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An Educational Model for Group Dynamics

The Phenomenon of an Absent Leader*

The Conception of the Project

THE THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

The project from which this paper selects an episode for detailed report represents one of the lines of growth stemming from a program of exploratory studies in the dynamics of small groups inaugurated during 1946–1948 at the Tavistock Clinic and Institute of Human Relations by W.R. Bion. He (Bion, 1961) distinguishes between two levels of group activity: that of the “sophisticated” or “work” group (*W*), which involves learning and development and is concerned with specific tasks that must be met and undertaken in social reality; and that of the basic assumptions (*ba*) dependence, fight/flight and pairing, which are unlearned, primitive emotional response systems existing as cohesive patterns that alternate. The basic group organization may be in conflict with the sophisticated or *W* organization and is often unrecognized by members of the group, whose level of performance may be severely impaired in consequence. The aim of this program was to explore the use of a common method of interpretative group discussion in groups of different kinds: patient groups, student groups and staff groups. Though the method was derived from the *method* of psychoanalysis, recourse was not necessarily had to psychoanalytic concepts in making interpretations. Psychoanalytic concepts had been elaborated in the study of the individual in the two-person, inter-personal, as distinct from the multi-person, group situation. As the aim was now to explore what emerged at the level of the group, interpretation faced a new task: that of assisting a group (as contrasted with an individual) in extending its recognition of what was going on in the group situation as a whole, helping in achieving its work task (*W*) more effectively and more completely than would otherwise be

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the case. In making comments on the group's behavior, however, the member of the group in the role of social consultant or therapist could be said to proceed in accordance with psychoanalytic method in that he relied for his information principally on the relation of the group to himself in the immediate here-and-now situation.

The problems and types of stress that arose in these different kinds of group had differences as well as similarities. These differences led to more specialized models of the general method. Among those working with patient groups, there was a tendency to relate interpretation to a more directly psychoanalytic frame of reference by emphasizing the way in which each individual, as a personality, dealt with the "common group tension." This is the line of development that characterized the work of Ezriel (1950) and also of Sutherland (1985). It represents a more specifically clinical model.

By contrast, the development of what may be termed an action research model may be seen in such work of the Tavistock Institute as the Glacier Project as described by Jaques (1951) in *The Changing Culture of a Factory*. Under industrial field conditions he found that the most worthwhile discussions with the social consultant took place not so much in special meetings of an unstructured type outside the action situation as through his presence during the actual proceedings of various executive and consultative groups. Interpretation required to be related to a more sociological frame of reference and to be concerned with the ways in which roles and relationships in the particular social systems in which the groups existed were being used for unrecognized ends.

It remains to consider the experience yielded by the student type of group, in which the group met for educational purposes, usually under conditions of a seminar that gave maximum scope for free, as opposed to set, discussion. This technique may be regarded as initiating the search for a *training* or *educational* model of the method. Considerable difficulty was experienced with this type of group during the period of exploratory studies. The groups consisted of "students" of problems in human relations (industrial executives, social scientists, or practical workers in educational and community activities), prepared to examine their own experiences in a group as a method of gaining direct access to, and so increasing their understanding of, the dynamics of socio-psychological phenomena. These groups, however, tended to develop in one of two directions: when a good deal of interpretation was given the group tended to transform itself into a patient group and ask for treatment; when interpretation was restricted, the group tended merely to discuss the topic as a topic, and very little progress could be made in showing its relationship to the group. As the result of repeated experiences of this kind, student groups were discontinued, students being asked either to face taking the patient role and join a therapy group or to limit themselves to attendance at the workshop type of event. It was

not concluded, however, from these experiences that the original idea—that the student group might constitute a distinctive field of study—was necessarily invalid; rather that a suitable form had not yet been found.

The essential feature of the patient group in the treatment situation is that its task is directly and exclusively the study of its own internal tensions and relations. Its activities, so far as these concern the topics that it discusses, are regarded as meaningful only if they provide material which allows the underlying relations to be exhibited. A work group, however, in the action situation has a defined line (direction) of activity which is predetermined by its position in the social system to which it belongs. Its task is to pursue this line of activity. Its problem is that its relations may severely disturb its performance. In first approximation, the clinical and action research models can be described in terms of the different ways in which group relations and group activities are related to the task of the group. The search for an appropriate educational model depends on finding a type of task which requires a relationship between group activities and group relations distinct from that in either treatment-centered or action-centered groups.

