experiences as well as from incidents in their current relationships. In addition, the group provided a medium in which some worked out their feelings towards parents and siblings in a transference situation. The leader participated quite actively in the discussions, helped to clarify issues, dealt with intense feelings if they seemed intolerable to a particular member and, at appropriate times, offered theoretical material about child development and training.

Even in the three months during which the group had been in process at the time of reporting, the agency staff was of the opinion that the group discussion method was a valuable supplement to individual case work: "new material heretofore unknown has been brought up in the individual sessions, and there has seemed to be marked momentum in the mothers' progress due to the influence of the group".¹ Frequent conferences between the group leader and individual case workers correlated the two services. It was evident that the discussion group made possible the following values: "reassurance of other persons' being in the same boat, the first-hand transference situation with siblings as well as with the parent figure, and the driving home emotionally of ideas that were only grasped intellectually previously".²

¹ *ibid.*

² *ibid.*

Group discussions of a special type form an important part of the counselling programme conducted by the Chicago Community Child-Guidance Centres. Dr. Rudolf Dreikurs, Medical Director, describes the group therapy in these centres as

a unique combination of group dynamics, with the group approach taking place at various levels: the family group, in which we deal with the entire family in each case rather than with the mother or the child alone; the children's group in the game room, where we supplement play with psycho-drama as a further group approach; the parents' group, composed of parents enrolled for therapy, who participate in group discussions; the community group, composed of visiting parents, teachers, students, and others interested in problems of child guidance, who likewise participate in the discussion; children among the adults, being interviewed in the counselling room in the presence of adults -- one of the most interesting, and perhaps most controversial, aspects of our group therapy.¹

Parents who seek help at the Centres are encouraged to bring other members of the family who have contact with the child in treatment, and are required to bring all the children in the family. The only limitation is the upper age level of fourteen years for children accepted for treatment. Families and other adults participating in the counselling sessions represent a mixture of economic, religious and racial backgrounds. Dr. Dreikurs believes that their meeting together increases awareness of the similarity of their problems, regardless of external differences; thus, indirectly, the human relationships of the whole community are affected and improved.

Parents enroll at the Centre and immediately begin attending the weekly group sessions. Before their own case is taken up, they will probably

¹ Dreikurs, Rudolf, "Family Group Therapy in the Chicago Community Child Guidance Centres", Mental Hygiene, Volume XXXV, No. 2, April, 1951, p. 291, The National Association for Mental Health, Albany, New York.

have taken part in several sessions and will be familiar with the procedure. The parents and adults involved in a case are interviewed by the counsellor and the social worker in the counselling room, while the children are being observed by the group worker in the game room. Other parents and interested adults -- possibly up to 100 people -- sit two or three rows deep in a solid semi-circle around the counsellor. They are encouraged to make comments, ask questions and offer suggestions during the interview. Sometimes their spontaneous reaction to a parent's statement or attitude is an important factor in causing him to re-examine his behaviour and eventually to revise his thinking and practice. At the end of this interview, the parent leaves the counselling room, the children are brought in, and the problem is talked over with them. The parent (or both parents if they are present) may be brought back and a discussion carried on with the whole family group, or the parent may be interviewed again without the children. The parent's case may require these personal interviews every two or four weeks; in addition, he or she is expected to attend all the weekly sessions.

It is Dr. Dreikurs' experience that, contrary to common expectation, parents do not seem to be inhibited by the presence of others while they are being interviewed. He feels, in fact, that frequently a parent can accept group pressure more readily than the opinion of the counsellor. At times, when distinctly personal matters which cannot be discussed publicly are important in a case, parents have an opportunity for private interviews with the social worker or counsellor. For the most part, however, problems are taken up before the whole group. Having participated in the discussion prior to his own case, the parent realizes that his problem is shared by many others and consequently

feelings of shame, humiliation, guilt, and inadequacy are diminished or removed. Frequently some parent in the group volunteers an instance from his own experience, his way of meeting the problem, and the results achieved. This may be directly helpful to the parent whose problem is being discussed; in any case he may be able to view the example with more objectivity than his own difficulty, and eventually be able to transfer to his own life situation the understanding he thereby achieves. By interviewing children and parents together, the counsellor demonstrates for the whole group the idea of the "family council" in action, and he encourages an atmosphere of calm rationality in which to work out the difficulty.

Obviously the success of this programme depends on the skill of the counsellor, who must be sensitive not only to the "clients", but also to the whole group. The seating plan must be conducive to group unity and so planned that the counsellor can see everybody, "not only to catch any indication of desire to participate, but also to recognize and deal with emotional reactions, confusion, objection, or criticism".¹ While counselling one parent, he is simultaneously dealing with each member in the whole group. The counsellor in the Chicago Centres may be a psychiatrist, or a psychologist or social worker with specialized training.

The Lasker Mental Hygiene and Child Guidance Centre of Hadassah, Jerusalem, co-operates with four infant welfare centres, each of which has an ante-natal clinic.² Expectant mothers visit the clinics every two weeks for physical examinations, and they are invited to attend also a group meeting

¹ *ibid.*, p. 296.

² Caplan, Gerald, "Mental-Hygiene Work with Expectant Mothers - A Group Psychotherapeutic Approach", *Mental Hygiene*, Volume 35, No. 1, January 1951, The National Association for Mental Health, Albany, New York.

held once a month. Usually each mother attends the group meeting five or six times during the period of her pregnancy. The total number in the group varies from four to fifty, with an average of fifteen to twenty. Groups of ten to twenty have been found to develop a feeling of unity which has resulted in the most effective discussion. Great variety in economic status and nationality backgrounds seems to present no hindrance to participation, because the discussion is concerned more with feelings than with knowledge, and is focussed upon a common experience.

The aim of the group leader (a psychiatrist or a psychiatric social worker) is to stimulate a reassuring and permissive atmosphere in which members can discuss freely their doubts and fears, knowing that they will not be scoffed at, but understood and helped to deal with these destructive feelings. Group members sit around a table, or gather in the clinic hall. The leader is prepared to give an informal, fifteen-minute talk on some topic known to be of interest to the group, as a stimulus to discussion. The topic may be chosen because it involves information needed by the mothers, because it is related to probable causes of worry, shame or guilt, or because it may provoke fruitful discussion. Sometimes only a part of the talk is given before it is interrupted by questions or discussion, and the leader is always alert in following up points of particular interest to members. The leader's role in the discussion is not directly to lead, but to help clarify the contributions of different members and to relate these ideas. The leader

does not interest himself in the problem of any individual as such, except insofar as he accepts it as a contribution of one member of the group to be related to the group as a whole. He makes use of the remarks of various members in relation

to the group much as a psychotherapist in individual treatment deals with the separate associations of his patient. Whereas in the lecture his main technique has been suggestion, in the discussion he changes to an analytic orientation, and his role is mostly interpretative. He points out evidences of anxiety and guilt, and in the main leaves it to the group to undertake the task of reassurance.¹

The Centre staff has found that the mothers in these small groups resemble patients in therapy groups who, perhaps because they are strangers to each other, are more willing to speak freely about their intimate feelings than when alone with a therapist. These expectant mothers find the greatest reassurance in hearing each other talk; they discover that many of them have "similar guilty secrets and irrational anxieties".² Mothers revealing serious disturbances are helped to seek individual treatment. The intention is to initiate the use of small, closed weekly group therapy meetings with these women.

Requests for post-natal discussion groups from the mothers who have attended the pre-natal meetings have resulted in plans for series of meetings in which a more intensive technique will be possible because the membership will be selected. These requests testify to the success of the programme, which the Clinic staff considers of value also because, by their attendance, large numbers of mothers become accustomed to the workers at the Centre and find it natural to turn to them later for help in dealing with their family problems.

In Treatment Centres for Children

Group discussion is used by the Department of Psychiatry

¹ *ibid*, p. 47.

