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An Experiential Approach to Social

Work With Groups in a School

Setting

A Practicum Report Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Social Work

by

Russ Chambers

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SETTING

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A practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
of the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the  
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## Preface

The practicum experience involved an experiential learning approach with male adolescents within a school setting. The practicum attempted to enhance their sense of identity.

The author maintained two objectives for the practicum:

- 1) To enhance the author's skills with adolescent groups, and
- 2) To increase the author's knowledge in the areas of adolescent development, social work with groups, the role of social work in the schools and interpersonal communication skills.

The practicum report is separated into four sections. The first chapter relates the rationale for social work intervention, the objectives of the practicum and the means of evaluation. The second chapter is a review of the literature focussing on adolescent identity, social work in the schools, social work with groups and experiential learning. The third chapter deals with the practicum experience through the stages of group development. The final chapter provides a summary of the practicum.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Rationale for Social Work Intervention

In the not so distant past, the family, living in rural communities and small cities, was the main unit of socialization. Youth learned from their nuclear or extended families. The present urban, technocratic society places greater demands on the family unit. Families are generally smaller and the extended family unit is the exception to the norm. Increasingly, more families have both parents employed in the labor force. The increasing divorce rates and single parent families have further eroded traditional family units.

Rather than intensify the need for the family to group together for mutual support, there appears to have been a lessening of interdependence upon family members. Individuals turn toward outside resources for assistance, but as Carkhuff (1976) relates:

We in the helping professions wait downstream  
to fish the bodies out (p. 2).

Unfortunately, as reflected in the previous statement, the help is "after-the-fact", remedial rather than preventative. This suggests the need to reassess intervention strategies with adolescents. Greater emphasis should be placed on recognizing the "storm and stress" of adolescence as part of normal development. In analyzing adolescence, relation to other maturational stages, Mitchell (1975) concludes:

Adolescents, of course, are not the only people who experience growth predicaments - they flourish during childhood and adulthood. Teenagers, however, experience their predicaments more intensely than at other ages and the potential for serious disorder coming about as a result of predicaments is increased during these

years, therefore, the consequences of adolescent predicaments are serious and merit close attention (p. 6).

The focus should be to create an environment where adolescents can experience their growth in a positive and accepting atmosphere; where they can experiment with new behaviors; and where they can learn interpersonal skills they will require as adults.

The school in our contemporary society has become a major institution of socialization for the young. Most children spend six hours per day, five days per week, in a school setting for ten to twelve years of their lives. Increasing importance is placed on the education system to assume greater responsibility in the socialization process. However, some authors think that the school system has not responded adequately to their responsibility. As Bachy, Duner, Shelders and Selosse (1972) state:

. . .the school churns out information which can only be described as stereotyped and often unrelated to real life. The result is that school training ill prepares young people for integration into social and economic life (p. 19).

In a similar vein Braverman (1974) views our junior and senior high schools as:

Teen sitting institutions which keep our youth segregated from the mainstream of life (p. 439).

Bachy, et al. (1972) have identified characteristics which can serve to increase or decrease maladaptive behaviors. Mitchell (1975) concludes that:

. . .the school structure emphasizes acquiescence and conformity, therefore, initiative falters (p. 3).

It appears that individuality and self-growth can suffer for the goals of uniformity and efficiency.

Although the education system is conservative and slow to change, changes are happening. The introduction of new programs, specialized classes, more highly trained personnel and the increased utilization of

outside resources reflects the changes in the schools. Dr. Hugh Curtis, in a presentation at the Child Welfare League of America Conference (Winnipeg 1979), related that while school enrollment continues to decrease the number of referrals for school social services has increased. This suggests that the school system may be becoming more responsive to the interpersonal needs of students in addition to the students academic education. It also seems to indicate that the increasing number of referrals requires an overall approach to assist all students thereby lessening the number of treatment referrals.

What are the implications for social work within the school system? Social work is becoming more accepted as a vital and contributing component of the school system. Curtis (1978) reported seventy-five functions for school social workers. The majority of these roles are within the scope of remedial or treatment interventions. However, it would appear that social work has the responsibility to go beyond these roles toward a focus on prevention. The role of social work is succinctly stated in the preamble of the 1975 Canadian Association of Social Workers code of ethics:

Social work is a profession which endeavours to foster human welfare through professional services and activities aimed at enhancing, maintaining, or restoring the social functioning of persons. It employs a body of knowledge, skills in human relationships and method such as interdisciplinary co-operation, research, planning, and social action to change conditions and practices infringing upon individual rights and maintaining social institutions sensitive to human needs and supportive of human fulfillment and to changing or abolishing institutions and systems which do not serve the public good.

Pincus and Minaham (1973) support the previous statement with their definition of the purpose of social work:



Social work is concerned with the interactions between people and their social environment which affect the ability of people to accomplish their life tasks, alleviate distress, and realize their aspirations and values. The purpose of social work therefore is to 1) enhance the problem-solving and coping capabilities of people, 2) link people with systems that provide them with resources services, and opportunities, 3) promote the effective and humane operation of these systems, and 4) contribute to the development and improvement of social policy (p. 9).

From the two preceeding statements it can be seen that social work is not and should not be limited to a remedial, treatment role. Both definitions emphasize the importance of a need to enhance, promote, and fulfill human development. Social work with its knowledge of human functioning, understanding of social interactions and practice skills can contribute to the enhancement of adolescent growth.

The author's interest in this area of social work intervention developed from his previous experience in the child welfare field. It was based on the personal observations of the significant number of adolescents who are known to social service agencies. They might have been diverted out of the system if intervention had occurred earlier on a preventative level.

Thus adolescents have been identified as an unique population with needs and life tasks specific to that stage of development. The school system has the responsibility to respond to these needs. The school system is an accepted environment for social work intervention. Social work has the responsibility to contribute to societal growth and to promote the general good health of individuals, including adolescents. Therefore, intervention with adolescents in the school system appears to be an appropriate area for social work involvement.

## Objectives

The author maintained two objectives for the practicum intervention:

- 1) to enhance the author's social work skills with adolescent groups, and
- 2) to increase the author's knowledge in the areas of adolescent development, social work with groups, the role of social work in the schools and interpersonal communication skills.

To achieve these goals the author contracted with the Portage La Prairie School Division to run two groups composed of students from a junior high school in Portage. The practicum was implemented from November 1978 to May 1979.

Based upon the current literature and the author's personal experience the following objectives were developed for the group intervention:

- to increase the group participants' knowledge of the basics of interpersonal communication;
- to increase the group participants' understanding of their own communication;
- to increase the group participants' skills in communication, through practice, in a safe environment where group members can experiment with new behaviors;
- to increase the group participants' ability and comfort in assuming responsibility for themselves;
- to enhance the group participants' ability to express their feelings; and
- to provide a learning experience which was fun and stimulating.

## Evaluation

The evaluation of social work intervention with the students was

primarily based on direct and indirect feedback. After each group session a short period of time was set aside to elicit feedback from the group members. The final meeting was an evaluation session designed to discuss how the group members thought and felt about the group experience and what had been accomplished. The author also videotaped the majority of the group meetings. The author's practicum advisor also provided feedback about group progress through regular meetings with the author. A short questionnaire, developed by the author, was administered at the termination of the groups to provide written feedback. The author also obtained verbal feedback from school personnel.

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## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

From the preceeding rationale for social work intervention it has been illustrated that there are a number of significant components to the practicum. The importance of adolescent identify cannot be overstated as one of the most significant and critical developmental tasks in an individual's life experience. It is also known that an individual spends a significant portion of his adolescence in the school system. While in the school the adolescent grows emotionally as well as intellectually. Social workers can enhance this growth through their role within the schools. It appears that an experimental learning approach by social workers, within the schools, can assist in helping adolescents in their identity development.

The Literature Review focuses on these four relevant areas: Adolescent Identity, Social Work in the Schools, Social Work with Groups and Experiential Learning. The section on Adolescent Identity focuses on the different interpretations of identity, the psychological and the social factors which contribute to identity formation. The section, on Social Work in the Schools, attempts to define the different perceptions of school social work by illustrating both traditional and non traditional interventions. The third area reviews how work with groups is similar to other types of social work practice and yet contains distinct differences. A specific methodology of intervention, experiential learning follows in the last section. The four sections are separate to provide a distinct overview of each specific area.

### Adolescent Identity

I ain't what I ought to be, I ain't what I'm  
going to be, but I ain't what I was\*

Authors and researchers have developed various definitions to describe the stage of growth called adolescence. The definitions reflect their own theoretical orientation on human development. Freudian and neo-Freudian scholars place a greater emphasis on the sequential, pre-determined nature of development, focusing on the biological and physiological nature of growth toward adulthood. Other authors, such as Lewin (1962) and Piaget (1958), concentrate on the cognitive aspects of development. Braverman (1974), Mitchell (1975), Sebald (1970) and Baum (1975) assume that sociological variables outweigh the psychological and biological factors of adolescence. There is some question as to whether certain aspects of adolescence are real or if they are artificially manufactured by society. Erikson (1968) and his followers favor a mid-point, recognizing the social variables, the physiological changes and the psychological needs of adolescence.

The author supports the perspective of adolescence as an almost universal phenomena. In this sense, adolescence is accordingly viewed as a period of transition between childhood and adulthood, in which certain maturational needs must be addressed. The length of time of adolescence varies from culture to culture and over history. The author, after a careful scrutiny of the literature, chose to focus on a specific maturational need or life task of adolescence which was predominant throughout the literature. This task is the need to form a sense of

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\*Erikson came across this saying in a bar - see Erikson, E.H., in M.J.E. Senn (Ed), Symposium on the Healthy Personality, New York, Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation, 1950.

personal identity. The issue of "identity" is very often vaguely defined in the literature, however, Mitchell (1975) provides a useful definition:

In general usage, identity refers to how a person thinks of and defines himself, taking into consideration his own expectations of himself and the roles society assumes he will carry out. Identity refers to the sameness of character which persists throughout an individual's behavior despite superficial differences in behavior or mood and, therefore, represents unity of personality over a period of time (p. 52).

In comparison, Muuss (1962) offers what appears to be a more comprehensive definition:

Ego identity involves total integration of vocational ambitions and aspirations, along with all those qualities acquired through earlier identification: imitation of parents, falling in love, admiration of heroes, etc. Only the achievement of all of these aspects of ego identity - which we may call "integrity" - will permit intimacy of sexual and affective love, deep friendship, and other situations that call for self-abandon without fear of loss of ego identity in the next developmental stage (p. 38).

Both of these definitions tend to stress the sociological aspects of identity in areas such as roles, previous learning and interpersonal relationships. Erikson (1968) thinks that part of the difficulty in defining identity is caused because we are dealing with a process. The process is located in the individual and in his culture, with both interacting to establish the individual identity and the cultural identity of the community. He states:

. . .we cannot separate personal growth and communal change, nor can we separate the identity crisis in individual life and contemporary crises in historical development because the two help to define each other and are truly relative to each other (p. 23).

Erikson thinks that the process is ongoing from birth but has its normative crisis in adolescence. Identity includes consistent behavior of the individual and experimentation for the individual to discover what

is right for him personally. It appears that the central issue concerns the individual feeling secure and accepting of himself. This section will summarize the prevailing theories with an emphasis on the factors which emerged as significant in the literature to healthy adolescent identity formation.

Traditional Freudian psychology focuses on the intrapsychic, sexual changes which occur during adolescence. It stresses the importance of conflict at this stage of development and considers conflict to be normal and necessary for identity formation. Freud assumed that the sexual body changes results in a resurgence of the Oedipus complex as an universal phenomena. The conflict is centered in the relationship between the adolescent and his parents and will emerge in some areas of the relationship. Successful resolution of the Oedipus complex and acceptance of the appropriate sex role results in a good self-concept and a healthy sense of identity. While Freud did not pursue adolescence as much as childhood, his daughter, Anna Freud, has written extensively in this area. Anna Freud is cited in Smart and Smart (1973):

I take it that it is normal for an adolescent to behave for a considerable length of time in an inconsistent and unpredictable manner; to fight his impulses and accept them; to ward them off successfully and to be overrun by them; to love his parents and to hate them; to revolt against them and to be dependent on them, to be deeply ashamed to acknowledge his mother before others and, unexpectedly to desire heart-to-heart talks with her; to thrive on imitation of and identification with others while searching unceasingly for his own identity; to be more idealistic, artistic, generous and unselfish than he will ever be again, but also the opposite: self-centered, egotistic, calculating (p. 115).

From a cognitive perspective on the development of identity writers such as Piaget and Lewin stress the importance of the adolescence is



the stage of development of formal operational thought. Formal operational though involves being able to engage in hypothetical and abstract thinking. This is often characterized by idealism without the tempering of realism. Often the adolescent begins to question the answers given by authorities, realizing their answers are not always consistent or rational. As the adolescent is now capable of planning for the future his perspective on the present also changes. Some of his present actions are oriented toward future goals. These elements affect adolescent self-concept as summarized by Sutton-Smith (1973):

One consequence of the ability to think abstractly and in terms of possibilities is that the adolescent becomes more aware of personal alternatives. He is capable of imagining an ideal self that is different from his present real self. Increasingly he projects himself into future social and occupational roles (p. 459).

The adolescent becomes more aware of social demands and expectations with the growth of his increased cognitive powers. The cognitive capacity allows the adolescent to discriminate with regard to himself, his family, his peers and his environment. Kurt Lewin's (1962) theory, referred to as field theory, combines biological, sociological, environmental and psychological factors in the concept of life space. The life space contains the interactions between environmental and personal factors. An important concept within the construct of life space is that objects or goals can have a positive or negative attraction which allow the fulfillment of needs or inhibit the needs. As a result the individual moves toward and away from his goals. Lewin refers to this as locomotion. This concept appears significant to the adolescent quest for identity and could explain the vacillation of adolescents from very mature behavior at one time to childish behavior at another time. Lewin refers to the

adolescent as a marginal man - someone who does not really belong to the children group or to the adult group. In this sense adolescence is a changing of group memberships. Muss (1962) explains this concept:

As a 'marginal man' the adolescent experiences a continuous conflict between the various attitudes, values, ideologies, and styles of living since he is shifting from the childhood group to the adult group. The adolescent develops the ability to understand the past, adopt a new outlook toward the future and plan his own life more realistically (p. 89-91).

