

VALIDATION BY MEANS OF THE SOCIOGRAM OF A TECHNIQUE FOR PROMOTING SOCIAL ACCEPTABILITY AMONG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

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There is a growing emphasis both in educational literature and in practice upon social adeptness as a primary objective of education. Pressey and Robinson express this point of view in *Psychology and the New Education* when they say that "the guidance of social development along healthy and desirable lines might well be considered the first concern of modern education and the almost complete neglect of this problem the outstanding weakness of the traditional school."

All development is, of course, continuous, and social development is no exception to the rule. Yet the study of the child has clearly shown that certain developmental tasks belong specifically to certain age ranges. In fact, without the successful completion of these various developmental tasks sequentially, whether they are physical, emotional, or intellectual, the child is tremendously handicapped in the process of growing into a balanced adult.

One of these developmental tasks that ideally is spread over the period of time from the entrance to school at the age of six till adolescence is the emancipation of the child from the circle of the family and his entrance into his peer group. In this new world to which the child goes it becomes increasingly important to him to find a place for himself where he belongs. In fact, it is a corrolary

of the social adeptness objective of elementary education that the child can develop social adeptness only in a group where he is an accepted and contributing member. For the psychologist believes that the psychological environment of the child—the reaction to him of individuals and groups with whom he is in contact—is of infinitely more importance as a factor in his development than the physical environment in which he lives.

Grouping has generally been a tool that the elementary school of our age uses to promote its intellectual purposes and to aid in reaching such goals. But whether or not grouping is a tool for the school to use in achieving its social goals and especially whether *the type of group* is a major factor in the degree of success the individual achieves as he strives to attain status are problems not yet thoroughly investigated.

It is the hypothesis of this study that through considerable use of small informal flexible groups the child who is a fringer or an isolate can most easily be helped to gain in social acceptability and, as he does this, it is believed that he will be a better achiever intellectually.

This study makes no pretense at being a controlled educational experiment. It is rather a problem in teacher education in which all the teachers at a given grade level in

a small city in southern Illinois cooperate in an attempt to help children in their groups who lack social status to attain a higher degree of social acceptability.

It is an attempt, likewise, to put in the hands of the teachers a tool by which each may discover for herself whether or not she is succeeding in helping children who have not yet attained and do not know how to attain status in their peer group. Also, we believe it will throw some light on the effect of different types of groups on growth in social acceptability.

However, since the emphasis was to be teacher education, no attempt was made to force consideration of this problem until attention turned there naturally. As it happened, for several weeks other problems occupied the focus of attention.

The background for this study is laid in the work of J. L. Moreno and dates back about fifteen years. It was in 1934 that Dr. Moreno published his epochal book, *Who Shall Survive?* In this work he developed a science of sociometry—a way of measuring interpersonal relationships in a group—and used the sociogram as a way of recording and making graphic these relationships. Since that time Helen Hall Jennings and others have used the same technique to measure social relationships within a schoolroom.

Dr. Moreno used his new discovery not only as a means of measurement but also for therapeutic purposes. In his book he described the use of it in grouping girls in cottages in the New York State Training School for Girls at Hudson, N. Y., and reported substantial reduction in number of problem cases when groups were formed on the basis of

information obtained by a sociometric test.

Fifth grade children were used in this study, since previous studies have shown that social relationships among younger children are very unstable. Reading was chosen as the special field for study because the capacity of social and emotional factors to affect a child's performance, while evident in most learning situations, is especially evident in the acquisition of reading ability. This is true at least partially because the attainment level in reading significantly affects every other type of subject matter. It is also true that society puts an especially high premium on reading skill in the child.

In the small city where this study has been carried on there are seven fifth grades with an average enrollment of thirty pupils each. All teaching, heretofore, had been conducted with an entire grade group with uniform assignments for every child.

The superintendent stated in a meeting of fifth grade teachers before the opening of school that the director of the study would be at the service of the teachers as consultant, that she would teach classes when requested to do so, and work with teachers either as individuals or groups in their attempts to meet pupil needs. Such supervision as would be given would be unofficial and would be actually educational leadership emphasizing in-service training of teachers. From the beginning, largely perhaps because of the confidence of the teachers in the superintendent and because of his evident interest in, and wholehearted backing of, the study, they accepted the offer of unofficial assistance in teaching problems with

little evidence of the resistance or even resentment with which supervision is sometimes met.