² *ibid*, p. 48.

as one method of helping parents of children undergoing treatment at the Children's Memorial Hospital in Montreal.¹ Recruitment is done on the basis of the child's diagnosis. There have been groups for mothers of neurotic children and for those of children suffering from cerebral palsy, also for parents of children attending the speech therapy clinic. Other groups for parents of schizophrenic children, retarded children and asthmatic children are being planned. No other limitation is placed on the composition of the groups. Both groups of mothers only, and mixed groups of fathers and mothers, have been tried. In this connection, Dr. Statten reports that the mixing of sexes in a group seems to affect the choice of topics discussed. He has noticed some difference also depending on the sex of the psychiatrist in charge of the group; mothers apparently feel much freer to discuss sexual and gynaecological problems with a female therapist. Groups consist of eight to ten members.

The discussion leader, a psychiatrist at the Children's Memorial Hospital, "plays a relatively passive role and leaves the parents to initiate the discussion"² after the first one or two meetings, in which he may have to take a "slightly more directive"³ role. An observer is usually present who takes no part in the discussion, but is available to take the leadership role (and is accepted by the group) if the regular leader has to be absent. The observer may be a trainee in psychiatry, psychology, or social work.

Utilization by another agency of a caseworker's services as discussion leader is described by Regina Elkes in an article entitled, "Group-Casework Experiment with Mothers of Children with Cerebral Palsy".⁴

¹ From letter dated January 16, 1952, from Dr. Taylor Statten, Director, Department of Psychiatry, The Children's Memorial Hospital, Montreal.

² & ³ *ibid.*

⁴ Elkes, Regina, "Group-Casework Experiment with Mothers of Children with Cerebral Palsy", *Journal of Social Casework*, March 1947, pp.95-101, Family Service Association of America, Albany, New York.

The Brooklyn Visiting Nurse Association enlisted the caseworker's help with a group of ten mothers whose children were attending the Association's treatment centre for children with cerebral palsy. Subjects discussed grew out of the mothers' own requests, and the four meetings were concerned mainly with (1) the acceptance by the mothers of their ambivalent feelings towards their handicapped children; ventilation of their resentment towards their husbands' failure to share responsibility with regard to these children; (2) discipline problems; their own guilt feelings and their tendency to "take it out on" other members of the family; difficulties with relatives; (3) problems connected with school and social adjustment; (4) community services; and a pot-pourri period, in which any questions were discussed.

Even such a short series was considered to have real values. The informal participation of a Visiting Nurse Association nurse made it possible for mothers to get the information they wanted about cerebral palsy and to clarify their understanding of the treatment carried on at the Centre. Through talking about their problems and experiences with others in similar situations, they found a certain relief -- the emotional burden seemed to become lighter as it was shared with the group. By keeping the focus on subjects desired, however, the worker was also able to keep within manageable limits the therapeutic aspects of the meetings. One mother was referred to a family agency when it became evident that individual treatment was needed. Finally, the caseworker's method encouraged the mothers to plan their own meetings, thus enhancing their sense of adequacy, competence and self-respect.

In addition to the immediate advantages to the group served, this type of co-operation between social work and other agencies produces a means of bringing casework services into touch with people who need help but do not

usually seek it of their own volition.

(b) Parent Education with Non-Client Groups

Family Service Agencies

The family life education programme of the Family Society of Greater Boston began on an organized basis in 1947,¹ with the distribution of a circular stating that the staff of the Society was available to give talks on topics relating to marriage, children's behaviour, and similar subjects. The immediate response of about fifty requests was evidence of the interest in, and need for, this type of service. During the five years since 1947, the agency has tried out different types of programmes. Though single talks to large audiences are still offered, talks to smaller groups with extended discussion are considered a preferable method by the agency staff, and discussion series are regarded as the most effective type of programme. Topics suggested in the agency's publicity leaflet as possible areas of interest for groups include, "The Pre-School Child", "The Years Six to Ten", "Parent-Child Relationships", "The Teen-Ager", "Looking toward Marriage", and "You're Younger than You Think".²

Most of the discussion series have been carried on with mothers' groups which usually are affiliated with parent-teacher associations, nursery schools, or settlement houses, but sometimes are groups which have organized themselves expressly for the series. Teen-agers, too, under the auspices of a church or settlement house, call upon the agency for leadership. While middle-income groups have made most use of the service, some groups in both the low- and

¹ From letter dated December 21, 1951, from Edward J. Power, Jr., Assistant to the Executive, Family Society of Greater Boston, Boston, Mass.

² "Perhaps Someone Can Help!" publicity leaflet on services of the Family Society of Greater Boston.

high-income districts have received assistance.

Usually, a preliminary meeting takes place between the staff member in charge of the family life education programme and a sub-committee from the group, to consider in broad terms what the members want, the manner of conducting the meetings, and such mechanics as the time and frequency of meetings and the payment of a fee. This preliminary meeting provides an opportunity for both the agency and the group to clarify their ideas as to the value of working together on this educational project. If the arrangements are completed, the discussion leader at his first meeting goes over all of these matters again with the whole group. He covers such questions as, "What does each member of the group expect and want in this series ?", "What topics are to be discussed ?", "How often shall we meet ?", "How long will meetings be ?". The leader goes carefully into what he can do to help the members gain their expectations; he clarifies his role -- he is to help the members achieve their goal of understanding specified phases of children's development and behaviour, and their own part in these. He emphasizes that he cannot give quick answers, but that the real value of the series will come as the group shares experiences, ideas and knowledge, and that he will participate when he has something to contribute.

This agency has found that it is a good plan to start with about twelve members in a group, since usually eight to ten of these will attend regularly throughout the series. Experience also indicates that groups consisting of fifteen to twenty persons are too large for "the intimate sort of give-and-take that is necessary for a successful series".¹ On the basis of experiments, the staff tends to the conclusion that longer series of ten to twelve meetings

¹ From letter dated December 21, 1951, from Edward J. Power, Jr., Assistant to the Executive, Family Society of Greater Boston, Boston, Massachusetts.

are more satisfying to group members than shorter series of six to eight meetings, which frequently seem to end just when the members are becoming free enough to participate comfortably. In addition, groups in which members already know each other before beginning the series are found able to move into freer and more meaningful discussion more quickly than groups in which members are strangers to each other and consequently require time to develop group feeling.

Staff caseworkers serving as group leaders promote in the groups a permissive atmosphere in which members bring up any questions or problems connected with the topic they have chosen for the particular meeting. Problems concerned with their own families form the major content of their discussions. The leader encourages participation of the members, drawing out their ideas and opinions, helping them to look for causes of behaviour, to see connections between their children's reactions and their own feelings and actions, and to become aware of the meaning of behaviour. From their examples and the ensuing discussion, the leader points up mental hygiene principles which are now meaningful to them and which they may henceforth be better able to apply in everyday living. At times, the leader's role is to protect from the group some member who draws upon herself more criticism or hostility than she can profitably endure. The leader is also on the watch for evidences of need for individual consultation, and for ways of assisting such members to seek the help they require. An interesting change has taken place in the method of dealing with this problem: "In the beginning stages of this programme we became quite alarmed about the person in the group who needed casework help. Our procedure at that time was to speak to the person outside the group, suggesting referral to one of the agencies for

help. Today, by facing an issue squarely in the group we find that often the group itself will recommend an application to one of the social agencies".¹

Obviously, discussion leadership as practised by the staff of the Family Society of Greater Boston demands a thorough knowledge of mental hygiene principles, as well as skill in working with groups. Caseworkers who participate in the family life education programme of this agency may be presumed to have the former qualification as part of their professional equipment. They are assisted in gaining the latter by participating in a special seminar given in the agency, and in courses on group dynamics conducted by analysts on the staff of the Boston State Hospital. The objective of the courses in group dynamics is "to learn the dynamics of the group by analysis and study of the group in which the person is participating, moving then to the study of the techniques, characteristics of the group, and the role of the leader as applied to groups generally".²

As one method of evaluating the benefits that members obtain from taking part in the discussion group, the Family Society asks them to answer a questionnaire at the conclusion of their series of meetings. Questions asked include, "How did the discussion help you ?", "In what way didn't the discussion help you ?", "Do you feel differently in any way about your children as a result of the discussions ?", "What new ideas did you pick up ?" Such answers as the following are frequently given: "It made me understand my daughter a little more. I believed in discipline at that age and now I feel that it isn't everything. My child seems more normal to me now". "I learned to use tact with the children and a little psychology". "One, patience with children. Two,

1 & 2 *ibid.*

understanding why they do things. Three, each child is an individual". "Not to expect so much of my youngsters". "It helped me to realize that everyone besides myself had other problems too". "That people can be helped if they want to be".¹ Such comments provide encouraging evidence of the effectiveness of the small discussion group as a means of promoting mental health and sounder family life.