Lewin explains the adolescent uncertainty as a lack of cognitive structure stating that the roles for childhood and adulthood are clearly defined whereas the adolescent is entering a transition phase. This theory attempts to explain individual behavior as opposed to generalizing to adolescents as a group.

Erikson (1968) attributes more influence to social factors than does traditional psychoanalytic theory, but he was still influenced significantly by Freud. He identifies the development of a personal identity as the primary task of adolescence. In this view the adolescent must resolve crises of previous developmental stages which are basic trust versus basic mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, and, industry versus inferiority. According to his theory, if the conflicts of each previous stage of development have been resolved positively, then healthy growth can continue to occur because those positive qualities of the previous stages become part of the adolescent's identity. Conversely, if the conflict is not resolved the negative quality is assimilated into the identity. The danger of this is what Erikson refers to as identity diffusion which can result in delinquent behaviors, personality disorders and withdrawal. Erikson (1959) relates:

The emerging ego identity, then, bridges the early childhood stages, when the body and the parent images were given their specific meanings, and the later stages, when a variety of social roles becomes available and increasingly coercive. A lasting ego identity cannot begin to exist without the trust of the first oral stage; it cannot be completed without a promise of fulfillment which from the dominant image of adulthood reaches down into the body's beginnings and which creates at every step an accruing sense of ego strength (p. 91).

Successful establishment of identity in adolescence allows the individual to progress into adulthood where he must develop intimacy, generativity and integrity. This can only occur if the adult has a "reasonable sense of identity" according to Erikson.

It can be seen that Erikson's theory, like Freud's theory, is based on conflict resolution of developmental crises. Both theories build sequentially and assume the universality of developmental stages and tasks. However, Erikson (1956) does recognize the contribution of outside variables:

This period adolescence can be viewed as a psychological moratorium during which the individual through free role experimentation may find a niche in some section of his society, a niche which is firmly defined and yet seems to be uniquely made for him. In finding it the young adult gains an assured sense of inner continuity and social sameness which will bridge what he was as a child and what he is to become, and will reconcile his conception of himself and his community's recognition of him . . . Identity formation arises from the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications, and their absorption in a new configuration which, in turn, is dependent on the process by which a society . . . identifies the young individual, recognizing him as somebody who had to become the way he is, and who, being the way he is, is taken for granted (p. 66-68).

Erikson uses the term moratorium because he thinks that adolescents require time to move from the stage of childhood to the roles and responsibilities of adulthood and society provides him with this time. This

"time-out" from continuous development allows the adolescent to experiment with new behaviors and ways of relating.

The identity quest in adolescence deals with the existential problems of life: Who am I? What is my purpose? What are my goals? The adolescent is involved in making decisions about his present situation and his future life. John J. Mitchell, an author who has written extensively on adolescence takes a similar perspective. Mitchell theorizes that a complex identity requires that the adolescent know who he is, what he is and why he is. He thinks that task during adolescence is to determine the "why" question. He thinks that the adolescent, besides his concerns for existential questions, wants to know in practical terms what is available to him: Where can I find employment? What school should I attend? What is to my best advantage now? Mitchell (1975) comments on this aspect of identity:

Much has been written about the idealism of youth, and rightfully so, as it is a trait genuine to them. However, idealists only they are not. Youth are hardheaded pragmatists who, like the legendary sceptics from Missouri, must be shown not only what is but how it makes a difference. The identity problems which most occupy the thoughts of youth are practical questions dealing with tangible opportunities and possibilities harboured by the future (p. 18).

This would appear to indicate that the identity crisis of adolescence is not confined to the psychological sphere. The adolescent wants to know who he is in relation to the larger philosophical issues, but also who he is in simple terms of everyday functioning.

An important variable in adolescent identity formation is that of body image. The physiological changes of adolescence place stress upon the body image which affect identity (ie., rapid body growth, secondary sexual characteristics, sexual awareness, early or late maturation).

In the preceeding stages of development the adolescent gains a mastery over his body and a trust in his abilities which is consequently upset in adolescence. An adolescent who is unhappy or unsure about his body image is more likely to have a poor self-concept. Lewsin incorporated body image into his theory of adolescent development as commented on by Muuss (1962):

During adolescence, changes in body structure, body experiences, and new body sensations and urges are so drastic that even the well-known life space of body image becomes unknown, unreliable, and unpredictable. This is understandable; the body obviously is especially close to and vital to one's feeling of stability and security. Doubt about this stability leads to emotional instability, which may change one's perception of life and of the stability of the world at large (p. 89).

Closely related to body image is the question of gender identity and sex role. Mitchell (1975) states:

The degree of security an individual feels in his sexual identity, and how consistent this identity is with the expectations of family and peers, cannot help but affect the adolescent's overall self-concept and feelings of self-esteem (p. 46).

The more comfortable the individual feels about his sex role the better his personal sense of identity. Mitchell thinks that role experimentation is a crucial factor toward achieving gender identity and overall identity. Adolescents' sampling behavior is not done randomly, but rather with purpose. The adolescent is particularly concerned about what others think about him. David Elkind in Smart and Smart (1973) remarks:

It is the belief that others are preoccupied with his appearance and behavior that constitutes the egocentrism of the adolescent (p. 108).

Therefore as the adolescent tries out new behaviors he receives feedback which allows him to modify his subsequent behavior to what his society considers appropriate role behavior. The social, interpersonal interactions affect the adolescent's sense of identity. Mitchell relates:

One's personal identity is formed (almost created) by the adolescent as he interacts with his environment and introspects within himself (p. 51).

Both the adolescent's family and his peers are significant others in the adolescent's life which have profound influence on the development of a sense of identity. The adolescent often receives mixed or contradictory messages from his parents. He is told that his behavior is childish and that he should act more like an adult. At the same time the adolescent is denied adult responsibilities and privileges although he is capable both physically and psychologically. In our western society there are uncertain role expectations which can lead to role confusion and in turn to identity confusion. The adolescent wants to view himself as a separate entity from his parents although still needing the support of the family. The family still wants the adolescent to be obedient, yet independent. Kandel and Lesser (1969) found that adolescents generally depend on their parents opinions for important occupational and educational choices, and on the influence of peers in questions relating to personal style and identity. In some ways the relatively high standard of living in our society has increased the identity problems of adolescence by maintaining the adolescent's dependence on his parents into young adulthood. A common example is the university student who often remains at home, financially dependent on his parents, well past the teenage years.

The family can be viewed as both an asset and a liability depending

upon the relationship which has developed over the adolescent's development. The parents can be very beneficial in helping the adolescent to integrate his previous social roles with his future goals in life. An important decision that the adolescent must make is in terms of career which Lidz (1968) refers to as vocational identity. It appears that knowing what one wants as a career can have a stabilizing effect on the adolescent's future identity because the course of action to be followed is clearer as are the role expectations. The parents need to allow the adolescent the independence and autonomy to make this decision while at the same time providing support and guidance.

In addition to the family, peers have a great influence on adolescent identity formation. The adolescent seeks assurance from his peers who are also in the stage of change and seeking assurance. In the area of peers Lidz (1968) comments:

The adolescent society provides standards that furnish considerable guidance as well as the milieu in which the individual can feel that he belongs to something while seeking to renounce his attachments to his family (p. 323).

While greatly asserting their own identity and uniqueness adolescents are often viewed as conformists within their own group, adopting their own language, style of dress and social behavior. Partly this may be due to the fear of being excluded, but also out of the need to feel that they are accepted and that they belong. Lidz relates that a sense of identity requires that the individual be recognized by others as an individual. Augilera and Messick (1978) explain the importance of the peer group:

In his struggle for an identity he turns to his peers and adopts their mode of dress, mannerisms, vocabulary, and code of behavior, often to the distress of adult society. There is a desperate

need to belong, to feel accepted, loved, and wanted (p. 141).

Muuss (1962) also writes:

The peer group, the clique, and the gang help the individual in finding his own identity in a social context. The in-group feeling in adolescent peer groups and gangs is strong and the ensuing clannishness and intolerance of differences - including petty aspects of language, gesture, and dress - is explained by Erikson as the necessary defence against the damages of self-diffusion which exist during this period (p. 36).

The peer group is also an enlarging process for the adolescent's identity development. The adolescent comes to learn more about himself and who he is as he interacts and relates with friends which is different than his relationship with his parents.

Failure to achieve a sense of identity can result in an inability to form intimate relationships and feelings of isolation in adulthood, according to the Eriksonian perspective. This can also lead to feelings of identity diffusion or negative identity. This type of behavior is characterized by doing something against what the adolescent dislikes, more to create negative feelings in someone else than to produce positive feelings for the adolescent. Mitchell (1975) refers to this as the "striking-out reaction" based on the assumption that it is better in the adolescent's mind to have a negative identity than no identity at all. This relates to the individual's need to be recognized as an individual. Mitchell (1973) refers to psychological alienation:

. . . feelings of estrangement or separateness from the self; experiencing oneself as a stranger or unpredictable companion. The individual usually has little concrete sense of his own personal identity; his self-concept vacillates tremendously. Because of a lack of inner certainty he finds himself strongly influenced by others, often



seeking out the approval, the direction of others to fill his void. He has trouble taking himself for granted (p. 47).

This helps to explain the type of adolescent who becomes involved in a variety of religions, drifts from job to job as an adult, cannot relate to the opposite sex and shows little interest in life overall. The struggle for identity appears to be a searching for something outside of the individual, because he does not possess a sense of who he is.

From this discussion it can be seen that numerous authors place a great emphasis on adolescent identity, ranging from the crisis theories of Freud and Erikson, to the cognitive theory of Piaget, to the social theories of Mitchell and Lewin. It appears that adolescent identity is affected by a variety of factors including body image, gender identity, vocational identity, family and peers, role expectations, previous learning and interpersonal relationships. It includes psychological, biological and social variables. A sense of identity allows the individual to assume the responsibilities of adulthood.

#### Social Work in the Schools

The role of social work within the school system is not clearly defined, being open to various interpretations. Some authors are of the opinion that the school should be viewed as a treatment resource while other authors view it as a treatment setting. Still others see the school as a sub-system of the total community. The social worker's role has been thought of as diagnosis, consultant, mediator, preventor, or some combination of these roles. Social workers are either a part of the school, a resource to the school or a separate entity depending on the philosophy advocated by the various writers in the literature. The following discussion will highlight the various

roles of the social worker with the schools and the types of programs which developed from these role definitions.

Authors, such as Wadsworth (1970), are of the opinion that school social work follows too closely to the medical model, focusing strictly on diagnosis without treatment. He states:

The procedure has included referral of a child by the teacher, various diagnostic studies (and thus identification of problems) and referral back to the teacher or to an outside resource. Social workers have had little time for actual treatment (p. 60).

Wadsworth thinks that the central goal for school social workers is the remediation of problems in children. He refers to a 1968 program in an Illinois school division which utilized social workers in a treatment role. The social workers employed a behavior modification process in what was termed a preventive-corrective program to identify small behavior problems in children before they developed into more serious problems. The program not only decreased the maladaptive behaviors in the students, but also enhanced the relationship between the teachers and the social workers because the teachers were able to see positive results from the social work intervention. This is somewhat indicative of the school personnel's view of social workers in the education system. They are skeptical of the benefits of social work interventions often because they are unable to see concrete changes in the students. It appears that professional roles has also created a barrier resulting in the school personnel seeing the school as their area of expertise and resenting social work intrusion. The school social worker must often overcome the resistance of the teachers before he can accomplish any changes within the school.

From a different perspective Gitterman (1976) argues that professionals

have had a tendency to assume that it is the children who must change as opposed to coinciding changes within the system as well. He postulates that this type of perspective could serve to label and stigmatize the children being served because they are seen as "problem students". However, Moynihan (1978) argues that the effects of the school social worker can be positive in that the students who are receiving treatment view themselves as "special". This serves to increase self-esteem and self-concept.

Gitterman (1976) envisions two central roles for social workers in the school system, which are similar to the social work role advocated by Schwartz:

1. helping parents to become more involved with the educational system, simultaneously influencing school representatives to be responsive to parents' interests and concerns; and
2. helping children to use the school and its representatives, simultaneously influencing school representatives to be responsive to children's individualized needs (p. 115).

In summary, Gitterman states:

Social workers can be most useful if they mediate the transactions between the various groups of people that are, in fact, an integral part of the school system (p. 118).

Moynihan (1976) views the school as a treatment setting where the referral does not always come from the school, but the school can serve as a setting to create changes. She firstly assumes that the social worker is in a "guest" position and the social worker must develop his credibility through co-operation because he does not possess any authority within the school system. Secondly, the school is often relieved by the social worker's involvement because the school does not feel totally responsible for the child. The social worker can influence

changes between the child and the school by allowing the school to see the child in a different perspective and for the student to see his teachers differently. In many ways the social worker effects these changes by modeling for both teachers and students. However this approach is still problem oriented with the child seen as the problem. The social worker actually plays a very low-key role and does not really become a part of the school system. Philips (1978) also considers it important that the social worker comes from outside of the school system:

The specialist is a mediator and advocate for the children, and consultant to teachers and guidance personnel. It is important that the specialist come from outside the public educational system, and thus be able to serve as a bridge between the informal and formal systems (p. 87).

The idea that the specialist is outside the system is based on his belief that school problems result from a variety of factors including the student's personality and ability, his family relationships, and the educational and social environments. The role of the social worker includes working in the classrooms with various target populations, but is more focused in helping the school to become a community resource through programs after school, during school and in the evenings for parents, children and other community members. The programs should be recreational and social, as well as educational. In this way being outside of the system increases the social worker's ability to respond to various components of the community. Other authors tend to see the need for the worker to become more directly involved in the school system.