When the California Mental Maturity Test was given to all fifth grade children at the beginning of the school year, it showed a wide range of ability from school to school and within schools. Two groups had median IQ's of 110 and a range of points that exceeded 60. Four had median IQ's of 102-104 and a range of 50 points, and the seventh school had approximately the same range as the last four but a median from 13-15 points lower (89) than the four average schools.

On the basis of this wide spread of abilities the seven fifth grade teachers discussed individual differences and ways of meeting them. At this stage it was evident that most teachers were primarily absorbed with intellectual differences, but it appeared even then that at least one teacher was greatly concerned about emotional and social differences in her group.

When grouping was proposed as a way of meeting differences, it was decided to make a study of some attempts in this direction to see what light they might throw on the situation. Ability grouping and interest grouping both had advocates, but some teachers showed reluctance to shift from their old one-group procedure. It was agreed that each teacher in conference with her principal would decide which procedure to follow and report at the next meeting.

The report was as follows: Two teachers—one of a superior group and one of a near average group—decided to continue to use the grade group only, with uniform assignments for all, and attempt to provide

for individual differences with directed out-of-school reading. Two other teachers—one of an average group and the other of the low group—felt that ability grouping in reading with material selected for each level so that each group would be able to read without strain would best help children to develop in reading skill.

The remaining three, while not experienced in interest grouping, were eager to try a procedure in which small informal flexible groups would function frequently.

By this time the Progressive Achievement Tests had been given to fifth grades and the results were available for all teachers.

Teachers of ability groups had decided to use only two groups. Children with a reading grade score of 4.5 or less would be provided with material with a simple vocabulary but with a high interest level. Others would read the basal text. Teachers using the single grade group only made use of the results to guide their children in selecting books for out-of-school reading. Those using interest groups likewise had the results of the tests at hand to help in wise selection of books.

The general plan followed by the teachers using interest groups in reading was: (1) the selection of a general subject by the group in cooperation with the teacher, (2) the division of the subject into its various phases, (3) the listing of questions to which the children wished to find answers on each phase of the subject to be investigated, (4) the election of student chairmen by the group, each to lead his group in research on one phase of the subject, (5) division into groups according to interests, (6) work in groups,

each child reading at his own level to help to answer the questions that had been listed earlier, (7) occasional meetings of the entire group to discuss problems of the grade as a whole, see a movie pertaining to the general subject, or evaluate progress, and finally, (8) some kind of pooled summary of the results of the research.

As each teacher followed her own procedure there developed a growing concern for the social development of pupils. Some study of Moreno's sociogram was made and the teachers decided to try a special modification of it as a means of measuring social status.

The three questions finally selected for the sociometric test to be used were by no means the only ones that might have been used and not necessarily the best ones. It was decided to use one question of a purely social character. "If your mother told you you might invite a child from your room home with you to dinner on Friday night and then to a basketball game, whom would you ask?" First choice, second choice, and third choice were called for.

The second question was on an academic basis, but called for cooperation between two people. "If you need help in arithmetic and the teacher, being busy, tells you you may ask a child in the room to help you, whom would you ask?"—again, first choice, second choice, third choice. The third question had to do with ability to fit into a group and contribute to the cooperative thinking and effort of the group. "Whom do you like best to have working on a committee with you?" In each case, as above, the child was asked to give first choice, his second if the first were absent, and his third if

both the first and second should be absent.

There are some respects in which it may seem regrettable that the sociometric test results could not have been procured earlier in the year. However, since this study has been conceived as primarily one of teacher education, it has been a guiding principle not to use any procedures with the groups until the teachers were ready for them. Consequently school had been in session more than three months and each teacher had had in operation her chosen plan of grouping in reading for from 6 to 10 weeks before the first sociometric test was given.

The serious approach of the children themselves to the test and their whole-hearted cooperation in answering the questions was a matter of note. All seven groups had been taken into confidence as to the year's work to the extent that they knew their teachers and the director of the study were working together to try "to find out some better ways to work with boys and girls" and they referred to the sociometric test in that connection in discussing it, though they had been told that their teacher hoped that the answers would help her in trying to make them happy in their school home.

The teachers' meeting in which each teacher studied the sociograms showing interpersonal relationships in her own group was the most interesting of the year. Varying teacher attitudes were plainly evident. At least one showed a defensive attitude at first—"Some children just don't have what it takes." Another teacher noticed one girl, who showed up distinctly as a fringer, who she felt could be helped to attain status with her peers if given

a chance to help others in arithmetic. Another commented that she believed one boy would have been either an isolate or a fringer before he worked in a small group that prepared an Indian play to show the large group what they had found out about how the Indians of the Southwest lived.