In Minneapolis, the Family and Children's Service² decided, in April, 1949, to put its work in family life education on an organized basis, with one staff member in charge of this aspect of its programme. Requests henceforth were centralized, records kept of activities, and experimental work carried on both with respect to discussion in small groups in series of meetings and to the improved use of single meetings. Groups were helped to evaluate their experience and the workers recorded self-criticism. In addition, studies were made of movies, pamphlets, plays and bibliographies to obtain information and suggestions regarding content and method in family life education. In another phase of the programme, the community was explored to ascertain what activities were being carried on by other agencies also interested in the prevention of family problems. It was found that there was "a serious lack of coordination and co-operation -- a contrast to the long history of coordinated community social services".³

Records for family life education activities during the 1949-50 season show a total of 34 single-session meetings, in which the worker met only once with a group, and 48 meetings in 7 series of 6 to 8 meetings each.

¹ From Record of Settlement House Discussion Series, p.39, Family Society of Great Boston.

² Reichert, Mrs. Elizabeth, "Report on Family Life Education, 1949-50", Family and Children's Service, Minneapolis, Minn. (Multilithed)

³ "Outline for a Report on Family Life Education," Family and Children's Service, Minneapolis, dated 2-19-52, unpublished.

A tentative policy of charging a ten-dollar fee for a single meeting or \$40 for a discussion series was frequently modified to meet the individual circumstances of the various groups; the fee most commonly paid by groups was \$25 for 6 to 8 meetings.

Requests for leadership for the single-session meetings came from parent-teacher associations, groups in settlement houses, church groups and nursery school parent groups. Content of the meetings included topics concerned with the mental hygiene of family relations, parent-child relationships, and (with young people) boy-girl relationships and preparation for marriage. Frequently the worker was asked to lead a discussion after the showing of a suitable film. Even in these single sessions, emphasis was placed on encouraging participation through total group discussion, in the conviction that lectures were not an effective method of meeting the needs of a group interested in family life education. Material brought out by the group members was used to illustrate the general principles of mental hygiene which the worker was interested in presenting. When connected with their own experiences, problems and questions, these principles were much more meaningful than they would have been if presented in a lecture.

The discussion series were arranged not only with members of parent-teacher associations, but with groups from a Business and Professional Girls' Club, and Industrial Girls' Club, and a group of advanced student nurses. Topics chosen by the groups were developed under the headings, "Personality", "Psychology", "Parent-Child Relationships", "Mental Hygiene and Family Relations", and "Changes in Family Relationships". The staff worker also conducted one session on "changes in family relations as related to women pregnant for the first time" in a series planned by a mental health nurse for a class of

expectant mothers. In these discussion series, the worker began with the apparent interest which brought each parent to the group. Her task was then

to weave this into a meaningful consideration of inner and outer pressures operating on the individual family member and the family as a whole. Such sharing of individual experience and knowledge with a group may be reassuring and anxiety relieving; as would also be the universalizing by the group (including the worker) of the feelings inherent in problem situations. At every opportunity offered by the group, worker planned to stress the basic principles of human relationships, such as (1) behaviour is emotionally determined, (2) strain is normal since growth means change, (3) behaviour is specific, (4) social pressures can become psychological pressures, etc. In this way emphasis is on integrating knowledge within the group with content given in small doses supplementing what is already there.¹

Recording and evaluation of group meetings were considered an important part of the programme, even though evaluation -- in particular -- was difficult. In attempting to arrive at a more reliable evaluation, the following factors were taken into account: "(1) The worker's own impressions about the individuals in the group, their changing relations to each other and to the worker, their contributions, and their reactions to material under discussion, (2) The group members' spontaneous and/or written comments, (3) The group chairmen's judgement".²

An article in a recent issue of Highlights reveals that three years of careful experimenting have strengthened the belief of the Family and Children's Service in the value of member participation in family life education.

We have been convinced that material about family relations is so personal, and so laden with feeling,

¹ "Family Life Education", (Hollis PTA Record) Family and Children's Service, Minneapolis, Minn., multilithed article dated 11-29-49.

² Report on Family Life Education, op.cit. p.4.

that didactic lectures are not an effective way of individualizing a group and of meeting in some measure its needs and interests. A group that is participating in family life education needs to be activated to communicate within itself. Only after this occurs can the reassurance the group experience offers be used creatively.¹

Because of this conviction, the agency staff has continued to encourage the use of the discussion series as a medium, and has more recently been experimenting successfully with the use of "buzz" groups in large, single-session meetings.²

In either setting,

this informal discussion method sets a pattern of participation; it allows face-to-face experience, with consequent improved group identification; it permits the worker to integrate contributions made by members of the group and to add only what seems relevant and necessary, at the same time using their examples, their language, and their ideas; and it avoids making the leader the "know-it-all expert" who can easily be put on the spot with difficult or impossible-to-answer questions.³

For some years, the staff of the Family Service of Philadelphia has made voluntary contributions of staff time to the various city organizations which requested speakers and discussion leaders for family life education groups. Sharing the general, increasing concern about the prevention of family breakdown, the Family Service decided to set up in October, 1951,⁴ an organized programme in Family Life Education, with an experienced caseworker in charge. Although in existence only four months when reported on, this programme was already taking definite shape. In addition to contacts with key persons for the

¹ Reichert, Elizabeth, "Family Life Education 'Buzz Sessions' ", Highlights, Volume XIII, No. 3, March 1952, pp. 35-36, Family Service Association of America, Albany, N.Y.

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

⁴ From letter dated January 28, 1952, from Mrs. Gertrude K. Pollak, Director, Family Life Education, Family Service of Philadelphia.

purpose of interpreting the service, several single meetings with groups and one series of discussion meetings had already been completed, while others were planned for succeeding months. The discussions series vary in length from four to six sessions. Attendance is from twelve to eighteen participants. (The group leader prefers to have ten to twelve members present, to achieve good discussion). Requests for discussion leadership have come from such groups as mothers of pre-school children, senior high-school girls, and nurses. Topics discussed differ according to the interests of the group and have included, "The Pre-School Child and His Family", "Improving Your Date Quotient", and "Family Living". The amount of the fee for a discussion series is determined during preliminary planning, and is based on the group's ability to pay. Fees have varied from \$25 to \$80. The fee-charging policy has been generally accepted, although service would not be denied to a group which could not pay any fee.

During the past several years, staff members of the Family Welfare Bureau of Greater Vancouver have given talks on family life education topics in single-session meetings, at the request of various organizations. More recently, certain caseworkers have also participated in a few parents' discussion groups and in a pre-marital counselling course.