Costin (1975) relates that traditional school social work goals are to help the student adjust to the school system and to use the learning opportunities offered by the school more effectively. The

focus is on the individual student in basic casework approaches to intervention. She argues that the social work intervention is changing toward a focus on the situation rather than on student personality problems. Costin (1975) elaborates this view:

In a model based on school-community-pupil relations the center of interest and attention is on (1) deficiencies in the school and the community and (2) the interaction between specific characteristics of the system and characteristics of groups of pupils at points of stress in the pupil life cycle (p. 135).

Costin's perspective draws upon social learning theory and systems theory in examining the roles of school social workers. Intervention requires an understanding of the needs of the students in terms of their developmental stages and the resulting stresses which occur. This must be integrated with the purpose of the school system and the expectations of the community as a whole.

Costin favors an interdisciplinary approach to meet the student/school/community needs. Important in this view is that the team members are flexible in determining professional roles. Team members should be assigned specific tasks based upon their expertise and ability in certain areas without regard for traditional professional boundaries. The team must have competence in all areas of social work, but each individual team member need not be an expert in all areas. This would seem to provide a comprehensive delivery system for the schools and the students while at the same time allowing the workers to intervene in the areas where they are most comfortable.

In an earlier article Costin (1969) views the schools as a "life setting" where the goal is learning and the development of competence. In this sense:

School social services then become preventive services as they help to make school a place in which more children and youth can learn, an environment for acquiring the skills for today's job market, for progression into higher education, and for developing an image of one's self as a person who is capable, who can learn and succeed. Effects such as these are truly preventive of future problems (p. 281).

Euster (1972) comments on two early social work programs in the school system by Simon (1951) and by Vinter and Sarri (1964). They both utilized a group approach with the goal being to resolve malperformance problems and secondly to improve interpersonal relationships. Euster advocates these two programs as indicative of the worker's role because they both attempt a systematic approach to intervention. Like other authors, Euster presents the social work role as similar to Schwartz's mediating model:

In a sense, the school social worker must become the advocate for students in trouble . . . Mediation, negotiation, and consultation become basic school social work tasks (p. 65-66).

He considers student problems to be a result of the interaction between the student and the school system which means the social worker cannot limit his role to simply treating the student. This perspective appears to be compatible with the role of school social workers advocated by Costin.

The school social worker is often seen as an "outside" person, on the periphery of the school system and not an actual part of the school personnel. Euster would expand the worker's role, particularly within the area of group work. He advocates a higher profile for the social worker which must be actively sought after.

He continues to carry many traditionally assigned functions, but strengthens his connections to the school by negotiating for additional responsibility

to create, promote, and sustain various group activities that help solve individual and collective problems within the typical school and community (p. 67).

The social worker's role would be treatment, but also preventive, utilizing the community's resources to enhance the students' social functioning. Euster also sees the social worker becoming involved in the classroom, working as a team with the teacher; working for the student government system as an advocate; and, working with parents' groups to facilitate their involvement in the school. The worker would become an integral part of the school system instead of an outside person brought in to solve some types of student problems. An important point in this conceptualization is that Euster stresses the need for social workers to expand their role by seeking additional responsibilities. This seems to suggest the need for the social worker or agency to contract with the school system to establish which types of services the social worker will provide.

Webster (1974) considers it to be of central importance that the social worker intervene in the problems identified by the school, not necessarily what the social worker considers relevant. In turn it can lead to a further expansion of the social work role. Webster uses an example to describe such a process. A school requested social work intervention for a group of students who were behavior problems in the school. It was negotiated between school and worker that the intervention would take the form of a group program. The students involved in the group program came to see the group as a problem-solving resource for themselves. As they were better able to understand themselves they were more positive in the school and their scholastic work also improved. As the faculty noticed the positive changes in the students their initial

skepticism turned to interest. The result was that some of the teachers, with the assistance of the social worker, started their own groups as part of the regular school program. It appears to indicate a redefining of the students so that they were not seen as behavior problems which allowed the group to become a resource for the students instead of a treatment group. It also demonstrates an indirect means for changing school personnel's attitudes by providing a concrete means for them to become involved in the process. It allowed the social worker to expand the services he was providing at the request of the school. A similar type of group program for students was used to involve parents in the school system in addition to students and teachers.

A two year project in Oklahoma described by Powell (1973) placed school social workers in the role of "co-ordinators of services" as opposed to counselors. The role of the social workers in the schools was twofold: (1) to act as consultants for school personnel, accepting referrals to outside resources and (2) to help community resources develop new programs to deal with problems for which no services existed. The social worker did not provide treatment to students, but utilized the existing community agencies to provide the required services. This can also be viewed as a mediating function between the school and the community.

A different role for social work services in the schools is described by Fox (1974). The social worker's role was to train teachers to deliver helping services. It was based on the following:

Non social workers with the assistance of trained personnel can gain interpersonal skills necessary to effect constructive change and render effective service (p. 387).



In collaboration with the school faculty the following goals were developed for the program:

- 1) to help educate the child as a whole, to promote spiritual, physical and mental well-being through increased awareness of the dynamics of behavior;
- 2) to enable teachers to recognize and intervene in problem areas; 3) to convey basic interviewing techniques for evaluation of problematic situations and to develop skills in alleviating them; 4) to provide continued support, consultation and assistance in goal-setting so that teachers could learn basic counselling methods via practical experience;
- 5) to help develop skills in working with families in situations demanding attention (p. 388).

To accomplish these goals the social worker took a two-pronged approach. The first part was a weekly seminar with the teachers on various content areas as they related to the stated goals (ie., interviewing, family environment, cultural differences) and the second thrust was experimental, focusing on actual "doing" with the teachers what was learned in the seminars. The role of the social worker then was 1) to transmit his knowledge and skills to the teachers and 2) to provide ongoing support and backup to the teachers. It could be argued that the teachers did not have the "professional" training to become involved in working with the students. Such an attitude reflects the narrow professional outlook which social workers often criticize teachers.

Actually this approach allowed the social workers to expand their role and utilize scarce resources effectively. The program was termed a success, both for the students and the school. The teachers were better able to understand and deal with the students and the number of referrals to outside agencies was decreased. An additional benefit was the increased cohesion among the teachers who participated in the program and the teachers' group became a support in itself. This suggests that a potential role for social workers is to develop existing resources within the school system.

Hallowitz and Van Dyke (1973) do not think that it is required for a school to possess a school social worker for the school to become a part of the treatment program. A Canadian demonstration project by an outside agency utilized a group approach in a school to enhance adjustment into junior high school. The intervention was preventive and short-term, based on Northern's model of group treatment. Buckley (1974) comments:

Successful change from elementary to junior high school would call for a need to reduce anxieties, develop new skills for coping with the environment, accept the reality of their new situation, and develop a positive view of themselves as well as their friends and families. The peer group became the testing ground for understanding and contending with their problems (p. 208).

The girls who were involved in the groups were better able to handle the adjustment than a similar control group. The social work role was treatment oriented, focusing on the girls' interactions within the group. Although the school was the treatment setting, it did not include the school faculty in the program as it was felt that they were not required. The project demonstrated that the school's co-operation was essential, but that the school does not always have a role in the actual intervention.

The school social worker cannot fulfill all of the aforementioned roles, but must be selective in provision of services. The lack of manpower and financial resources limits what services the social worker can provide to the school. In Canada and the U.S. some of the current and previous funds for the programs come through grants for pilot or demonstration projects. They quite often do not find a permanent place in the school's budget once the grant is finished. As a result many good programs are discarded. In this sense school social workers are employed on a temporary or contract basis instead of as fulltime personnel.

The various types of programs and perspectives of intervention outlined all provide needed services and are in line with social work goals and objectives. The United States appears to be moving toward a more comprehensive and expanded role for school social workers, but there are not many school social workers in Canada. A major study compiled by Curtis (1978) revealed that only two major centres in Canada (Toronto and Winnipeg) employ a large number of school social workers. He found that there were less than three hundred school social workers throughout Canada.

Costin (1968) identified 107 tasks for school social workers. Curtis (1978) reduced this number to 75 and Meares (1977) listed 84 tasks. Curtis' research demonstrated that many of these defined social work tasks were being handled by non-social work personnel such as guidance counselors, psychologists, school nurses and attendance officers. In addition many government agencies outside of the school handled some of the tasks. The reason most often given for not employing social workers was lack of funds. School personnel also wanted or required that the school social workers have teaching experience which severely limits the number of potential social workers.

Through the recognition of the increased roles that social workers can provide to the school system, the social workers have enlarged their intervention from assessment and remediation toward a more holistic approach. Meares envisions the social work role as follows:

School social workers could be considered key persons in facilitating the philosophy of humane education. This concern for the individual child and groups of children and the children's total environment, as well as their understanding of social, cultural, and community influences may be considered part of the process in humanizing today's public schools (p. 196).

This definition appears to represent the role of the school social worker most appropriately as it allows for remedial, assessment, preventive, liason, consultant and social change roles as all being part of the social worker's milieu.

### Social Work With Groups

Within the last two decades the usage of small groups has increased significantly, both in the number of groups and the types of group. Diedrich (1972) postulates that this increase is a reflection of our current lifestyle:

Two major factors seem to be accelerating the use of small face-to-face group experience as learning vehicles; (a) the fast-changing, large complex, and impersonal society in which we live, and (b) the increasing amount of organizational work-life that takes place in small face-to-face groups (p. 39).

Social work with groups maintains the same values and ethics prescribed to by the social work profession as a whole, and is guided by the same principles as other forms of social work intervention. The group is a means of intervention and not an end in itself. The benefits are to the individual group members and not to the abstract being - "the group".

The author chose to utilize the definition of group developed by Bernard Davies (1975):

A gathering of three or more individual human beings; who may, but who may not, expect to go on meeting permanently; in which direct person-to-person exchanges (verbal or non-verbal) between each individual are to least possible; and in which there exists, or is possible, between any among these individuals some common interests and/or purposes, some sense of identity and some mutual acceptance of interdependence (p. 22).

This is very similar to the characteristics of a group outlined by Glanz (1967):

1. The members must be in face to face contact with one another,
2. It must be possible for them to have a high degree of interaction,
3. They must have some common goal for which they are willing to expend certain energies to reach (p. 6).

Both definitions are useful, but only Davies' definition includes the added dimensions of a time perspective and of group size. The need for interchange between the group members tends to limit the upper extreme of group size, which most authors agree should be less than twenty members. The time perspective recognizes the possibility and probability of groups possessing a finite duration. It also takes into account the fact that the frequency and length of group meetings vary considerably. This allows for the inclusions of weekend marathon groups, activity groups such as Boy Scouts, and weekly therapy groups.

Shulman (1979) views the group as a micro society which has the potential to be a mutual aid system. Group members can be assisted in a variety of ways: simple sharing of information, debate of ideas, empathy and support, confrontation by peers, discussion of taboo areas, experimentation of new behaviors, individual problem solving, mutual concerns, greater strength for action and change. It can be seen that work with groups has advantages which the usual one-to-one relationship does not provide. Davis (1973) has categorized these advantages: the normality of group experience; changing perceptions and self-perceptions; a reduced sense of isolation; and, rehearsing new ways of behaving.

The normality of group experience refers to the fact that everyone is involved in different types of group situations throughout their lives, from family and friends to school and work groups. It is perhaps more

common than the one-to-one relationship. As Feldman and Wodarski (1975)

comment:

In contrast with the usual one-to-one therapeutic situation, any treatment group composed of more than two persons is likely to present a broad variety of social stimuli, behavioral patterns and reinforcement mechanisms. To the extent that these represent the 'real world' or, more specifically, the client's typical social environment . . . each client is likely to be confronted with a wide array of social problems, peer relationships, and task responsibilities that inevitably are lacking in the typical one-to-one therapeutic encounter (p. 7).

Groups are by nature experiential, a microcosm of life involving different individual personalities and relationships and are, therefore, more likely to reflect the way people interact in their everyday lives. The individual's means of coping and relating to others in his environment are exposed along with his strengths and weaknesses.

The second advantage of groups is that they can change the individual group member's perceptions of himself and of others. The individual's sense of identity can be strengthened by receiving feedback and observing how he interacts with the other group members. The individual may be able to modify his behaviors through the group experience. At the same time the group members are able to perceive their own uniqueness.

A group can serve to reduce individual feelings of isolation. The members may realize that their feelings and reactions are shared which can serve to reduce stress because they know that they are not alone in what they are feeling. The client may feel more at ease and more open since the focus is not one-to-one, but rather to the group as a whole. In the same context the group members may feel less threatened by the social worker because the social worker has less power and the members more.

The group approach increases the potential resources available to the group member because the individual can utilize the other group members. At times the learning or help provided by another group member will be more readily accepted than if it comes from the social worker. The sharing process can become reciprocal in that the individual who is able to help another group member feels that he is making a worthwhile contribution. This serves to increase his own sense of identity and self-worth.

The fourth major advantage of working with groups is that they can provide a safe and secure environment for rehearsing new behaviors. Although groups can produce conforming behavior, they do allow for, and encourage experimentation. If there is a feeling of trust and cohesiveness, group members are more likely to test out different ways of interacting. Group feedback can enhance the individual's decision making process on appropriate and acceptable behavior both within and outside of the group.

Douglas (1976) has developed a set of basic assumptions upon which group work practice is founded. Douglas states:

1. that group experience is universal and an essential part of human existence,
2. that groups can be used to effect changes in the attitudes and behaviors of individuals,
3. that groups provide experiences which can be monitored or selected in some way for beneficial ends,
4. that groups offer experience shared with others so that all can come to have something in common with the sense of belonging and of growing together,
5. that groups produce change which is more permanent than can be achieved by other methods and change which is obtained more quickly also,
6. that groups assist in the removal or diminuation of difficulties created by previous exposure to the process of learning,

7. that groups as instruments of helping others may be economical in the use of scarce resources, eg., skilled workers, time, etc.,
8. that a group can examine its own behavior and in so doing learn about the general patterns of group behavior (p. 28).