Each teacher studied with interest the group of children who were lowest in social acceptability to try to decide what the cause was and what direction remedial work should take in each case. Each teacher agreed to try to find something each isolate or fringer could do well and see that he got praise for it. Each teacher also agreed to try to build up the ego of neglected children by giving each some responsibility. The question at this point was, "Would a child rise in social acceptability with his peer group as he appeared to rise in acceptability with the teacher?"

A survey of the sociograms taken showed that there was great difference in interpersonal relationships within the different groups at that time. The only sociogram showing a group where no child was completely neglected was one of the schoolrooms where small-group work had been frequently used in the entire program for ten weeks.

Perhaps it should be noted that this school had at least one problem in social acceptability that no other school in the city faced. A children's home that had operated in the city for years moved the first of October so that it was within the bounds of this last mentioned school district and four children joined the group from the Home. This teacher used considerable ingenuity in creating situations that would help the rest of the group to realize that boys and girls from the children's home

were perfectly normal children like themselves. She arranged with the director of the Home to have some committees meet there on Saturdays. Since no child was allowed to leave the Home after dinner at night except by special arrangement with a responsible adult, she arranged at different times to have a parent of one of the children in the room call for one of them and take him along with his own child to a school program or basketball game. It is probably not assuming too much to say that the very satisfactory showing of these children on the first sociometric test can be attributed to these wise procedures, for there were many indications in the first days after these children joined the group that the others did not accept them without reservations.

The second sociometric study was made April 20. In order to be able to draw conclusions about changes in degree of acceptability, it was decided to weight the choices, giving six points for a first choice, three points for a second choice, and one point for a third choice. The small amount assigned to a third choice is justifiable because experiment has shown that the third choice is far less reliable than the other two. Most children will repeat their first and second choices if given a chance to choose again soon after the first opportunity, but will vary the third choice.

The short period of time since the last sociograms were made does not permit a full analysis of results, but such analysis as has been made indicates that there is a distinct difference in the changes in acceptability in the different groups.

Rather arbitrarily we have accepted ten as the dividing point among the scores of social acceptability.

TABLE 1.—NUMBER OF ISOLATES AND FRINGERS IN EACH OF SEVEN FIFTH GRADES IN WHICH VARYING GROUP PROCEDURES HAD BEEN USED THROUGHOUT THE YEAR.

School	Number enrolled	Median IQ	Range of IQ	Type of Grouping for Classroom Activity	Number with Social Acceptability Score Below 10					
					December 1			April 20		
					Isolates Score 0	Fringers Score 1-9	Total Score 0-9	Isolates Score 0	Fringers Score 1-9	Total Score 0-9
1.....	32	110	73-145	3	4	7	4	5	9	
2.....	27	102	78-127	0	7	7	2	6	8	
3.....	26	104	73-128	0	7	7	0	5	5	
4.....	30	110	76-139	1	8	9	1	5	6	
5.....	28	89	63-115	2	6	8	2	7	9	
6.....	32	103	72-140	1	8	9	0	7	7	
7.....	34	104	73-128	1	9	10	1	12	13	

Those receiving less than ten points are either isolates (with zero scores) or fringers (with scores from one to nine). A score of ten means that a child has received one first choice, one second choice, and one third choice, or equivalent, whereas three times that many—three first choices, three second choices, and three third choices—would be the average each child would receive on the three questions of the test if the choices were evenly distributed.

The accompanying table indicates the status of each group at two different times during the school year, as revealed by the two sociometric tests. These groups are not matched. Many varying conditions affect each of them. The main objective has been to make teachers conscious of children's needs with respect to status in their peer group, and to interest them in trying specific ways of meeting those needs.

The rough data as it stands from seven unselected groups in the same community would appear to throw some light on the usefulness of small flexible groups to promote social acceptability among isolates and fringers.

Although the evidence is not overwhelming, there is an indication here that schools 3, 4, and 6 are improving social relationships by reducing the number of isolates and fringers. These schools are the schools that have made frequent use of small flexible groups. The increase in number of children with low acceptability scores in the other groups may be due to strengthening of clique lines where no special measures are used to change the situation.

There is nothing here to suggest that there is any distinct difference between ability grouping and the grade group as a tool for affecting social relationships. All groups have doubtless benefited by their attention to this problem. But it is evident that it takes more than attention from the teacher to cause a child to rise in status with his peer group.

While the success of such a program as this should never be judged in terms of what happens academically, it will be a matter of more than passing interest to discover whether the children who have improved in social acceptability may not also simultaneously have become better achievers intellectually.

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