A caseworker was assigned to lead the parents' discussion series at the request of the local parent-teacher associations, under whose auspices the groups were organized. Groups consisted usually of about 14 members, who met in each other's homes. The content of the discussion was based on the parents' requests. Encouraged by the group leader, they brought up the topics in which they were interested, moving freely from one to the next, with the leader's assistance, when they were ready. The leader's role, in addition to

helping members engage in productive discussion, included intervening -- when necessary -- to prevent the presentation of material that could not be advantageously dealt with in the group.

The pre-marital counselling course, arranged in co-operation with a nearby neighbourhood house, was planned by a committee of doctors, caseworkers, and group workers. The course consisted of five two-hour meetings. It was attended by a group of eighteen young people associated with a number of Protestant and Catholic churches. In order to provide for continuity, all meetings were under the supervision of a trained social worker, who introduced the speakers and acted as chairman during the question-and-discussion periods following the talks. Topics, which were selected in advance by the planning committee, were, "The Meaning of Maturity", "The Meaning of Engagement", "Understanding Our Bodies", and "Relationships in Marriage"; the last meeting was attended by all the speakers, who answered members' questions in a round-table session.

Agency workers are of the opinion that the series of informally-conducted discussions with small groups of parents who preferably already know each other provides for a use of relationship between group leader and members, as well as between the members themselves, that distinctly enhances the value of the meetings. Lectures (even when followed by a question period), as provided in the pre-marital counselling course, may supply information which some members can use, but on the whole fail to provide opportunity for individual needs to be met. In the informal group, since much of the material comes from the members themselves, the group leader is able to determine what is really relevant to their particular needs. Such a group, under good leadership, also provides a setting in which the less aggressive members gradually become able to

express themselves. Furthermore, material which is disturbing to certain members can be diluted or interpreted so that it can be used constructively.

Children's Agencies

The ways in which group methods have been used with foster parents are illustrated by two quite different developments.

The Children's Aid Society of Montreal conducts a parent education programme "for the dual purpose of giving foster parents basic concepts which are essential to their adequate functioning as parents, and to give them the knowledge that they are sharing with other families the problems that are essentially typical of the foster home situation".¹ Invitations to the courses are included in a monthly bulletin that goes out to all foster parents, but attendance is voluntary. Group members of both sexes, ranging in numbers from 75 to 150, meet together for the presentation of topical material, then divide into groups of about 20 each, for discussion under trained leadership. The small groups reconvene at the end of the evening to present their conclusions to the total group. Topics dealt with recently have been: "The Role of Own Parents in Children's Lives", "Sex Education", and "Spending Money". The "specialist" speaker has been found to be the least successful medium for the presentation of material. Films followed by discussion in small groups have been stimulating, but the most effective method discovered to date has been discussion following the presentation by a local repertory company of three plays prepared by the U.S. National Committee for Mental Hygiene. Committees of foster parents plan the programmes, with considerable assistance from three workers representing the agency staff. The small discussion group leaders are agency

¹ From letter dated December 31, 1951, from Mrs. M. B. McCrea, Executive Director, The Children's Aid Society of Montreal.

caseworkers specially trained in group discussion leadership courses provided by the Mental Hygiene Institute of Montreal.

In Miami, Florida, foster mothers of the Children's Service Bureau organized their own club, with voluntary membership, and their own by-laws and statement of purpose.¹ The latter included, in addition to sharing problems and educating themselves to become more effective foster parents, the responsibility of interpreting their work to the community and of enlisting the interest of prospective foster parents. At the time of reporting, the club members had already participated in community educational programmes and were translating into practice their conception of their role as leaders in a programme designed to produce more and better foster parents. In addition to their discussion activities, members sponsored parties for foster parents and children. They sometimes invited to their meetings members of the agency Board and staff, as well as potential foster mothers.

Though of varied economic, social and educational backgrounds, there was a strong feeling of unity among club members, based on their common interest in foster children. Even the agency representative met with the group as a member of the club. For her, the club provided an excellent opportunity to observe the mothers in a group setting. Preferably she was kept informed by other staff members on what was going on between each foster mother and the agency, in order to enter into the discussion with relevant points when necessary. With her help, the group was able to become identified with the agency. Through discussion, anxieties were relieved and new mothers got reassurance. All benefited from the friendly relationships and growth in personal security they found

¹ Harnett, Margaret, "Casework Implications of a Foster Mothers' Club", Child Welfare, Volume 29, No. 8, October 1950, Child Welfare League of America, New York.

through participation in the club. Through sharing problems and experiences, they increased their understanding of their children's needs.

There is also something about expression in general in a group that relieves the burdensome feeling of personal responsibility. It leaves people freer to express themselves and freer to accept criticism. There isn't the need to be defensive and thus block on learning or acceptance. There is less emotional interference to insight if there is this diffusion, if people can say, 'This is not being said just to me, but to all of us'.¹

Miss Harnett concludes: "In the Foster Mothers' Club, I believe that casework and group work have merged in providing mutual benefits for the child, the foster mother, the agency, and the community".²

School Guidance Services

Set up as a division of the Board of Education of the City of New York, the Bureau of Child Guidance provides clinical services for New York school children who have special educational, social or emotional problems: this is its primary responsibility. Closely related to this function, however, is its concern with teacher education. Through special courses for teachers, clinical conferences on specific children, and individual interpretation, the Bureau aids in promoting among teachers and others concerned, mutual understanding and co-operation in the interests of better standards of mental health throughout the community. As its third function, the Bureau recognizes its responsibility for the spread of mental hygiene principles among parents and other adults in the area and, despite the priority given to the first two objectives, a considerable amount of work has been done relative to the third -- parent education.³

The programme is carried on under the broad direction of a

¹ *ibid*, p.14.

² *ibid*, p.14.

³ From letter dated March 4, 1952, from James N. Rinaldi, School Psychiatric Social Worker, Committee on Parent Education, Bureau of Child Guidance, Board of Education, New York City.

Committee on Parent Education which brings to the attention of the administrative staff any policies and practices that would increase the effectiveness of parent education activities engaged in by the Bureau's staff. Rotation of membership on the Committee has the advantage of providing experience and stimulus to more staff members as well as the opportunity for the introduction of new ideas into the programme. Committee administration of the programme has also disadvantages; since committee members carry the responsibility for parent education in addition to their other duties, they are frequently pressed for time and unable to devote the amount of attention to this programme that they consider desirable.

The parent education programme began as part of the Bureau's plan of interpreting its work to the community. Gradually, parent-teacher associations, United Parent organizations, and other groups began requesting speakers on various topics in the fields of child development and parent-child relations, and eventually the Bureau was asked to supply leaders for discussion groups or short courses. Talks, discussion, films and plays have all been used to advantage in the single-session meetings. However, feeling some doubt as to the value of single talks except as a means of stimulating interest in further study, the Committee on Parent Education has been favouring the use of the discussion method in a series of meetings with the same group. Recently, in a series of ten weekly meetings with a parent-teacher group, discussion was used exclusively, the leader taking the responsibility for organizing and conducting the discussion in the areas of interest that the parents themselves raised for consideration. These interests included discipline, sex, adjustment, sibling adjustment, social adjustment, effect of television on children, and fears.

In common with many other organizations engaged in

parent education, the Bureau staff recognizes the difficulty of evaluating results in this field but considers that certain signs point to the value of discussion group projects as a means for promoting mental health: "We do feel that there has been value in interpreting our clinical programme to the community, in stimulating interest in mental hygiene and in helping some parents seek additional casework or clinical service".¹ Continued attendance of parents at meetings, the degree of parent participation in discussion, and evaluative remarks by the parents all seem to indicate the benefits to them of increased understanding of children's needs and ability to meet problems: in short, it is felt that definite educational gains are made.