Of central importance in this set of assumptions is that Douglas appears to make a sweeping statement in number five to suggest that groups are the most effective means of intervention. It would seem more appropriate to state that groups have the potential to be effective, dependent upon numerous variables ranging from the group goals, members, model of intervention, leadership and motivation to mention just a few. Klein (1972) effectively summarizes his thinking in this area:

I have little patience with authors who claim that theirs is the only way to achieve positive results, and I have less tolerance for dogma. There is no one way to work with people. Groupwork is useful because it offers the groupworker and the group members many options and allows both or either to innovate and create means that are appropriate and effective in the unique situations at hand. This is its appeal, its strength, and its promise (p. XIII).

Although not unique to social work with groups, most authors in analyzing a group divide the group experience into a number of stages or phases of development ranging from four to ten phases. Tuckman (1972) conceptualizes four stages as does Gazda (1973) and Maier (1965). Garland, Jones and Kolodny (1965) state five stages, Trecker (1955) six stages and Sarri and Galinsky (1967) use seven stages to describe group development. Davis (1975) does not think that any theory of group stages can accurately account for all of the group experiences. However, within the limitations of any model, Gifford (1970), in a working paper, has conceptualized four stages of group development which appears to contain the essence of group development.

The first phase is referred to as the Preaffiliation and Orientation



phase. It includes the activities which precede the first group meeting and has also been considered the planning phase. The main purpose of this phase is for the group worker and the potential group member to reach a mutual understanding of the pending group experience. The first phase ends with the group member's decision to tentatively participate in the group.

The second stage is the Formative phase which begins with the first group meeting. The formative phase can also occur after a break in the group meetings or with the introduction of a new social worker. This phase is marked by a high degree of testing behavior and checking-out of expectations. During this stage the group members are still in the process of determining if the group can meet their needs and they have no real commitment to the group. The end of the second phase is seen as happening when the group members develop some cohesion toward working on the group goals and develop a sense of "our group". Turner-Zeglinski (1970) in her five stages of group development divides the second phase into parts; the formative and the intermediate phase. In the intermediate phase, group norms and values become clearer and the group has a moderate level of cohesion. Leaders begin to arise and sub-groups are forming. There is a general commitment from group members to the group goals.

Gifford refers to the third stage as the Established phase. He describes the established phase:

. . .encompassing as it does the extended period during which the group members have no basic doubts, or at least the majority of them have no doubts, about their commitment to the group and during which it functions continuously, but within which there may be 'ups and downs', periods of rapid movement towards goals and other periods of temporary frustration, a static traditionalism in the functioning of the group or an overall progression which

may nevertheless be marked by 'two steps forward and one step backward', as a pattern of development (p. 6).

The established phase may be marked by significant event or may only be preceived retrospectively. Typically the worker's role becomes less active as the group members are able to assume more responsibility for group functioning.

The final stage is the Termination phase. Groups can end for a variety of reasons such as the achievement of the group's goals, the end of a set time period, lack of interest, withdrawal of funding or the ineffectiveness of the group. As Zeglinski points out, the termination phase may follow any of the preceding stages. The group members may experience feelings of loss and be unwilling to end the group. The group worker's role is to help the group deal with its feelings toward termination, to review with the group the experience and to help them evaluate the experience.

In addition to group stages, there are other components by which to understand group functioning. Glanz (1967) considers three basic concepts to understanding group procedures. The first is interaction which refers to how the group members relate while in the group. He also considers group size to be important because when the group is too small there may not be sufficient input to maintain the group and when the group is too large communication becomes difficult. He sees three functions in examining groups: 1) those that attempt to accomplish a task, 2) those that attempt to develop or change the participants, and 3) those that provide structured learning situations.

Group norms develop from a common set of values within the group. They serve to set the parameters for which behavior is acceptable to

the group and which behavior will not be tolerated. The group norms serve as the principal means of control.

The group goals or purpose will influence the make-up of the group. There may be personal goals for the members in addition to the stated group goals.

Power and authority are elements which determine the effectiveness of the group. All members will have varying amounts of power and influence in the group which can effect group productivity. The style of leadership, whether democratic or autocratic will influence the degree of participation and involvement the group members exhibit. Related to this is the area of group cohesion. Group members will feel varying degrees of commitment to the general group and its members. In this sense their ammendability to group influence will also vary. This is also affected by how well the group members like each other.

The status and prestige the group members feel they have within the group along with their roles within the group maintain the group functioning. Awareness of the sub-groups within the group becomes important with some members feeling more apart of the group than others. Finally the group's perception of itself in relation to the larger community will influence how the group feels about itself.

A major difficulty within the group work field of practice concerns the seeming inability to readily conceptualize the numerous group typologies in a simple format, especially with the rapid increase in group usage in recent years. Definitions and labels are often used interchangeably and often inappropriately. There appears to have been a blurring of terms while at the same time an increase in group theories and models, which has served to create some confusion. This is particu-

larly evident with "developmental" type groups which have been referred to as laboratory, experiential, encounter, growth, marathon, T-group and sensitivity groups.

The literature suggests that groups tend to be delineated in terms of their goal or purpose (ie., growth, therapy, socialization) while other are defined on the basis of the theoretical concepts of intervention (ie., client-centered, reality therapy, mediating). Still others are defined in relation to what they do (ie., discussion, activity, encounter) and others are defined in terms of the leader's role (ie., therapist, advocate, group member). The following review indicates the wide variability of group classifications.

Papell and Rothman (1966), identify three models of groupwork:

- 1) the social goals model with the focus on social responsibility, creating social change with the emphasis on democratic group process;
- 2) the remedial model with the focus on rectifying social dysfunctioning by changing individual behavior;
- 3) the reciprocal model with the focus on the group as a mutual aid system for meeting individual needs.

The social goals model is seen as the oldest of the three models and along with the remedial model has utilized knowledge from various disciplines and is not associated with a single contributor. The reciprocal model is usually associated with William Schwartz's development of the mediating model which has come to be utilized fairly extensively in the social work profession. However Wittaker (1970) still does not think that these models are adequate. As a result he has attempted to integrate the three models with the five stages of group development produced by Garland, Jones, and Kolodny.

Feldman and Wodarski (1975) also classify group work into three major areas. The first component they refer to as traditional social group work

which derives its theoretical base from the discipline of sociology and social psychology. It is highly directive in the manner of Glasser and Vinter. Groups which utilize experiential psychology, social learning theory, and behavior modification are referred to as group level behavior modification by Feldman and Wodarski. The final category is the group-centered approach which they refer to as non-directive. It is based upon the work of Hobbs and Gordon who followed Rogers' client-centered therapy.

A more basic grouping was developed by Klein (1972) who simply referred to groups as treatment, preventive and developmental. In his view treatment groups main purpose is to help the individual to develop a real self and is particularly useful in psychotherapy. Developmental groups focus on increasing personal growth and normal development in addition to social competence. In between these two groups Klein places preventive groups which could be seen as treatment or developmental depending upon the goals to be achieved. The intent is to increase social adaptability whether on a primary or secondary level of prevention.

Feldman and Wodarski (1975) comment:

Yet, to date, investigators have reached no consensus regarding. . . a model or, even regarding its basic parameters. To the contrary, a number of models for group development can be set forth (p. 171).

This suggests that while the present theoretical frameworks have their limitations, they are usable when viewed as working hypotheses and not definitive theories. It appears to be much too easy to get caught in the trap of semantics, particularly since social work with groups is influenced by many related disciplines. Glanz (1967) states:

Rather than emphasizing certain rigid techniques as necessary for good group counselling, the trend seems to be to emphasize certain basic understandings on the part of the counsellor or therapist (p. 232).

An important concern as to which method of group work to use needs to take into account a number of variables. Factors such as group composition, the group environment, the larger social environment, the group worker's skills and preferences, group purpose and group development as outlined previously all influence the method of intervention. From this perspective the author has attempted to illustrate the basics of social work with groups and will focus on a specific means of group intervention in the next section.

### Experiential Learning

Given the limitations of any one model or theory, the author will review the experiential learning model as a basis for social work with groups. Experiential learning can be categorized under the broad umbrella of developmental groups. Klein (1972) comments on the nature of developmental groups:

This kind of group can provide experiences which facilitate progression through normal developmental stages and extend the capacity for social relationships. Herein, the group experiences help participants to develop social competence, express latent potentialities, and provide enrichment (p. 42).

Within the developmental framework has evolved the Human Potential Movement which focuses on human relations training. This movement began in the early sixties and claims individuals such as Otto, Rogers, Satir, Maslow, Gibb and Schwartz as contributors to its origin. Human relations training is experiential, based upon planned and structured series of exercises or activities. An underlying assumption is that skills in

participation can best be learned by participation. As a result, particular stress is placed in learning about the process of working in groups while a part of the group. This type of experiential learning has been referred to as humanistic education where the goal is to maximize individual potential. Bradford, Gibb and Berne (1964) state seven basic objectives:

1. Increased awareness of and sensitivity to emotional reactions and expressions in himself and others;
2. A greater ability to perceive and learn from the consequences of his actions through attention to feelings, his own and others;
3. The clarification and development of personal values and goals consonant with a democratic and scientific approach to problems of social and personal decision and action;
4. The development of theoretical insights which will serve as tools in the linking of personal values with the requirements of the situation;
5. The development of skills to support better integrative actions;
6. The development of techniques for the transfer of training from the laboratory to other situations;
7. The ability to help each learner become an analyst of his own process of learning (p. 117).

This approach is somewhat of a shift in priorities from the traditional social work orientation which was patterned after the medical model. The focus is not on the remediation or treatment of problems, but rather an emphasis on the development of every individual's growth and integration. Carkhuff and Berenson (1976) in their book Teaching as Treatment, claim that traditional modes of counseling do not work and that the need is for skills training for individuals as opposed to therapy. This type of view is compatible both for experiential learning and social work with groups. Two of the goals of social work with groups developed by Davies (1975) relate to a developmental approach:

1. achieving a sense of identity with others,  
and
2. changing group member's self-image,  
attitudes, and behaviors outside of the group  
situation (p. 46).

These are similar to the four goals developed by Campbell (1972) for experiential learning groups:

1. increased self-insight or self-awareness concerning one's behavior;
2. increased sensitivity to the behavior of others;
3. increased awareness and understanding of the type of processes that facilitate or inhibit group functioning and/or the interaction between different groups; and,
4. increased behavioral skills in inter-personal and intergroup situations (p. 72).

The experiential learning model has been equated with the principals of laboratory training as reflected in the writings of Eddy and Lubin (1972):

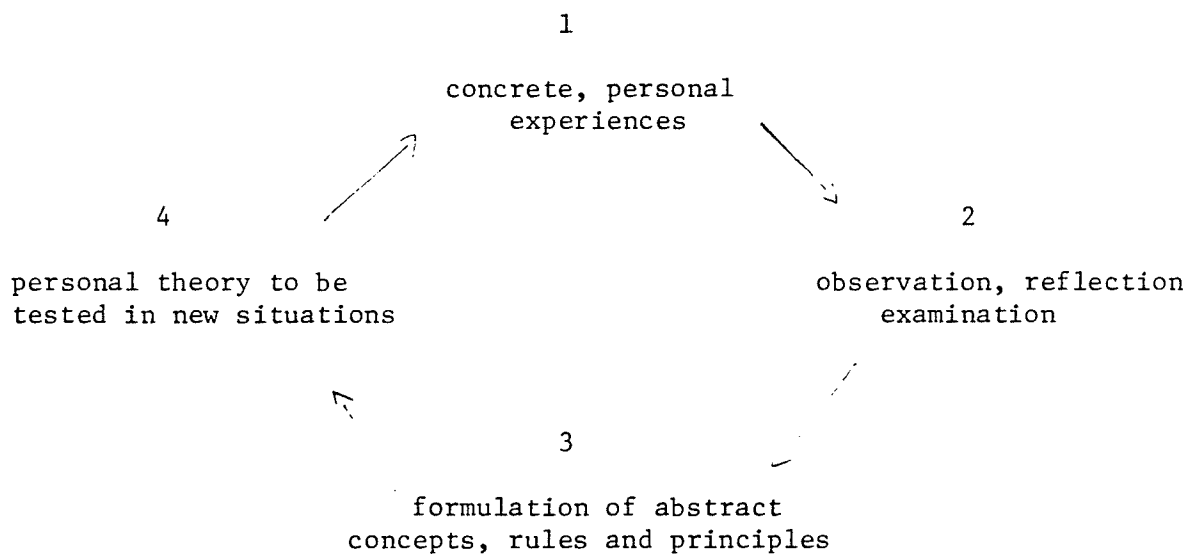
. . .it is used to refer to an educational method that emphasizes experience-based learning activities. Participants are included in a variety of experiences, usually including small group interaction, and their behavior provides data for learning. Thus laboratory training involves learning by doing. The subject matter of such programs deals with some aspect of human interaction, and the goal is to be more aware of and responsive to what is going on (p. 39).

Kurt Lewin had a great impact on the development of the experiential learning model, particularly in the area of groups. His work in the 1930's and 1940's led to the recognition that learning was more effective when the learners were actively participating in the learning process. They were able to share their experiences with others which also increased the effectiveness of the learning. Davis and Marks (1975) compare the experiential model to the didactic approach:



The experiential model is to the didactic model as participating in a heated discussion is to listening to a lecture. Involvement and responsibility in an experiential model are centered in learner participation and active involvement. However, in the didactic model the focus is primarily on the teacher, while the learner's responsibility is to take notes, listen, think, memorize, or duplicate on examination the content of the course (p. 161).

The experiential learning model could be thought of as a cyclical, four stage process as developed by Johnson and Johnson (1975):



In the experiential model the experiences are structured which allows the individual group member the opportunity to examine his own reactions and feelings. It does not assume to tell you what you should think or feel, but instead places the emphasis on the awareness of what happened in the learning experience. From this stage concepts, theories, or abstractions are developed in relation to the experience itself and the feelings and ideas that were generated. The key in experiential learning is the integration of the individual's response

with theory. The individual is then able to decide what is appropriate for himself as an individual which affords the opportunity to change or modify his behavior. From this stage the cycle repeats itself with continuous reflection, modification and conceptualization.

The experiential learning model, then, focuses on both process and content. Content is that which is said and done in the group. Klein (1972) refers to this as the external level of group operations based on behavior, task and communication. In the experiential model the content provides the basis for the processes to be examined. As such the group utilizes a variety of instructional media to enhance awareness of group processes including role playing, movies, films, music, speakers, audio/visual equipment, etc. Process refers to the relationships between the group members and the patterns of interactions. Klein calls this the internal level of group functioning. He further divides this into three areas:

1. affective relations - which means that some people are attracted more or less to others and can enjoy them or work better with them;
2. communication networks - who talks to whom, about what, and in what manner;
3. relationship networks - centered around such concepts as power, status, position, role, and the like (p. 55).

It is also based on the concept that, under normal circumstances, nothing is more important or relevant to us than ourselves. This permits group members to make the experience meaningful for themselves. An individual learns best when he is personally involved in the learning experience. Marks and Davis (1975) state:

. . .experiential learning legitimizes a forum for acquiring self-knowledge because, regardless of the issue under consideration, the participants have the mandate to see, to hear about,

and to examine their own uniqueness in action. Thus experiential learning - in combining a personal reference point, cognitive and effective involvement and feedback, and theoretical and conceptual material - results in a more complete learning model (p. 162).

Evaluation in an experiential model is usually more immediate and ongoing than in other types of groups. The use of feedback allows the group members and the group leader to know how they are doing and where they stand in relation to the rest of the group. Although reactions may be positive or negative, the discussion does not center on right or wrong.

The experiential group does not usually have the intensity of a therapy group, although at times it can. This is dependent upon the amount of effort and motivation that the group leader and group members are prepared to expend. The group meetings can be intensive or superficial and within the group the individual's own input is free to vary widely. The degree to which an individual participates in the group is a personal choice although members are encouraged to examine their own behavior in the group. This can be an advantage or a liability to the group in terms of creating changes in the group members, but since increased awareness is a central goal of experiential groups the individual may benefit from reflecting on why he does or does not participate. Thus the often stated problem by social workers of "lack of participant motivation" does not become a factor. Each participant is recognized as being able to contribute at the level he is comfortable with.

The fact that experiential learning is not "problem" oriented and the members are not seen as needing treatment increases the applicability of the model to a wide variety of groups and individuals. The emphasis is on increasing personal growth which can be utilized with almost every type of individual.

The responsibility is placed on the individual group members for the initial involvement in the group. For this reason it is extremely important that participation is voluntary. Secondly the group leader has an important role to play in helping the group to obtain the maximum benefits from the experience.

The experiential model views the group leader as a facilitator who enables the members to find ways of utilizing their learning experiences. His role is to create an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance. The worker must achieve a balance between his participation as a group member and as a group leader. Gazda (1973) reflects the nature of this balance:

The nature of the interaction must be controlled by the helper. He is the expert on the conditions necessary for change to occur; therefore he must control his own behavior and create an atmosphere of security and trust, . . .and . . .high levels of the facilitative or 'core' conditions of empathy, warmth, and respect as well as the more action and activity oriented conditions of concreteness, genuineness, appropriate self-disclosure, confrontation, and immediacy (p. 22, 31).

Therefore the worker's role is active and directive, not passive. The worker must also accept responsibility for his role as the group leader without stifling the group members' learning. The leader provides the opportunities by which learning takes place through direct action such as structuring of learning activities and by indirect action such as role modelling. The worker must remember that the most effective learning takes place when the group members have the freedom to discover their own knowledge.

Gazda (1978) summarizes the characteristics of effective workers developed by Truax and Carkhuff (1967):

. . .integrated, nondefensive and authentic or genuine. . .and. . .providing a nonthreatening, safe, trusting or secure atmosphere by their acceptance, unconditional positive regard, love or nonpossessive warmth for the client. And finally they are able to 'be with', 'grasp the meaning of' or accurately and emphatically understand the client on a moment-by-moment basis (p. 31).

This appears to be similar to what Gordon (1972) refers to as the group-centered leader:

The group-centered leader prefers to adopt as his working hypothesis the belief that the individual has a vast store of untapped potential for positive, constructive, intelligent, and mature behavior (p. 75).

Marks and Davis (1975) in comparing the roles of the leader in an experiential group and in a didactic group describe the difference as between a director and a leading man:

The experiential facilitator is responsible for assessing the group, selecting the activity, and conducting the experience. While the experiential facilitator must know how to set the stage and create an atmosphere, the didactic leader is traditionally an actor who is seen as publicly responsible for the whole performance (p. 161).

The group leader's role is not to evaluate or influence the group members' feelings and thinking unless asked. However, as a group member he does have the responsibility to be involved in the group, to appropriately share his feelings and thinking. Hanson, et al. (1976) think that the group leader's interventions should be in six areas: direction giving, feedback, eliciting feelings, providing information, clarifying group process and content. Lifton (1966) has organized the leader functions into three areas: clarifying operations, show-how operations and security giving operations. In both cases the group leader is seen as an enabler and a facilitator.

The experiential learning model can be used with a wide variety of individuals of all ages. It has been found to be extremely useful with adolescents. They are at the stage in their development when they want to experiment with new feelings and ideas. The group setting can be a safe and secure environment to risk themselves as they learn more about themselves.

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## CHAPTER III

### THE PRACTICUM EXPERIENCE

The practicum was implemented from November 1978 to May 1979 at Prince Charles School in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba. Portage was chosen because the author was familiar with the city from having worked there. Also, the author thought that the school would be receptive to the practicum.

The school is located in an older area of the city, close to the downtown section. Its population is drawn from a cross-section of the Portage community, including students from the surrounding rural areas and Indian reserves. The school encompasses grades nine to kindergarten. A number of the students attending the school come from poor, multi-problem families. There are a number of alcohol and drug related problems. In addition, Prince Charles is seen as the school in the division which takes children with behavior problems. In some cases their life skills are limited. In the past the school had been receptive to new programs. The appropriate authorities were consulted, including the Superintendent of the Portage School Division, the Co-ordinator of Student Services and the Vice-principal of Prince Charles School. The main contact person in the school was the vice-principal.

The author selected a group approach as the primary means of intervention. A group intervention was decided to be the most effective for a variety of reasons. The school system is basically organized on the basis of groups through their system of classes. Both the school and the students are comfortable with learning in this type of group

setting. Groups were reasoned to reach the greatest number of students in the time allotted. In addition the author's major area of interest was in group work.

The literature emphasizes the importance of the peer group during adolescent development. A group approach taps the potential for peer learning. This is true for the life tasks of adolescence - the need for acceptance and belonging, the need for independence, and the need for a sense of identity. In this sense the group approach is very appropriate.

The groups were experiential in nature with the focus being on process as well as content. Marks and Davis (1975) explain the model as:

The participants experience the issues as well as identity them intellectually. Involvement and responsibility in an experiential model are centered in learner participation and involvement (p. 161).

The model is also based on the concept that under normal circumstances nothing is more relevant to us than ourselves. This is particularly true with adolescents who are searching for a sense of identity. The group allows them to gauge themselves in terms of their peers. Individual members are able to establish their own level of interaction. Marks and Davis (1975) comment:

. . .Experiential learning legitimizes a forum for acquiring self-knowledge because, regardless of the issue under consideration, the participants have the mandate to see, to hear about, and to examine their own uniqueness in action (p. 162).

Given the life tasks of adolescence, the group sessions were developmental, focusing on interpersonal communication skills. Both the content and the process of the group sessions stressed the conditions for building relationships and effective communication. This was

accomplished with the use of specific exercises in interpersonal communication and subsequent discussion about the exercises. The students were able to observe their own behavior by means of video feedback as well as receiving feedback from other group members. The learning from the exercises was incorporated into the on-going group process. The groups dealt with various issues of interpersonal communication including attentive listening, co-operation, sharing, feedback and openness. The groups utilized various means to enhance the learning process. They took part in role playing, audio-visual feedback, discussion, films, art, simulation exercises and games.

The next sections relate the group experience from the initial contact to the termination of the groups, providing description and comment.

#### Initiating Contact and Contracting

The initial contact with the school division was made by the author with the Co-ordinator of Student Services. The Co-ordinator was agreeable to the author's proposal and a subsequent meeting was arranged between the author, the Co-ordinator and the principal practicum advisor. At this meeting the author's proposal was further clarified.

The Co-ordinator was then able to identify the particular school in the division which would be the most appropriate. He assumed the responsibility for obtaining permission from the school Superintendent. The Co-ordinator also approached the school to determine if they were receptive.

Both the school division and the school responded positively. The author attended a meeting at the school with the Vice-principal. The Co-ordinator was unable to attend. At this meeting the author was given

a list of potential guidance classes which could be used. It was agreed that the author would run two groups in the school starting in January and running for eight to ten sessions. Memberships in the groups was voluntary.

By enlisting the support of the Co-ordinator the author's entry into the school system was facilitated. The Co-ordinator was able to act as an intermediary in dealing with components of the school system. To a certain extent the Co-ordinator's involvement also served to lend greater legitimacy to the practicum proposal in the eyes of the school.

The Literature Review indicates that social services in the school are underutilized because they often tend to be stigmatizing. The author sought to reduce the possible stigma by drawing students from the regularly scheduled school group guidance classes. As a result the participants were less likely to be thought of as "problems students" (both by the school and other students) since all students were required to take guidance.

Membership in the groups was voluntary in an effort to stress the developmental focus of the groups as opposed to a treatment group. The mutually agreed decision to select group members from the group guidance classes meant that the groups would not be completely voluntary because whether the students were part of the author's groups or not they still had to take guidance. It was anticipated that some students might volunteer for the group to get out of their regular class. However, this was not thought to be a significant problem since individuals do join groups for a variety of reasons separate from the group's stated purpose. This issue could also be dealt with in the group if the need arose.

The author did have a contract between the author's committee, the co-ordinator of special services and the author. All of the individuals agreed that the practicum was a worthwhile endeavour. However, there was no formal contract between the author and the school. While this enables greater flexibility, it also encourages ambiguity and an absence of precise responsibilities and expectations. It appeared that the author's proposal was not a priority project for the school. The author was only connected with the Vice-principal in the school. The other teachers were, for the most part, unaware of the practicum. In addition the Vice-principal did not seem to be particularly concerned about what would happen in the groups. This allowed the author a wide range of topics, but also no guidelines in terms of what was or wasn't acceptable.

#### Prepartory Stage

The author decided to approach two potential groups - a grade seven special education class and a regular grade nine class. These classes were selected because each class had a free period after the guidance class. This would allow double the normal group time without infringing upon the regular studies. Secondly, both classes met during the last periods of the day which allowed for the possibility of running overtime.

"Group Guidance" refers to an allotted unit of time in the school cycle during which the males from one or two classrooms would meet for a class in guidance while the female students took physical education. When the female students had guidance the males had physical education. It is a required credit in the school.

Particular importance was placed on the method of recruiting group members. This was done in three stages. The author first met with each

of the two classes during their normal guidance class. As a result of these meetings thirteen students from the grade nine class and all six students of the grade seven class expressed an interest in participating in the groups. The second phase consisted of meeting individually with the potential group members. The author furnished the students with complete information on the nature, goals and expectations of the group. Following all of the individual interviews all of the students decided to join the groups. The grade seven special education group were thirteen to fourteen years of age. In the grade nine class all of the students were fourteen except for one who was fifteen. The final phase was a short meeting with both groups. This was primarily to inform them of when and where the groups would meet.

The author also continued to meet formally and informally with the Vice-principal. This provided an opportunity to discuss the guidance program and share ideas. The author met the grade seven teacher and was able to learn more about the students. The author also met with the part-time psychologist at school. The purpose of this meeting was to gain a sense of how the psychologist viewed the school and students.

At the same time the author continued to familiarize himself with the school, obtain an appropriate room for the group meetings, arranged for the use of audio-visual equipment and other supplies.

The purpose of the first meeting with the classes was multifold:

- to explain the reasons for establishing the groups;
- to answer student questions;
- to make initial contact with the students; and,
- to enlist potential group members.

Similarly, the individual meetings with the students had certain specific aims:

- to further clarify group member expectations;
- to discuss the individual's reasons for wanting to join the group;
- to allow the author and students to get to know each other; and,
- to obtain a commitment from the students about participating.

The importance of allowing both the school and the students get familiar with the author and his expectations is outlined by Northern (1970):

Other people, such as children and adults from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds, tend to respond initially in terms of the worker's personal qualities. Such persons need to feel that they know and like the worker as a person as a basis for using him for help with their problems (p. 123).

In this regard, the author had some concern that the students might still see him in his previous role in the community as a Children's Aid Society (C.A.S.) worker. As a C.A.S. social worker, the author was often involved in the apprehension of children. It was thought by the author that if the students were aware of his previous employment with C.A.S. they might be less open with the author, for fear of bringing to light problems in their lives. They might have thought the author would report these to C.A.S.

The initial approach used placed the author in a highly structured leadership role. It was reasoned that the benefits in terms of clear expectations and role responsibilities would assist the group process by avoiding initial confusion. The option was left open for the author to take a less visible leadership role if the group was able to function more independently and with less specific direction. The two group meetings and the individual meetings placed the choice and responsibility with the students to decide if the group was right for them individually. It was thought that the freedom to join or withdraw would make the



resulting group experience a shared responsibility between the students and the author. The author attempted to determine the needs, interests and abilities of the students in order to focus the group sessions to their concerns.

The two classes selected were thought to provide two distinct populations which would require different materials and approaches to make the group experience beneficial. Although the two groups were close in chronological age, they were far apart in academic progress. It was questioned whether this would also be apparent in the emotional maturity. In addition, the two groups would provide a contrast in size - six versus thirteen.

A significant structural problem was encountered in attempting to locate an appropriate meeting area. Prince Charles is an open area school which does not allow for much privacy. As a result the worker chose a small conference room which was long and narrow. It was not ideal but it did allow for privacy and would not disturb other classes.