School social workers in other cities are also recognizing the importance of their participation in parent group education programmes as a means of increasing their own effectiveness in promoting mental health in the community.² Mrs. Mary Thomson, who conducted a study of the social worker in the school in 1948,³ advanced the opinion that by serving as a "resource person" -- giving leadership as speaker, consultant, or discussion chairman -- the school social worker could make a significant contribution to the programmes of parent and other adult groups. Indeed, Mrs. Thomson points out the opportunity provided by actual participation in various community groups, for social workers to foster an understanding of mental health principles, an understanding which will become evident in improved community services. In support of this recommendation, Mrs. Thomson quotes Florence Poole:

Visiting teachers now, beside the basic skill of individual therapy, must take their places in the school

¹ *ibid.*

² E.g. in Colorado Springs, Colo., and San Diego, California.

³ Thomson, Mary, *The Social Worker in the School*, Master of Social Work Thesis, 1948, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, B.C.

and in the community as persons aware of possibilities inherent in good group work or the group approach, as well as the individual approach. They must be able to interpret social and economic changes and, as relationships among community agencies are better recognized, they must play an effective part not only in facilitating the interchange between schools and other agencies interested in children, but participate also in creative social planning for the continued development of all agencies designed to improve the level of citizenship.¹

Trends Indicated by These Projects

The fourteen projects just described, while admittedly a very small sampling, serve to illustrate the variety of agencies in which social workers are assisting with parent education programmes; they include family service agencies, child guidance centres, children's hospitals, a group work agency, children's aid societies, a mental hygiene clinic, and school child guidance bureau. Similarities in the conduct of these projects give some indication of directions in current thought and practice in the field, on the part of social workers. Many questions are suggested which require further study, and these are augmented by those arising from the points of difference in practice in even these few projects.

In general, parent education programmes with client groups are found in the agencies in which the work is under the direction or supervision of a psychiatrist. The "clients" are parents whose children are undergoing treatment of some kind. A notable exception is the group work agency, in which the clients are parents using the agency's facilities and the worker for a recreational-educational purpose. The family service agencies, with one exception, prefer to make their leadership services available to organized groups such as parent-

1. Poole, Florence, "National-wide Developments in School Social Work", The Bulletin of the National Association of School Social Workers, March 1947, Volume XXII, No. 3.

teacher associations, who recruit interested persons from their membership. Among those agencies working with client groups, the method of recruiting groups members varies widely, from very careful selection based on group therapy considerations, to a policy of accepting all who register for an advertised service or "course". Group members in the projects represent different levels of age, socio-economic status, and racial, religious and educational background; they are of both sexes, though women are in the majority. Attitude of the professional workers toward the homogeneity of membership in regard to these factors varies: some are of the opinion that the group process is aided by similarities in age, socio-economic status, and cultural and educational background; others believe that differences in these factors can be advantageous to group development and member growth. The latter point out that a common interest in human relations and the fact that the content of the discussion is emotional rather than purely intellectual over-ride differences; in fact, differences add interest and result in broadening of viewpoints.

There is general agreement among all the agencies on the importance of using discussion as a medium rather than the lecture method, and of providing for some continuity over a series of meetings. There is much variation in the number of meetings preferred in a series; several agencies favour four or six, but others find that the group is just getting under way at that point and requires ten to twelve meetings. While most of the agencies favour work with small groups -- about eight to fourteen members is the most popular range -- some handle larger numbers, even up to one hundred. Two agencies are adapting the large meeting for discussion by means of a break-down of the "audience" into small groups for a portion of the time. Another reports good results even with

a large group, given a suitable physical set-up and a highly-skilled leader. In all cases, group members participate in planning their own programme, though as a starting point for their thinking they may use broad topics proposed by the leader on the basis of assumed interests. When groups are kept small, free discussion arising from the members' needs and interests is the usual mode of procedure, although in a few instances a short talk on the topic is given by the leader or some other method of introducing the subject is provided. In most of the groups, therapy of the parents' own problems is subordinated to the primarily educational purpose but it is always an important element and is given careful attention by the leader.

In evaluating their programmes, the leaders emphasize most of all the beneficial results attendant upon the use of the group discussion method. They refer to the relief felt by parents as a result of expressing their fears and worries in a group and finding that others have similar fears and worries. They mention the economy of effort that is made possible by the opportunity afforded the leader to find out in discussion what are the needs of members, and to provide the right assistance to meet those needs. They point out the value of the parents' questioning, bringing out their objections and thinking through problems themselves, in the process of integrating new ideas emotionally as well as intellectually, and in changing attitudes. Several workers comment on the benefit to the parents of their feeling of greater adequacy as people, gained through their participation in the group. Several agencies report favourable comments from the parents themselves, mentioning increased understanding of their children, greater enjoyment in family life, and less anxiety about relatively unimportant difficulties. Workers in the Agency which gives particular attention to the mothers' own problems comment that the group experience proves a valuable

supplement to casework treatment.

Many questions regarding purpose, group membership, the group process, and the role of the leader are suggested by the projects described. The different methods of recruiting membership for the groups, and of handling other organizational details, for example, points to a need for much more specific knowledge about the influence of various factors involved. What effect does the purpose of the group have in determining membership? For example, How does the stress on educative or therapeutic elements affect the selection of members? Are there more advantages in having a fairly homogeneous group as to age, sex, socio-economic status, cultural and racial background, or are there kinds of groups in which differences in certain of these factors carry special benefits? What are the effects on the group process of bringing together strangers, or people who already know each other? Is there an optimum number for a discussion group, or are there factors which operate to make different sizes of group advisable for various purposes? What can be achieved in groups of various sizes and what are the most effective methods of working with them? (This question has pertinence especially from the viewpoint of the effective use of leadership). What are the factors determining the length of a series of meetings? What is the effect on the group of constant or changing membership, and how may the difficulties caused by changing membership be mitigated?

Much more specific knowledge is needed about the group process particularly as to the roles of the leader and of the members in groups of different sizes, of varying economic status, educational level, and group experience, and in groups with different emphasis as to purpose -- educational, recreational, or therapeutic. What factors determine the leader's activity, for example, in being permissive, giving direction, giving support, or permitting frustration?

Under what circumstances does participation in a small group assist or retard the member's learning process ? What value has actual verbalization by a member, in the group ? Does the value of verbalization differ for different individuals, or in relation to different problems ? What are the advantages of dealing in the group with specific problems brought by various members, as against using these problems only as spring-boards for a discussion of more generalized concepts of difficulties, meaning of behaviour, and possible ways of dealing with problems ? While many social workers favour the latter method, and are supported by the F.S.A.A. Committee on Family Life Education,¹ some prefer to deal directly with the problems proposed by the members,² Are both of these views valid, in different circumstances, and, if so, in what circumstances ? Is there a danger of making some parents too self-conscious in their relationships with children and mates ? If so, what factors are involved and how can the danger be avoided or mitigated ? What are the values and the disadvantages of helping group members to become more conscious of the group process and of individual behaviour in their own group ? What factors determine when this procedure might be beneficial to a group ? What affects the development of group unity and what influence has this on the members' capacity to learn and to grow ? What are the potentialities for constructive and destructive development in group crises ? Can any generalizations be made as to the leader's role in such situations, in specific kinds of groups or in groups at varying levels of development ?

In order to find answers to the above and other essential questions, more attention will have to be paid to the development of evaluative techniques which can be used to study the development of groups and the growth

¹ F.S.A.A., "Family Life Education", Highlights, Volume XII, No. 5, May 1951, p. 70.

² E.g. as described in the account of the Chicago Community Child Guidance Centres, p. 50.

of individual members. The task of measuring change in the intangibles -- feelings and attitudes toward the self and others -- presents complicated problems. To date, in parent group education in the projects described and, for the most part, in other programmes as well, evaluation has been based on the subjective judgements and reactions of the parents and leaders taking part and, occasionally, on the observations of trained persons sitting in with the groups or on the perceptions of specialists working with the children of the parents concerned. Comments of parents and group leaders tend to focus around the following points: evidence of increased knowledge and understanding of children; evidence of change in the parents' feelings about themselves in their parental role; happier relationships with children and mates resulting from more co-operative attitudes generally as a consequence of changes in the members' own reaction to behaviour in the family group; and evidence of increased perception of, and participation in, events in their communities.

There is a serious need for experimental work to test in parents' groups the feasibility and validity, and to increase the effectiveness, of various tools and techniques of evaluation and measurement, such as verbatim recording methods (stenographic and mechanical), reporting of observers, and methods of testing changes in attitudes, growth in understanding, and advancement in the integration of knowledge and understanding with practice. The possibility of adapting individual interviews for the purpose of evaluation -- timing these to come before the discussion series begins, possibly during the series, and at different points in time after the series -- should be investigated. Such interviews could also serve an important educative purpose as well.

In this problem of evaluation as well as in other aspects of parent education, experience from other professions should be helpful. Adult

education, psychology and group dynamics, for instance, have contributions which would save much waste of time and duplication of effort. Rich variety in approach and method, so essential to the development of new knowledge and skill, proves more valuable if the resulting experiences are made known, shared and integrated with the experiences of others working in the same or similar fields. The need for advancing the range of knowledge in parent education is urgent. The importance of co-operation among interested lay and professional groups cannot be overestimated. In Chapter 4, though it is primarily a summary chapter, a number of suggestions are offered regarding possible ways of promoting such co-operation.

Chapter 4

IMPLICATIONS AND NEEDS

Much has been written about the increasing complexity of modern civilization and the demands it makes on its citizens -- demands which prove too arduous in some cases. World-shaking economic and political developments, and technological advances appear to the "average man" more and more to take place beyond his reach and control. Events which once did not disturb his peace of mind because he was ignorant of their existence now threaten him, periodically, with disaster or even annihilation. Two world wars have speeded scientific discoveries with awesome potentiality for good and evil, but have also brought about a tremendous upheaval in the system of values prevalent in western countries at least. Emphasis on the possession of material things as a measure of success at times seems to over-ride the emulation of mature qualities of character. The apparent controversy between religion and science has stimulated the thinking of some people, but has thrown others into anxiety and uncertainty. Recent years have brought a striking change in social relationships -- not only among formerly stable classes in society, but also between the sexes, a change that carries with it opportunities for healthier development and more sincere living, but is at present often seriously disturbing to those involved in it.

Small wonder that people are proving subject to emotional illnesses under such conditions ! But with the recognition of the ill effects of modern living, there is growing an interest in ways of combatting and of preventing them and, more recently, of building strong and mature personalities which

will be able not only to meet the demands of civilization but to shape its development along constructive lines. Action toward these ends takes place on many fronts: in provision for economic and social welfare through public and private activities; in the improvement of school systems through educational reforms; in the strengthening of moral and spiritual values through religious teaching that accords with present-day needs; in the provision of satisfying opportunities for recreation; and, finally, in the spread of mental health principles through all of the above as well as the development of specific mental health services on positive, preventive, and curative levels based on research. There are many facets to each of these fronts. This study has been concerned with only one facet of the mental health programme -- parent education and, in fact, with one particular kind of parent education, that conducted in groups using the discussion method, under the leadership of a suitably qualified person.

Research has shown that "the emotional interchange and relationship between the young child and his parents is an important if not nuclear factor in the mental health of that child, determining early in life his future mental health".¹ It seems sensible, therefore, to do everything possible to ensure that this emotional interchange shall be conducive to healthy growth. Parent education offers one approach. Much has yet to be done, however, to determine the answers to basic questions and to overcome difficulties. For instance, in some circumstances it may be preferable to work on improving the parents' conditions of living and building up their mental health rather than attempting to interest them in more direct parent education programmes. Some parents lack the time and energy to take part in discussion groups or listen to talks. Others

¹ Griffin, J.D.M., and Reva Gerstein, "Parent Education and the Mental Health of the Community", Food for Thought, November 1951, Canadian Association for Adult Education, Toronto.

feel no need to do so. Some are confused by the varying points of view that are inevitable in growing disciplines like psychology and psychiatry, and have a tendency to reject anything labelled psychology or education. Others try to apply new precepts in ways never intended. Nevertheless, by their daily activities with their children, all of these parents are influencing, for good or ill, future citizens. Society is interested, even in cases where they are not, in helping to ensure that their influence shall be for good. The problem of getting mental hygiene teaching across to these various groups deserves careful attention. Many parents, on the other hand, are not only already interested, they are eager and able to learn. They would seem to be the most responsive clientele at this stage and might well be the first concern of parent educationists: such parents ask only for leadership to help them in their educational activities. Through their own efforts they have developed, or caused to be developed, numerous methods and programmes of parent education. Experts give talks on radio, on T.V., and in person. Newspapers and magazines print advice columns and articles of varying degrees of value. Pamphlets, books, and study courses have been turned out in considerable quantity during recent years. Even films and film-strips are increasingly available on mental health topics. Lay and professional groups hold institutes and workshops on family relationships, discussion leadership, and child development. They use speakers, panels, symposiums, dramatizations, socio-drama. People meet in groups of all sizes to listen, think, discuss and decide. They serve on committees which may turn out to be a valuable learning experience in human relations. They attend evening classes and take short courses. But all this activity has developed with too little attention to evaluation. There is an urgent need for a study to be made of methods of parent education, to determine

under what circumstances they are most suitable, how difficulties met in each can be overcome, and how they can be generally improved so as to contribute more effectively to creative living.

Parent group education and the possible contribution of social workers

The over-all objective of parent group education is to assist parents to help their children grow up into healthy, mature adults. To accomplish this end, parent educationists try to assist parents to gain the knowledge they need about child development and the meaning and purposive nature of behaviour, together with an understanding of the influence of parents' own attitudes and behaviour on their children and on family relationships. Parent group leaders, by accepting parents as people, whatever their status and whatever their "mistakes" in handling their family problems, help them to feel free to express anxieties and to examine new ideas. They recognize the ability and right of each individual to think and plan for himself and apply this principle in their conduct of parents' groups. They also take into account individual differences and assist parents to cultivate attitudes of respect for other human beings, with their likenesses and their differences and to apply this in parent-child relations. Parent educationists understand the importance of relationship in working with parents; they encourage parents and build on their strengths for the purpose of increasing their enjoyment in their job as parents, their ability to handle the problems they meet, and their acceptance - when necessary - of their need to seek expert aid. Leaders are concerned to help parents to understand themselves and to see the connection between their lives and those of others in their community and in the outside world.

Emphasis in this study has been placed on parent group education because it has particular values: the group itself becomes a medium in which members develop helpful relationships with each other; the support provided by other members encourages the expression of fears and of feelings toward their children and their role as parents, the offering of suggestions, the interpretation of behaviour, the working out together of new syntheses of understanding of the topics; knowledge can be emotionally integrated as parents have opportunity to question, to test out, and chew over, new concepts in relation to their own experiences and that of other group members; participation in the group provides experience in a way of co-operating on a matter of common interest, experience that may be carried over into everyday living in the family and the community; furthermore, the status gained as a member of a democratically-conducted group adds greatly to the parents' own feelings of adequacy. Parent group education, therefore, given good leadership, helps to meet the parents' own needs as people in their own right, as well as assisting them in achieving increased understanding of, and better relationships with, their children and mates. It is distinct from group therapy in that it "is oriented toward the healthy factors of the personality, and appeals to the ability to judge, to learn by experience, to gain understanding, to plan, to make choices, to adapt to changing circumstances", whereas therapy "directs itself to the deviant aspects of personality, the symptoms of the character disturbance, with a view toward effecting change in individual pathology".¹ To say this is not to deny that educational experience in a group cannot be therapeutic experience.