At this stage the author was able to become more involved with the school as a whole by meeting with the grade seven teacher and psychologist. The author spent time before and after the group meetings to familiarize himself with the teaching staff. The author also tried to make himself more visible to the students by being at school during lunch hours and class changes on group meeting days. It was anticipated that this would make the author seem to be more part of the school. To a certain extent this was successful, but did not generate much interest among the teaching staff. More than a lack of support, it appeared to be a lack of interest. However, as an outsider the author was not confined to the traditional teacher role.

### Formative Phase

The formative phase refers to the first meetings of the groups.

Gifford (1970):

. . .the group members test out, in the reality of their interaction with each other and with the social worker, whether the group can potentially be viable for them (p. 3).

The first meeting for both groups were held in the first week of January. All members of the grade nine group were present, but one member from the grade seven group was absent. It was learned that he was not at school that day. All of the group members arrived on time and appeared eager.

The purpose of the first session was shared with the group members. There were three stated purposes: 1) to become familiar with how the video equipment works, 2) to get accustomed to being on video, and 3) to get to know each other better. The means to achieve this were as follows: a demonstration of how the video equipment works, videotaping the group roleplaying and playback of the videotape; plus group evaluation of the session. The activities were kept short and contained an element of fun with minimal risk of failure. They were also designed to increase participation.

Differences between the two groups quickly emerged. David (1975) relates that often the social worker may not enter a group at its very beginning. The initial stage of group development may have been completed before the social worker arrives on the scene. This would seem to be evident, in part, in the author's groups because they were brought together as a class at the start of the school year. It appears that this aspect was more pronounced with the grade seven group since the group was formed with the entire class. With the grade nine class only certain

members of the class were part of the group. This served to alter the previous pattern of interaction, allowing a "new" group to form.

The fact that the group members were familiar with each other facilitated group growth initially. It would have reduced the stress and tension present when groups form. It was also believed that the well-planned preparatory phase increased the initial level of interaction among group members. As a result there was less need to "test out" among the group members themselves. Davis (1975) refers to this period of testing out and assessing each other as the synchronization of personalities.

The author had a vested interest in the groups and wanted them to function well. As a result the author tried to make the first group session fun and exciting. This was appropriate for a variety of reasons besides wanting the group members to enjoy themselves. The agenda allowed the group members to physically release some tension by the active nature of the role playing. It promoted the idea that this group was different from their regular school classes. It was also useful to increase the participation and energy level which is often low in newly formed groups.

The students, throughout the session, were testing the author to determine his reaction. With the grade seven group, which met first, the author was extremely conscious of not wanting to lose control. This was partially due to the author's need to make the groups "successful", for the practicum. This feeling was heightened because the sessions were being videotaped. As a result there was the tendency to rely on structure and following the agenda to maintain control. At this point the author was not very open to student ideas or modification of the session's

activities. The author still wanted the students to like him and to enjoy the group. The author tried to use persuasion to have the group accept his role as group leader. He would become frustrated when the group did not respond and would resort to an authoritarian role. The students must have been aware of this lack of consistency because the testing behavior seemed to increase as the session progressed.

The author recognized this type of behavior by means of analysis of the video and was able to modify his approach with the grade nine group. The author chose to "advertise" his feelings about his unfamiliarity in the role of group leader. By "advertising" it is meant that the author told the group that he expected them to test to determine his reactions. He said he would be trying to respond consistently, but there would probably be some inconsistency. This seemed to relax the group and the author.

When the group members did test the author was able to reflect this back to the group, bringing them back to the task. The author responded with more flexibility to group ideas. By giving the group members more responsibility to get the task accomplished the author was able to relinquish some control.

There were differences in the two groups communication. Initially communication within the group tends to be directed to the group leader as opposed to other group members. This was particularly evident with the grade sevens. There appeared to be no cohesion or empathy among the group members. Communication not directed to the author tended to be negative about specific group members. This seemed to be done to increase the individual's sense of importance by putting someone else down. It was obvious that two sub-groups were starting to form: the three members who ridiculed and the two members who were ridiculed. Attempts by the

author to reinforce positive behavior and to ignore negative behavior did not have any effect. Turning the problem back to the group for discussion had similarly poor results. Finally the author had to take a firm and authoratative role by clearly stating that certain behavior was not accpetable. Individuals that could not adhere would be asked to leave until they thought they could control themselves. As a result the group members did experiment with alternative means of achieving recognition. The author was disappointed in employing an authoratative role because it seemed to separate him from the group members, similar to a teacher/student relationship. This is reflected by Gifford (1970):

At the same time it must be acknowledged that some randomly selected groups and even some groups which have been formed with considerable care prove to carry within them such severe, latent or overt differences among the members as to make these untranslatable into common goals and a sufficiently satisfactory experience of mutual communication for the group to hold together to the end of the formative stage. If such difficulties are combined with the activity of a heavy-handed or passive worker, the group is unlikely to survive (p. 6).

The author had definite concerns about the viability of the group.

With the grade nine group the members were able to communicate more but instead amongst themselves. They did not direct all communication toward the author, but instead used their conversation with other group members to get their message across to the author. This could be related to the adolescent need to assert their independence while still seeking adult acceptance. In part it seemed that they were more confident in seeking support from their peers.

Although the group members related that they were not socially close outside of school, it was obvious that some loose subgroupings were beginning to form.

Unlike the grade seven group, the author was able to be less directive and controlling. The group was prepared to work on the session tasks and were eager to accomplish the tasks. They required only minimal intervention from the author when they did get off the task.

When both groups were asked to give feedback about the meeting they both related that they had enjoyed the session and were looking forward to future meetings. Interestingly, the grade seven group was more emphatic in stating their approval than the grade nine group. The grade nine group was able to be more objective and critical of the session. They were more specific in their analysis. The grade sevens tended to respond in generalities such as "it was good" or "I liked everything". All of the members indicated they would continue in the groups.

#### Intermediate Stage

The intermediate phase is characterized by a moderate level of group cohesion and the members are generally satisfied. At this stage leaders begin to emerge and subgroupings form. The norms and values of the group should become more clear. Some authors omit the intermediate stage, moving from the formative stage to the maturation stage. Whitaker and Liebman (1953) use the term "established phase". Gifford (1970) comments:

The established phase is not an ideal state but rather a state in which the group is a relatively stable system. It may become systematized in a way that is frustrating for its members, or in a way which allows only a very small part of the potential power within the group to be translated into action, or in a way that facilitates the translation of the full potentials within the group into action (p. 7).

During this stage the groups continued to meet once every six day cycle. All of the group members remained in the group and a new student was admitted to the grade nine group.

The group sessions focused on learning experiences in interpersonal communication. Key areas explored were the concept of two-way communication, attentive listening, decision making and problem solving. The groups utilized a variety of means to focus on these areas. These included role playing simulation exercises, film, debate, handouts and discussion. The groups attempted to incorporate this learning into the on-going group process.

A problem was encountered with the grade seven group due to weather conditions. Two sessions had to be cancelled as a result of snow storms. After each break it was similar to starting over again. In this sense the sevens remained virtually in the formative stages.

After a total of four meetings it became obvious that the grade sevens were not able to tolerate the parts of the sessions which focussed on discussion. They were much more action oriented. At this point the author consulted with the class's homeroom teacher. She was able to provide some insight into the group's level of functioning. The author also consulted with the vice-principal and the practicum advisor. As a result of these meetings the author changed his strategy for working with this group. The author selected activities which were highly action oriented and with minimal risk of failure. The author took a more directive stance utilizing reflection and interpretation as opposed to discussion. The sessions focused on increasing appropriate social interactions within the group. This appeared to be less frustrating for the group members and the author. Following the change the group was able to achieve a moderate level of cohesion. There was less inappropriate

interaction among the group members, but they were never able to offer much support to the other group members. The group did not reach the maturation phase of group development.

The grade nines, however, moved quickly from the formative stage to the intermediate stage. A variety of subgroupings formed although membership in these smaller groups was not constant. In a similar way various group members were able to fulfill leadership roles at both the task level and the maintenance level. The group was developing a level of intimacy which allowed them to see themselves as a group. They were able to verbalize their feelings about the group sessions and also to make changes in their own and the group's functioning.

There appeared to be a paradox with the grade seven group. The members were satisfied with the sessions, but there was little group cohesion. There was no sense of commitment to each other, but the members seemed to be having their individual needs met. The group members were receiving positive reinforcement as individuals from the author. This type of individual recognition appeared to be an important factor in their commitment to coming to the group sessions. The author related to the members in a non judgemental manner which allowed them the freedom to be more open about themselves.

A number of factors could have influenced the grade seven's failure to progress. Past experience could have played a part. These students were seen as "special" by the school. There is a definite stigma attached to this designation. The students have experienced little success within the school environment. To a certain extent they are already disenchanted with school. This was particularly evident with three of the group members. Within the school it is expected that this group of students will exhibit negative behavior. As a result it is also



seen as acceptable, becoming a self-fulfilling and self-perpetuating prophecy. This could have carried over to the group sessions. At the same time the students have a fear of failure. The disruptive behavior eliminated the possibility of failure because tasks were not completed.

In attempting to deal with this the author took a directive approach, clearly outlining expectations for behavior and consequences for inappropriate behavior. The most effective consequence was having the group member leave the room until he himself felt capable of returning to the group. There were many instances of testing initially, but it decreased as the meetings progressed.

Although both groups were at approximately the same chronological age it was evident that there was a significant difference in their emotional levels. The nines were more self-confident and sure of themselves. They were able to get support and reinforcement from other group members. The sevens lacked confidence and could not be supportive of each other. It seemed that much of the grade sevens' disruptive behavior was attention seeking. This was evident in the two group members who were more quiet. Communication was directed entirely to the author and not to the group.

The initial sessions were designed for the sevens' chronological age. It became necessary to utilize exercises for a lower maturity level. The sessions proved most successful in the latter meetings when the tasks involved activity and little discussion. The author used interpretation and reflection during the actual exercise. As the level of activity increased the degree of disruptive behavior decreased (and vice-versa).

The author selected tasks which afforded a high chance of success with minimal risk of failure. The author also choose tasks which were short and fun. It appears that the author made an error in judgement

during the early meetings by assuming that the sevens were capable of performing the given tasks. This created confusion and frustration; perhaps more so for the author than the students. With the switch in focus the group developed a more relaxed atmosphere.

In addition to the previously stated concerns, a central problem in the group development was the cancellation of group meetings. Given the structure of the groups this was unavoidable. After each cancellation it was as if the grade sevens lost any cohesiveness. The norms within the group had to be redefined after each break.

Despite the difficulties encountered with the sevens, the morale within the group was generally high. The group members all arrived on time and there was always an eagerness about the group sessions. There was a definite acceptance and liking for the author evidenced by both their comments and actions. However, the members had some difficulty in deciding whether to relate to the author at a teacher/student or a friend/friend level. This issues was not resolved in the group as testing on both extremes occurred. As the sessions progressed the students were more able to view the author as a social worker; different from teacher or friend.

In contrast to the grade seven group, the grade nines developed in a different manner. Even from the first session there was more cohesiveness. Norms and expectations appeared to develop quickly and were acceptable to all group members. In this group, peer pressure was the most significant aspect in accomplishing the tasks. The author usually had little need to take a controlling, authoratative attitude as the group members themselves filled this gate-keeping position. Interestingly, a variety of group members were able to assume responsibility for keeping the group on task.

Certain issues arose as a result of the size of the two groups - six in one and thirteen in the other. A number of the planned group activities required six or more members. This posed a particular problem when some members from the smaller, grade seven group were absent. As a result the author had to prepare two different sets of activities or try to modify the planned activity if there were absent members. With the grade nine group there was always sufficient members to proceed with the session as planned. It also afforded the opportunity to break up into smaller groups. During discussions following the activity it was possible to compare feedback from the subgroups. The larger group enabled the author to select activities from a wider variety. A key factor in the success of the subgroups was the grade nines ability to work independently. This seemed to relate to their commitment to the task and the group. A definite advantage of the smaller, grade seven group was that it allowed more direct communication because there were fewer individuals to deal with. It allowed the author to become more personally involved with the students. With the larger grade nine group there was less time for each member to be heard except when broken into smaller groups.

The grade nine group was highly task oriented. They placed importance on accomplishing the task as opposed to the means to achieve the task. This seemed to partially stem from a competitive attitude among the group members. It was evident both on an individual basis and in the smaller subgroups. The desire to finish "first" was strong. However, this was not seen as a barrier, and was sometimes used by the author as a positive. Initially the author utilized their competitive natures to increase group participation in the exercises. When the group members

thought they were competing against each other they took a more active role in the group sessions. In the sessions the group members were still able to be supportive of each other. In later sessions the author utilized exercises which focused on co-operation as opposed to competition.

The grade sevens were less interested in task completion. Instead the actual "doing" was far more interesting for them. For this reason the author chose to facilitate introspection and provide feedback during the task rather than after the task. It appeared that the learning was internalized more when this strategy was used.

The level of participation in both groups was high, but with the grade sevens the author had to individually solicit feedback to ensure everyone who wanted to contribute had the opportunity. However, the students were not under duress to speak, but the author would reflect on their silence. This seemed to be important to the group when they realized they had the choice and that there were no negative consequences for not talking.

Feedback from the grade nines was on a more spontaneous level both during and after the activity. It was only on rare instances that the author had to intervene. They were able to quickly grasp the concepts highlighted in the exercises. They still had difficulty, at this stage, expressing on a feeling level how the concepts related to their own lives.

No real leadership roles developed within the grade seven group. This could be accounted for by the fact that the author took a highly visible role. He was seen as the group leader and the students as group members. In addition it did not seem that individual group members were able to gain support from other group members. This resulted in a member

who wanted to be a leader within the group having no followers. A possible exception to this was one group member who was, at times, able to lead others in disrupting group sessions. Attempts to use his leadership for positive ends met with resistance from the student. It appeared that his goal was not leadership in itself, but to keep the group in disequilibrium.

Leadership roles within the grade nine group were still unclear and shifting at this stage, both in task and maintenance roles. It seemed that a variety of individuals were interchangeable in these roles.