¹ Parent Group Education and Leadership Training, "The Technique of Parent Group Education: Some Basic Concepts - Summary of Material Presented by Peter B. Neubauer, M.D. in a Training Programme for Parent Group Leaders Given by the Child Study Association of America, Spring 1951", p.10, Child Study Association of America, Chicago, Ill.

When compared with this brief summary of the objectives, principles, and values of parent group education, a few excerpts from a generally-accepted statement¹ of the basic assumptions and skills underlying social work practice illustrate clearly the close similarity of outlook and approach in the two fields, and the applicability of the social worker's skill to parent group education. The social worker, it is stated, helps individuals and groups through:

His respect for human beings and their social organizations and his belief in their right to manage their own lives.

His acceptance of each individual and group as unique, and of the right of each to be different from every other.

His ability to feel with individuals and groups without feeling like them.

His ability to accept the hostility and aggression as well as the love and affection of individuals and groups with whom he works as normal reactions of human beings toward one another.

His ability to understand the language of behaviour and to use his own behaviour to the best interests of the individuals and groups with whom he is working.

His ability to accept the concept that all behaviour is purposive and that the activity of individuals and groups is significant to the people involved even if it seems meaningless to the observer.

His ability to accept individuals and groups even if he must disapprove of their behaviour.

His ability to be permissive and to widen horizons where individuals and groups need to be supported in assuming greater personal and collective responsibility.

His ability to support individuals and groups in factoring out the issues in problems facing them, yet to refrain from indicating the solutions.

His ability to support individuals and groups in making and carrying out their own decisions.

¹ Wilson, Gertrude, and Gladys Ryland, Social Group Work Practice, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1949, pp. 22-23.

In short, it would appear that social workers should be particularly well qualified to undertake parent group education¹ and that social work agencies should take a vital interest in such programmes. Social work's basic regard for the integrity of people and concern for helping them to help themselves is essential to the leader in parent group education. The social worker's training and experience in understanding the meaning of behaviour, if it includes orientation to group work principles and practice, enables him to help group members gain the utmost from their group experience, as well as to assist them to gain knowledge and understanding of their children, themselves, and family relationships. Basically, both social agencies and parent education are concerned with improving mental health in the community. True, the primary purpose of social agencies at present is to assist with difficulties in family or human relationships apart from family affairs, when those difficulties are serious enough to warrant intervention by the public authority or to cause the prospective clients to seek help. As in other fields, however, in mental health increasing attention is being turned to prevention. It is not suggested that social agencies should launch immediately large-scale efforts in parent education, but it is recommended that those which are well established in their services should consider carefully the possibility of initiating experimental projects with either client groups within the agency, or non-client groups in the community. Already, many agencies have undertaken such programmes. The reports from those selected as samples for this study indicate that the agencies in question are finding these programmes well worth the time and effort expended upon them. The Family Service Association of America has expressed its approval of expansion

¹ With the proviso that they have gained an orientation to group work principles and methods.

into this field and its Committee on Family Life Education has set forth suggestions as to the organization and conduct of family life education programmes.¹

In addition to participating in parent education activities themselves, agencies might undertake research, possibly planned in conjunction with regional or national professional organizations, so that experimental programmes could be made to yield new knowledge for future application in the field. Furthermore, there is also a need to work toward the inclusion of training for parent education, particularly group education, in schools of social work. The F.S.A.A. Committee on Family Life Education comments:

If family agencies are to develop skill in the use of family life education as a method of helping people, there will have to be more concentration in schools of social work (the source of family agency personnel) on normal personality development and group dynamics.²

In this connection, it would be helpful if experience gained in experimental programmes such as those conducted by the Child Study Association of America were taken into account. Their monograph, Parent Group Education and Leadership Training, published in 1952, is based on their work with parents' groups and with a leadership training group of social workers, conducted during 1951. The monograph consists of three reports, "Parent Discussion Groups: Their Role in Parent Education", "The Technique of Parent Group Education: Some Basic Concepts", and "Training for Parent Group Leadership", whose titles indicate their subject matter.

Until the time when training in parent group education becomes part of the social work curriculum, and even when this is established,

¹ "Family Life Education", Highlights, Volume XII, No. 5, May 1951, pp. 68-73, Family Service Association of America, Albany, New York.

² *ibid.*, p. 75.

agencies might co-operate in holding their own in-service training programmes or joint workshops among several agencies, or programmes with other community groups. Those workers who are already trained and experienced in social casework should have an opportunity to gain special additional training in group methods of parent education. Group workers and specialists in community organization would profit by additional training in casework as well as by acquaintance with specific parent education methods.

Parent Education - a Concern of Many Agencies and Organizations

Social workers and social work agencies have in the past co-operated with other professional and lay organizations to different degrees, in various community projects. To date, however, there seems to have been only limited effort on the part of many agencies and lay groups to work together toward a more effective use of personnel and other resources in the field of parent education. Parent education programmes are sponsored by many agencies and institutions other than social work agencies, including such diverse organizations as children's hospitals, the Victorian Order of Nurses, government departments of adult education and health, and university extension departments. Many of these use their own staff members in a leadership capacity for these programmes; others call upon representatives from other professions. Many voluntary community organizations, as well as some professional agencies, include in their programmes at least certain elements of parent group education. As mentioned in the first chapter, parent-teacher associations and similar groups consider the encouragement of parent education activities one of their major functions. Such organizations provide excellent entrées to large numbers of parents. Another "natural" group of growing importance is the co-operative play group, in which parents come together

to plan for their children and (hopefully) find that they need to educate themselves as well. Other organizations whose interests are more diverse, such as women's university clubs or church groups, frequently sponsor a parents' discussion group or pre-marital group as one of their activities. Recently, the idea of groups for parents of children with various handicaps seems to be growing in favour; some of these groups are organized on the initiative of an interested agency (an institute for the blind, or a cerebral palsy treatment centre), others are "grass-roots" developments, organized by the parents themselves; associations for the advancement of mentally retarded children may be examples of this type. For the most part, parents' groups under the auspices of lay organizations are staffed by lay leaders, possessed of varying degrees of competence, some highly skilled, some lacking in both training and experience. (It is a hazard suffered by voluntary organizations that too often promising lay leaders are lost as a result of discouragement through lack of self-confidence and absence of assistance when they need it, also as a result of their discontinuance as members). At times, professional personnel from education, social work and other professions are employed as discussion leaders, speakers, or resource persons for particular meetings. Lay leaders, themselves, have achieved remarkable results in terms of self-education in the organization and conduct of groups for parent education, to the point where they have much to offer the professional workers from various disciplines now entering the field.

The time seems ripe for those interested in parent group education to come together for careful assessment of what is going on, of ways of improving current programmes, and of the gaps in parent education services that require attention. The task in each community is to try out ways of coordinating

efforts among lay and professional groups and of making co-operative work possible, to conduct research programmes to add to present knowledge, and to provide for the integration of new knowledge into existing programmes through opportunity for special training at various levels. This task is commented upon by the F.S.A.A. Committee on Family Life Education:

Not only is the need for family life education in most communities greater than a single agency can meet, but also a wide range of effort, emanating from different fields, is being expended on this particular need. It would be well for communities, through their community organization machinery, to develop central planning committees and information exchanges to carry out this shared educational effort on an orderly basis. This would result not only in better utilization of abilities but also in greater understanding of existing facilities. In this planning, many different disciplines and agencies such as education, casework, group work, psychology, psychiatry, and religion have important roles to play. Each discipline should be encouraged to make available and develop further its own specialized knowledge and competence.¹

Careful thought should be given to the setting up of co-ordinating machinery. One advantage in the present situation is the complete freedom enjoyed by agencies or groups to plan according to their own perception of their own function or needs. Coordination and co-operation should bring about the advantages resulting from a planned use of resources, a sharing of experience, and a concerted effort to extend the area of knowledge, with the least possible diminution of individual responsibility and initiative. Since communities differ, the co-operative machinery set up may well vary to suit the particular circumstances and needs of each. Nevertheless, one community might learn from another if there could be some means of exchanging information and accounts of experiences. Specially-trained, travelling consultants might be of assistance.

¹ Committee on Family Life Education, "Family Life Education", Highlights, Volume XII, No. 5, May 1951, pp. 70-71, Family Service Association of America, New York.

Joint conferences of several centres might provide opportunity for discussion of problems and the working out of solutions. Plans and programmes for parent education could be made known through lay and professional magazines and journals.

A Suggested Programme for Co-operative Action

The following four aspects of a parent education programme might receive the attention of co-operative effort in any community:

(1) the provision of qualified personnel to serve groups in various ways in leadership capacity; (2) the provision of counselling services to groups, regarding programme planning, leadership personnel, and resource materials; (3) the provision of personnel and/or counselling services to assist in the conduct of leadership training programmes for both lay and professional personnel; and (4) the conduct of a research programme in the field of parent education. These points deserve more detailed consideration than can be given here; however, some suggestions regarding each can be stated briefly.

In any community there are numerous persons -- both lay and professional -- whose training or experience enable them to make a special contribution to parent education groups, as discussion leaders, as speakers, or as resource consultants on specific topics. Frequently, one or two of these people are discovered by groups, and are kept so busy that they finally withdraw in self-defence from all such activity. Others, with equally valuable qualifications, may either not be discovered at all, or they are used a few times and then, if their particular specialty is not needed for a while, they may be forgotten and thus lost to community use. One answer to this problem of finding and making the best use of personnel might be the establishment, by a qualified committee representing both lay and professional organizations, of a file of names classi-

fied as to the individuals' subject specialty or qualification, their particular competence in parent education activities, and the terms under which they are willing to serve. Obviously, only persons who indicated their willingness to participate in community programmes would be included in the list. An intelligent and informed person in charge, with the help of the committee, could make a valuable contribution to community groups as well as to resource personnel, by managing recommendations to enquiring groups so that there was a more even distribution of opportunity for community service among the various persons qualified to give it.

Similarly, there is a need for centres which could supply counselling services to groups, to assist them in planning programmes to meet their needs, (discussion series, conferences, workshops, etc)., to clarify with them the kind of leadership that would help them to do what they wished to accomplish, and to guide them in selecting programme materials. It would be desirable for the counsellors to be able to meet with the groups themselves, or with representative committees, so that in addition to providing the immediate assistance required, the counsellor could make the occasion an educational experience for the groups and, incidentally, himself. If there were several centres of this kind, -- as would be desirable in a community of fair size, frequent conferences between the counsellors and other staff could be a means of increasing their skill, sharing the task of keeping up-to-date on new materials and new thinking on programme principles and methods, and generally providing the support and incentive that ensures good service. Special committees might undertake projects such as the investigation of resource materials and the production of new materials to meet needs not now satisfied.

The whole problem of providing specialized training for

leadership in parent group education programmes, to both lay and professional personnel, requires much study, planning, and experimentation. Comment already has been made regarding the training of social workers. Representatives of other professions should also have opportunities to increase their skill in adapting their knowledge for use in parents' groups: for example, in leading discussions, participating in workshops as consultants, speaking on panels for an audience of parents. Some communities have experimented with short courses in counselling which have brought recently-acquired knowledge in that field to the attention of interested ministers, teachers, social workers, and club leaders. Similarly, a concerted effort through conferences, workshops, and other training programmes might greatly increase the effectiveness of various professional persons who have much to offer to parent education.

Lay leadership training is also in the early stages of its development. Some professionals look askance at the very idea of using lay leadership in parent education programmes. Nevertheless, since people are in fact serving as lay leaders, and since even qualified professional persons engaged in lay leadership programmes testify to the value of work being accomplished by lay leaders,¹ this aspect of the subject merits careful attention. Already, some experience is being accumulated in various centres on the problem of the integration, in a training course, of "content" with group experience providing practice in applying the principles and methods of group discussion. A major problem is that of helping lay leaders to work within the limitations of their competence; but perhaps this is somewhat similar to that of training social workers to recognize the limits of their competence. With careful planning and the co-operation of

¹ For example, in the programmes being conducted by the University of the State of New York, Child Development and Parent Education Bureau; and by the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, under the leadership of Miss Ethel Kavin, well-known educationist.

interested social workers from agency staffs, it might be possible to arrange for lay leaders to have the benefit of individual supervision as well as group supervisory sessions as part of their training course. A further advantage of such a plan would be that it might provide a means of helping those leaders who were unsuited to activity in parent education programmes to move into other fields, or to make use of casework or psychiatric services if these were necessary. Assuredly, if effective training programmes can be devised which can develop the latent skills of the many intelligent lay persons interested in this field, the leadership potential of professionals will be enormously multiplied.

Need for Research

Experimentation and research are essential if parent educationists are ever to be able to proceed with more certainty than they now have as to the effectiveness of their principles and methods. Given co-operative action on the part of the various lay groups, agencies and professionals concerned, research could be based on actual programmes in operation -- programmes planned, executed and evaluated with a view to meeting research requirements. Some aspects of parent education that would benefit by careful experimental study have been mentioned at other points in this study. Mrs. Aline Auerbach, of the Child Study Association, sums up her thinking as to basic questions needing further study as follows:

In parent group education, as in the entire field of human relations, examination of the effectiveness of techniques designed to modify attitudes and influence behaviour is relatively new. This report¹ has pointed up the need to

¹ Auerbach, Aline, B., "Analysis of the Experience of Parents Participating in a Programme of Group Education: A Report of Three Parent Discussion Groups Carried on within the Framework of a Leadership Training Programme" (Prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Orthopsychiatric Association in Atlantic City, February 1952) Mimeographed, Child Study Association of America, New York.

develop methods which will effectively measure the growth of parents toward more adequate functioning in the parent-child relationship.

We need also to know much more about the healthy growth processes themselves, for all people and for parents in particular. We need to know much more clearly, for example, how parents can learn to extend capacities to reach a new level of response in which feelings and understanding become integrated and can be translated into action.

Group education as a method seems valid in its economy of services, since it reaches a number of people at one time; it also seems meaningful by virtue of its very nature. We need to know much more clearly how parents gain from the group experience. We need to explore, for example, such specific questions as the relation of the development of group cohesiveness to the growth of individual members, and the significance of the role the members play in the group in relation to their own role within their families.

We need also to study the many ways in which group education can be made more meaningful to parents, by means of richer content, more effective leadership skills and better organizational planning and structure.

Mrs. Auerbach's statement is at once a tribute and a challenge: a tribute, in its implication of present accomplishment; a challenge, in its indication of new knowledge to be gained.

Parent education is in the beginning stages of its development. Sound progress will depend upon the co-operative efforts of parents themselves, together with those of lay and professional organizations and workers whose interests link their activities directly or indirectly with this comparatively new field. Social workers have much to contribute to its development; they can assume a share of responsibility with assurance, knowing that in this way they are helping to build healthier personalities and thus, eventually, a happier world.

Appendix A.

ENQUIRY RE PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

1. Purpose and extent of the programme since its inception.
2. Description of groups served:
 - how recruited
 - composition (sex, age, socio-economic status, educational background)
 - usual number per group
3. Description of group programme:
 - how planned (by the worker, jointly by worker and group, by group with worker as consultant)
 - typical content
 - conduct of programme (use of talks, discussion, films, prepared study material, pamphlets etc.)
 - the role of the worker in the group
4. Evaluation of discussion group projects as a method of promoting mental health.
5. Correlation with regular casework services.
6. Training by agency personnel of lay leadership for work with parent education groups:
 - methods of training in content, and in the principles and techniques of group discussion
 - extent of use of lay leadership; supervision
 - evaluation of success of lay leadership
7. Training of caseworkers for work with discussion groups.

Appendix B.

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