Outside of the group sessions the author had difficulty in preceiving his role within the school. It was quite probable that there was no role for the author outside of the groups. The author continued to meet on an informal basis with the vice-principal. Generally this was on a superficial basis, but on other times the author and vice-principal were able to compare different approaches. The author did meet with the grade sevens' homeroom teacher twice. It provided a different perspective and insight which was beneficial in working with the group. The relationship with the homeroom teacher provided an "in" with the other teachers in terms of their knowledge of who the author was. It seemed to make the author more credible. However, the overriding impression was that the teachers were occupied with their own teaching roles. The author's work did not provide them with any obvious benefits and they weren't interested as a result. A potential ally within the school would have been the school psychologist. She had previously indicated an interest in becoming involved with the groups in some way. Unfortunately she left the school soon after the groups started.

The author foresaw little opportunity of making an impact on the school and decided to limit his intervention to the groups.

### Maturation Stage

The mature phase of group development is characterized by greater attention to the process level as opposed to the content level. It is evidenced by a sense of intimacy and trust which allows members to communicate at a feeling level.

At the same time norms and goals are accepted and adhered to by the group members. This does not infer a static environment because group goals can be redefined or changed as needed. Development may still be uneven, moving forward and backward. There is a state of "dynamic equilibrium".

Some groups do not reach the mature stage of group development as in the case of the grade seven group which was viewed as remaining at the integration stage. However, the author is inclined to see the grade nines as reaching the mature phase.

Movement into the mature stage can occur slowly over time or it can be seen as a dramatic event which separates the two stages. It seems that with the grade nine group the change to the maturation phase became evident during one particular group meeting.

The fourth meeting of the grade nine group was scheduled to be a formal debate organized by the students on their own time. The group members came to the session unprepared for the debate having not followed through with their commitment. As a result the debate was rescheduled for the following session. The author took responsibility for the fourth meeting with a series of exercises he had prepared for the next session.

At the next meeting the group was again unprepared. In addition

members came late, were disruptive and apparently unprepared to work. The worker had anticipated this and chose not to provide an alternative for the session. He opted out of the role as group leader, sharing his feelings of frustration and that he was not prepared to provide exercises for this session. Initially the group thought this would be great because it would be "free time". However, they soon became bored and restless. Gradually the group became quiet and unsure. From this they become angry and blaming about how they were wasting their time. Following this some of the group members began to voice their feelings about the group and what it meant to them. Other members were able to join in resulting in a sharing among the group. Unfortunately the time was up, but the group decided to continue the discussion at the next session.

During the next session all of the group members were present and on time. The author waited for the group to initiate the discussion, but then took a participatory role in the discussion. The group members were able to share their feelings about the group and also to provide feedback to the author about how they saw him. As a result the group reached a new level of functioning.

The following four sessions never reached the same level of intimacy, but there was the shared feeling of being a group. The final session served as an evaluation of the group and the other three sessions included a discussion on marijuana, co-operation and competition, and trust.

It appears that the fifth and sixth sessions were a turning point in the group's development. This was precipitated by a "crisis" situation (one of the students being expelled from school) which brought the

group members closer together. It would have been just as possible for the group to dissolve at this time. However, a number of factors were operative to negate this happening.

The previous sessions had been a positive experience for the group members. The group was different than their normal school classes. It provided them with new types of learning experiences. In addition they liked the author and were able to related well to him. On an individual level they did not want the group to end and were prepared to problem solve.

The group had developed some cohesiveness and trust. This allowed some of the group members to initially share their feelings without fear of rejection. This leadership at a maintenance level by three or four group members influenced other members to communicate more openly. The more that this happened, the more the members began to view themselves as a group. Peer pressure was instrumental in the adherence to the group norms and values.

Although the group appeared to be important to the members, it was also a "low risk" situation. By that it is meant that the individuals knew they would survive if the group failed. As a result they could be more open and critical in their feedback. The group members were confident in their own abilities and they felt capable of resolving the situation.

The author's strategy affected the resulting group process. He was able to share his own feelings about the group without blaming or projecting. At the same time he was able to "own" his own feelings and accepted responsibility as a member of the group. This seemed to reduce the original defensiveness among the group members. It became



evident to them that they each had their own responsibility to make the group work. This allowed them to see themselves as equal participants in the learning experience.

When giving feedback to the author they were secure that there would not be a negative consequence if the feedback was not favorable. The author was able to accept some criticism and to change. This made it easier for the group members to do the same.

When the group members made some valid criticisms the author was able to acknowledge these and ask the group for suggestions on how to change. In future sessions the author would modify his behavior demonstrating to the group that feedback was useful.

A later incident also served to bring the group closer together. One of the group members was expelled from school for smoking marijuana on school property. This resulted in an intense discussion about the incident specifically and the use of marijuana. It was evident that there were two distinct groups - one which supported the use of marijuana and one that did not. Although they did not agree with each other they were able to listen to what the other group was saying. They were also able to see the issue from the school's stance, but still supported the student who had been expelled.

During the final evaluation session the group members were able to provide insightful and constructive feedback about the group experience, the author and themselves. A significant change from earlier sessions was their ability to identify positive as well as negative components.

An aspect of the mature phase is that the leader tends to move from an active to a passive role allowing the group members to assume more leadership responsibilities. At the maintenance level this happened, but the author continued in a leadership role at the task level. To

elaborate, the author retained responsibility for providing the tasks for the group sessions. However, this was at the request of the group. The author was flexible in changing the agenda if the group had an activity, such as the marijuana discussion. In some respects control became a shared responsibility. There were still times when the author thought it was necessary to intervene to restore order when the group was not able to perform this function itself.

#### Termination Stage

Termination can occur after any stage of group development. With the grade sevens it happened after the integration stage and with the grade nines after the maturation stage.

Groups can terminate for a variety of reasons including achievement of group goals, lack of integration, departure of worker or significant members, a temporary break or maladaptation. If the goals have been accomplished the worker's role is twofold: 1) to review achievements and 2) to positively reinforce future group experiences. This quite often entails a review or evaluation of the group experience. If the goals have not been attained the worker needs to respond more on an individual level to ensure that feelings are dealt with and resolved. It is also possible for the group to end for a combination of the above reasons. Shulman (1979) summarizes:

. . .in addition to terminating the intimacy established with the worker, the members must also deal with their feelings about separating from each other. Guilt over the way in which the group functioned is common. The desire to have functioned more effectively also emerges in requests for continuation of the sessions. There is often unfinished business related to both the authority and the intimacy themes. Members need to share with each other not only

the angry feelings generated by their work together but also the feeling of loss they experience as the mutual aid system is dismantled (p. 278).

There is often denial followed by anger and apathy. Shulman refers to the "farewell-party" syndrome. It is characterized by the avoidance to negative issues where group members attempt to protect the group.

The central reason for the termination of the author's group was the time limited nature of the groups. The author had contracted to meet with the group for a specific period of time - until the end of April. The groups were aware of this limitation from the beginning and were reminded in the sessions as the final meeting approached.

The grade nine group met for ten sessions and the grade sevens met for seven sessions. The discrepancy in the sessions between the two groups resulted from cancelations and holidays. The groups returned to their regular guidance classes. The final session was devoted to an evaluation, both written and verbal.

Although both groups were aware of the finality of the groups there was reluctance to accept the inevitability of termination. The groups wanted to continue to meet longer and when the author said this was not possible they asked the author to come back to visit. This appears to be similar to Shulman's experiences with termination. There was a real sense of loss for the author and the group members.

The grade nine group was able to reflect back on previous sessions and to remember the positives. They were also able to laugh about some of the negative experiences. However, as the session drew to a close there was a marked decrease in the level of verbal activity. It seemed that each members was taking some time to himself.

The grade seven group maintained its high level of activity throughout

the session. Their focus was less on the termination of the group as opposed to the loss of the author. Comments were more simply stated such as "I like you" and "I'm going to miss you". This was the closest the group ever came to talking about their feelings. It was still not possible to get them to deal with negative aspects of the group experience.

The author focused on the positives and negatives of the group experience. He also commented on the positive contributions that each individual member had made to the group. The author also shared with the groups his own feelings of anxiety and loss. This appeared to make it easier for the grade nine group to share their feelings. In a similar way the author attempted to identify the feelings in the grade seven group and how these were not unusual.

Following the termination of the two groups the author met with the vice-principal to tie together any loose ends and to thank him for his co-operation throughout the five month period. This concluded the practicum experience for the author.

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## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

The author maintained two central objectives for the practicum:

1) to enhance the author's skills with adolescent groups and 2) to increase the author's knowledge in the areas of adolescent development, social work with groups, the role of social work in the schools, and interpersonal communication skills.

The practicum experience ran from November 1978 to May 1979 at Prince Charles School in Portage La Prairie. The author led two groups: a grade seven special education class and a regular grade nine class. The overall goal of the groups was to assist the adolescents to gain a greater sense of personal identity by providing a social group work experience in the school. The focus was on experiencing and learning interpersonal communication skills. To summarize, the specific objectives identified in Chapter I were:

- to increase the group participants' skills in communication, through practice, in a safe environment where they could experiment with new behaviors;
- to increase the group participants' knowledge of the basis of interpersonal communication;
- to increase the group participants' understanding of their own communication;
- to increase the group participants' ability and comfort in assuming responsibility for themselves;
- to enhance the group participants' ability to express their feelings; and,

- to provide a learning experience which was fun and exciting.

The author had to adjust his approach with the grade seven group because the original exercises were beyond their level of understanding. Although they were the same chronological age as the grade nines, they did not have the same emotional and psychological maturity. As Piaget (1958) and Lewin (1962) relate this is the stage for the development of formal operational thought (hypothetical and abstract thinking). This suggests that all adolescents do not mature at the same rate making it necessary to assess abilities on the emotional level as opposed to the chronological age.

The grade seven group could, possibly by rote memory, relate the concepts they learned, but could not utilize these skills in group sessions. In this sense the author increased their knowledge, but not their skills.

The author learned that role modeling and reflection of the group's behavior had the greatest effect on changing their interpersonal communication. This was evidenced by a decrease in the hurtful comments the group members made to each other. They were able to receive positive reinforcement without having to put someone else down to feel important. There was little peer pressure to act as a negative sanction. As a result the author maintained a directive leadership role in the group.

Group sessions with the grade sevens were more successful when activities allowed for a high level of physical activity and a minimum of discussion. The V.T.R. equipment was a valuable resource with the group because they were fascinated both with the operation of the equipment and observing themselves on tape. This allowed them to view their own communication patterns and incorporate this into their own self-concept. The author learned that "quiet" activities, such as drawing,

were also effective. When group members were not in what they perceived to be a discussion exercise, they would talk more freely about themselves. They would listen to what other group members were saying. They were not under pressure to relate and therefore were able to relax and be themselves. This was an effective means of getting the group to share their feelings.

One area where the author experienced personal difficulty was being a disciplinarian to maintain control over the group. It appeared that the grade sevens were so accustomed to being told what to do by teachers that they transferred the same role to the author. At times they called the author "teacher". They were unable to control themselves; not taking the responsibility only the freedom that the group offered. Although firmness and authority are always part of the group the author felt uncomfortable in this role. Part of the uncomfortableness was a result of the author's desire for the groups to be successful. The author was afraid that if he was too controlling with the group they would not come to the sessions. However, the author persisted in attempting to provide the group with opportunities to make their own decisions. This was successful at times, but sometimes resulted in disorder. The positive effect was that the group members learned that the author would not give up on them and he would continue to be supportive. The members came to view the author as separate from their teachers.

Comments by the students throughout the life of the group indicated that they enjoyed the group. At the time of termination their feedback was on a more personal level, focusing on their feelings toward the author as well as the group (see Appendix for group written feedback). Written comments such as "I liked everything about the group", "I liked



the leader", "I hope you come back" and "make the group longer" indicated that the members enjoyed the group. All of the members stated that they would participate in a similar group again. Interestingly one of the group members related that he enjoyed the group, but did not think other people did. Two of the members were able to comment on what they didn't like about the group ("some stupid attitudes, when we were rude"). This seems to point out that they were also uncomfortable with some of the disruptive behavior.

It is unlikely that the group experience resulted in the grade sevens acquiring the skill to utilize the interpersonal communication skills they learned, but the intervention provided other positive outcomes. The author's positive regard and empathy for each group member allowed them to develop a close relationship with an adult authority figure. The non-judgemental approach and role modeling behavior provided the group with an alternative to their own interpersonal relationship patterns. The author is of the opinion that the successes they experienced served to increase their self-concept and sense of self-worth.

A significant aspect which was absent from this group experience was the members' ability to be supportive of each other. Peer acceptance which is integral to a sense of belonging and identity was not present. It is hypothesized that each of the group members was so insecure; needing to have their own needs met, that they were unable to function beyond this level of interaction. From the literature, Erikson (1968) would suggest that the students never successfully resolved the crises of previous developmental stages. Their need for attention, either positive or negative, was always present. With the grade sevens it appears that Mitchell (1975) is correct in his premise that it is better to have a negative identity than no identity at all.

The grade nine group was able to grasp the concepts presented in the sessions (ie., trust, decision making, co-operation, attentive listening). This was obvious because they were not only able to feed back the essential ideas, but were able to integrate the ideas in later group sessions. The group members became able to utilize the skills they were learning in the group. As this happened they assumed more responsibility for the group functioning because they came to view the group as their own. Attendance and participation was high.

Even when some of the exercises did not turn out as intended the effort was not wasted because the experiential nature of the group allowed the individuals to examine why the exercises did not work. As the literature indicates the experiential model necessitates that the individuals have a personal involvement in exploring their own feelings. This is because the group focus was on the process as well as the content.

The grade nine group was not only eager to attend the group sessions, but were committed to making the group work. As Erikson (1968) states adolescence is a "time-out" period which allows the adolescent to experiment with new ways of behaving and relating. The group provided them with this opportunity.

The group itself was able to control its members to get the tasks accomplished. They responded well to the opportunities to make decisions for themselves. Sometimes the decisions the group made did not work out as they planned, but they were able to deal with the issues and grow from it. This is not unusual with any group, but as Lewin (1962) relates adolescence is a period of vacillation - from mature to childish. There is the need to experiment in adolescence and the group members were given that opportunity.

Although the grade nine group required a certain level of physical activity, they were able to discuss and analyze situations. Importantly, the group members could do this with each other, not having to rely on the author for approval. This was important because as Lidz (1968) relates the individual needs to be recognized as an individual by others to gain a sense of identity. The grade nines were more tolerant than the grade sevens of individual differences. It led to a sense of belonging because they were accepted by their peers.

The grade nine group enjoyed the group experience. They all stated that they enjoyed the group and would participate in similar groups in the future. The majority of the members related that they increased their understanding of communication skills and their understanding of themselves (see Appendix). Comments included "I learned other people's reactions to things", "I understand different people take different things differently", "I used to have problems talking to people" and "I can understand what others think about themselves and me". They found satisfaction not only with the group leader, but with what they had learned.

It was very important to the adolescents that they had a voice in what they were learning. They saw the group as their own. It seems that the skills they learned and used in the group carried over into other aspects of their lives. Feedback from the group members indicated that they had attempted to utilize their learning outside of the group and had met with some positive responses. They stated that they enjoyed the interactions which happened in the group and wanted similar relationships outside of the group.

The literature indicates that previous learning plays an important part in adolescent identity. It could be hypothesized that because the

grade nine group had a more enriched childhood environment they were more able to utilize the learning in the group than the grade sevens. It may also be that the grade nines experienced more successes and fewer failures in the school system. The grade nines felt that they were making a worthwhile contribution to the group which served to increase their sense of identity.

As both Davies (1975) and Shulman (1979) state each member gets different needs met from the group experience, but the normality of group experience is universal. Written comments from the group about what they liked about the group included: "I like to be able to talk and people listen", "being able to express ideas and thoughts", "to expect different things from different people", "communication", "video-taping" and "the leader because he was young and understood the kids in the group". In addition seven members responded that they liked the group because they got out of guidance class.

Overall, the grade nines were able to gain a better sense of their own identity while the grade sevens were able to receive some individual positive reinforcement.

The role of the social workers in the school system is not clearly defined. Wadsworth (1970) thinks that teachers are skeptical of school social workers because they do not see any concrete results. He also states that because of professional boundaries teachers tend to resent social workers in "their system". The social worker must first overcome the school's resistance.

The rural areas in Manitoba are different in their preception of social workers than in the larger urban center of Winnipeg. The schools tend to be more conservative and cautious. The rural areas do not have

a separate agency of school social workers as Winnipeg does. As a result they are less familiar with the services a social worker can provide for the school. In Portage La Prairie there was only one social worker in the schools. It was a half position combining school social worker and attendance officer for a population of 4000 children. Social workers in Portage and other rural areas tend to be equated with the child welfare agencies. The author's entry into the school system was facilitated by the good working relationship which had developed over a number of years between the school system and the child welfare agency in Portage. Prior to the author's intervention negotiations were taking place to have child welfare social workers assigned to the schools. As a result the author's acceptance by the school was aided by his previous employment with the child welfare agency.

Shulman (1979) recognizes the great importance of contracting not only with the group members, but also with the school:

The important point is that both the school staff and the group members understand that the group is formed to help them use school more effectively and to make learning more fun (p. 163).

If there was an honest understanding of the group purpose and if the staff can view the group as part of their educational roles, Shulman thinks the staff will accept the validity of the groups. The author did not contract with the teachers. The problem which became evident at the termination of the practicum was that there was no on-going program when the author left.

The literature suggests that there is a debate as to whether the social worker should be viewed as part of the school system or outside of the school system. Whereas Moynihan (1978) sees the social worker in a "guest" position, earning credibility with the school system, Costin

(1975) views social work intervention as requiring an understanding of the needs of the students in terms of their developmental stages and the resulting stresses which occur. This must be integrated with the purposes of the school system. Costin's approach allows for the social worker to firstly concentrate on services needed to the students and secondly to fit these needs within the parameters of the school.

The author's approach was to place importance on the students' needs. With both groups the author attempted to respond to where the students were at as opposed to what the school thought the students needed. However, there were no apparent differences between the school's view and the students' view. The school, mainly the vice-principal, was extremely supportive of the author's focus.

It is important that the social worker, as part of his assessment, take into account the school's perspective. If the school is not in agreement they will not support the program. This indicates the need for contracting with the school prior to starting a program in the school. At that time it should be clarified as to what role the school staff will play since the groups are a part of the school system. The school's acceptance of the author's involvement allowed the author to develop his own program. However, the acceptance could also be seen as the school not supporting the author. Permitting the author free rein allowed the school to disassociate itself from the groups.

One of the aspects that the author would change would be to have the group sessions on a specific day of the week instead of following the six day school cycle. By following the six day school cycle it meant that on some weeks the groups would not meet at all because that particular day on the cycle did not fall in the week. As a result there was a loss of continuity and cohesion at the next group session. The

author would also not run the groups during the regular school hours, opting for lunch hour or after school. This would be beneficial for a number of reasons. It would allow the participation to be more voluntary because the students would have to actively chose to attend. Even though the group members volunteerd to be a part of the group their only other option was the regular guidance class. The author is suggesting that if the students attended on their own time there would likely be a greater commitment to working in the group. A program operating outside the school hours would allow for a wider range of potential group members - not just from the same class or even the same grade. It would be a "new group", not one which had preconceived interaction patterns from the time spent together in their regular class.

On a potential level it would allow a greater choice in terms of the physical areas available to meet. Although the room which was used was adequate there were times when its size hampered some of the sessions. This was especially evident when the activities were more active or when the group was broken-up into sub-groups. Running the groups outside of school hours would also avoid clashes with special activities run by the school during the day.

In future groups the author would not proceed with preconceived ideas of what the students want to know, but would allow more flexibility for student input. Since the nature of the groups - especially the decision making - is so different from other parts of the school system, the author would still have to maintain a highly directive leadership role initially. Ideally, as the group became more responsible for itself, the author would act more as a facilitator than as the leader. Based on the interests of the group members the author could provide the necessary experiential activities to highlight these areas.

When the author left the school system there was no one else to continue the group program. A major change in the practicum strategy would be to enlist greater support from the school system. Initially it would be important to meet with the teachers to explain the purposes and goals of the groups and to solicit their ideas. If possible it would be beneficial to attend the staff meetings to allow the teachers to see the author as part of the school system. The rural schools have less exposure to school social workers and tend to have preconceived ideas of social work roles, usually related to child welfare agencies. The author would initiate more one to one contact with the teachers in terms of a mutual sharing of information about changes they observe in the individual group members' behavior in their classes. If the teachers were kept informed and were able to see some positive results they might be motivated to have the groups continue after the author terminated his involvement.

Although the vice-principal was designated as the primary contact, the author could have made the principal a more integral part of the practicum. The principal's support, as the head of the school, may have placed pressure on the school division to continue the groups. This would have been facilitated if the principal received positive recognition for initiating a unique program in his school.

A similar approach could have been utilized with the co-ordinator of student services since it is his role to address students' special needs. If the education system were to assume a more active role in the children's emotional development, a change in the school's perception of school social worker's roles would have to take place. It would have to be recognized as a necessary part of the school system rather than as an extra.



In an era of budgetary restraints, cutbacks and declining enrollments it appears unlikely that social work in the schools would be a priority. Given the good relationship which existed between the schools and the local child welfare agency they might have been approached to continue in the schools. To a certain extent the child welfare agency would need to shift from its traditionally mandated role towards a more preventative role. The Children's Aid Society of Eastern Manitoba has attempted to do this through the establishment of their resource centers. The inclusion of the child welfare agency could serve to expand the school's role as a community resource.

Based upon the students' feedback (see Appendix) the author would make some further changes. A number of individuals commented that the sessions were not long enough and the groups should have run for the entire school year. The author would make greater usage of the video equipment as a teaching tool. The grade nines suggested making the group smaller as they thought thirteen was too large a number for everyone to participate. The students request to make the individual sessions longer might not be accepted by the school if the groups conflicted with academic courses. There would also be problems with having group sessions after school as a number of the students are bussed in and have to leave when school is dismissed.

Although Portage La Prairie is relatively close to Winnipeg there are some significant differences between the two in terms of rural vs urban. The aspect that stood out most clearly was the lack of support programs available to the schools in comparison to Winnipeg. In addition they did not offer as many alternative programs within the school system. The school had to contend with the problems of serving students from outside

the city limits. At the same time the "global village" aspect increased the students expectations, causing some disappointment because Portage could not offer the same lifestyle available in larger urban centres.

In terms of the overall practicum objectives - to enhance the author's social work skills with adolescent groups and to increase the author's knowledge in the areas of adolescent development, social work with groups, the role of social work in the schools, and interpersonal communication skills - the practicum was highly successful. It provided the author with a unique learning experience. Unfortunately, the M.S.W. program did not provide many courses in the clinical stream which were helpful to the practicum experience. The majority of the learning and knowledge gained by the author occurred separate from the M.S.W. program. It was obvious that the program did not provide for specialization in the area the author selected. The practicum enabled the author to learn from the literature the areas which were important to him. At the same time the experiences of the practicum allowed the author to grow as a professional, increasing his skills.

In conclusion the practicum reconfirmed the author's belief in the value and need for social services in the school system. It also served to confirm the author's view that adolescence is a difficult stage of development with a need for a preventive approach to the crises of adolescence. The experiential approach was beneficial to the adolescents in allowing them to test new types of behavior without the fear of failure. The receptive nature of the school was encouraging to develop future programs within the school system. The author found the practicum to be a genuine personal and professional enhancing endeavour.

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## APPENDIX

### Grade 7 Group Evaluation - Total Response

#### I. Expectations and Objectives

1. Did the group sessions meet your expectations?  
Surpassed 0 Met 1 Partially 4 No 0
2. To what degree did the group contribute to your learning about communication? Greatly 3 Some 2 Small 0 Not At All 0
3. Did the group help you to understand yourself and others better?  
Yes 4 No 1 Explain: No Comments
4. Do you know more about communication now? Yes 5 No 0
5. Was the learning useful to you? Yes 4 No 0 (inbetween 1)
6. Did you enjoy being in the group? Yes 5 No 0
7. Would you participate in a similar group? Yes 5 No 0
8. Were the exercises useful to your learning? Yes 4 No 0  
(inbetween 1)

#### II. Leader

1. Was I organized and prepared? Always 2 Usually 0 Sometimes 2  
Never 1
2. Did I help the students get involved and participate?  
Very well 4 Well 1 Some 0 Poor 0
3. Did I use good communication skills?  
Very well 2 Well 2 Some 0 Never 1
4. Did I stimulate you to learn?  
Often 2 Sometimes 2 Rarely 1 Never 0
5. Did I provide feedback about the group?  
Often 2 Sometimes 3 Rarely 0 Not at all 0

### III. Group

1. To what degree did you learn from others in the group?  
Greatly 0 Some 4 Small Degree 1 Not at all 0
2. To what degree die you participate in the group?  
Greatly 0 Some 4 A little 1
3. Do you think other members enjoyed the group? Yes 4 No 1

### IV. Conclusion

1. What did you like about being in the group?
  - Everything (3)
  - It was very nice
  - The games
  - The leader
2. What did you dislike about being in the group?
  - Nothing (3)
  - some stupid attitudes
  - When we were rude
3. What changes would you have made in the group?
  - None (3)
  - Make it longer
  - I don't know
4. Other comments:
  - I hope you come back.

## Grade 9 Group Evaluation - Total Response

I. Expectations and Objectives

1. Did the group sessions meet your expectations?

Surpassed 5 Met them 4 Partially 2 No 0

2. To what degree did the group contribute to your learning about communication?

Greatly 2 Some 8 Small 1 Not at all 0

3. Did the group help you to understand yourself and others better?

Yes 10 No 1 Explain:

- Now I know if I bug somebody
- I learned other people's reactions to things
- I understand different people take different things differently
- I used to have problems talking to people
- I can understand what others think about themselves and me
- The way you ran the group
- I don't care how others feel about me

4. Do you know more about communication now?

Yes 10 No 0 (yes and no 1 )

5. Was the learning useful to you?

Yes 11 No 0

6. Did you enjoy being in the group?

Yes 11 No 0

7. Would you participate in a similar group?

Yes 11 No 0

8. Were the exercises useful to your learning?

Yes 10 No 0 (Some 1 )

## II. Leader

1. Was I organized and prepared?

Always 2 Usually 8 Sometimes 1 Never 0

2. Did I help the students get involved and participate?

Very well 3 Well 7 Some 1 Poor 0

3. Did I use good communication skills?

Very well 2 Well 9 Some 0 Never 0

4. Did I stimulate you to learn?

Often 4 Sometimes 7 Rarely 0 Never 0

5. Did I provide feedback about the group?

Often 6 Sometimes 5 Rarely 0 Never 0

## III. Group

1. To what degree did you learn from others in the group?

Greatly 1 Some 10 Small degree 0 Not at all 0

2. To what degree did you participate in the group?

Greatly 2 Some 8 A little 1 Not at all 0

3. Do you think other group members enjoyed the group?

Yes 11 No 0

## IV. Conclusion

1. What did you like about the group?

- Missing guidance (7)
- Video taping (3)
- Communcation (3)
- I like to be able to talk and people listen
- The games were fun
- Fun

- Informal
  - I liked the leader because he was young and understood the kids in the group
  - Being able to express ideas and thoughts
  - To expect different things from different people.
2. What did you dislike about being in the group?
- Not long enough (3)
  - Too many people (2)
  - Noise (2)
  - Nothing to do twice
  - Boring
  - Space was too small
  - Our fighting.
3. What changes would you have made in the group?
- Smaller (2)
  - Longer (4)
  - All year long
  - Have it after school
  - More communication between people
  - Meaner leader
  - More exercises.
4. Other comments:
- Fun
  - Alright
  - Sometimes boring
  - I felt you handled yourself well and kept your cool when people were not co-operating.



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