The structure of the type of situation required may be regarded as a function of the degree of determinacy of the line of the group's activity. If the action situation is such that this is predetermined by the position of the group in a social system and the treatment situation such that it must be kept indeterminate by the therapist, the training situation may be described as that in which the group goes through the process of determining its own line of activity. In this sense, work with training groups may be related to the frame of reference of the project method in education as developed by John Dewey just as that with patient and action research groups may be related to psychoanalytic and sociological frames of reference. The relevance of the project method is that it is concerned with finding and carrying out types of concrete activity through which immediate experience may form itself into more general understanding.

If the task of the group is to find and undertake a definite project within a general field, it follows that the group will expect to meet on the assumption that its sessions will be limited—though indeterminate—in number. This assumption has a selective effect on the type of material which the group is likely to produce and therefore on the depth and scope of interpretation. If the loyalty of the social therapist is to the *W* of the group, he must take up whatever is impeding the group in meeting this *W*, however deep. On the other hand, since the task is limited, he need not take “everything” up; nor, indeed, will everything come up. Moreover, the group will have different phases—that in which the project is found, that in which it is carried out and that in which it is evaluated. The relationship of the consultant to the group changes in consequence. In the discovery phase it is more like that of a group therapist; in the execution phase like that of a contributor; while in the third phase group and

consultant can act as collaborators in evaluating what has been done—from complementary viewpoints. The implicit existence from the beginning of such a progression means that a force is acting throughout the entire situation towards establishing the independence of the group from the consultant. This safeguards it against the development of too great a dependence, which would otherwise tend to be unresolvable except under patient conditions. Since the aim is to relate experience in the group to some particular field of outside experience, members should be drawn from a common field, e.g., teachers, nurses, supervisors, works managers. There must be common needs and common problems. The degree of heterogeneity within the common field that will be most beneficial will vary widely according to circumstances.

Treatment and action groups are brought together by a need to solve concrete problems causing immediate tension—personal problems of patients or practical problems of institutions. A somewhat different pressure provides the incentive that convenes training groups, where the felt need is to learn rather than to resolve. Experience of social situations in the past has created in their members a need to learn more about group phenomena and processes for application to social situations in the future. Such learning must be general as well as particular for the “transfer-effect” to be realized. A need for such learning may be regarded as authentic and reality-based (as distinct from simply an intellectual attempt to avoid facing awkward experience more personally) so far as it derives from the roles and responsibilities which members carry outside the group. While the presence of intellectualism as a defense is to be expected in such groups (and will usually be deployed with both ingenuity and strength) this does not negate the reality of the need for intellectual and theoretical, as well as emotional and practical, understanding of group phenomena among those on whom professional or executive responsibility devolves for dealing with many kinds of group problems in community and industrial life. Training groups composed of such individuals require to develop both types of understanding, and in work with such groups teaching is important as well as interpretation.

To increase general understanding of group phenomena may be regarded as the sophisticated task of training groups. It would be a fallacy, however, to suppose that this could be achieved apart from direct experience of the emotional reality of these phenomena. A way must be found through the activity which the group itself undertakes of relating interpretation to teaching. It is the scope that it affords for establishing this relationship that recommends the project method as a supplementary approach to the general method of interpretative group discussion in the training situation. For it is through the project method that the fullest use may be made of the opportunities for more general teaching afforded by the occasions when the interpretation of direct, concrete experience has created emotionally favorable conditions in the immediate

situation. The field study to be outlined below, from which one meeting is selected for detailed report, represents an explicit attempt to erect a model of a practical training technique on these premises and to test out its usefulness with a group of practicing teachers presenting a serious professional need for increased understanding of group phenomena in relation to their own work at school.

THE CHARACTER OF THE MODEL

The project consisted of a working seminar on "Human Relations in School" attended by a group of practicing teachers. It took place under the auspices of a School of Education. No special attempt was made to select the members, who registered in the ordinary way. The meetings of the group were conducted by the first author, the second acting as a research consultant with respect to planning and the analysis of the material.

The original group of 19 was drawn from all types of school. Between the ages of 11 and 12 years all children took a national examination as a result of which the brighter ones went on to grammar schools (the equivalent of high schools) which prepared them for university entrance, while the less bright followed a less exacting curriculum in what were known as secondary modern schools, where they stayed until the school-leaving age of 16.

Two positive factors, one professional and the other psychological, affected all members and made for homogeneity: all were teachers and all were concerned in varying degrees about their relations with their pupils. Thus they all belonged to a large and dispersed professional group, i.e., teachers, and to a smaller attitudinal group, i.e., the category of teachers who attach importance to psychology and the study of personality as a means of achieving good pupil-teacher relations. This last factor constituted the overt motive that brought them together to discuss their problems.

There was also a third factor—the group contained no avowed authoritarian. All members, however, taught within the British educational system in which some degree of authoritarian discipline is traditional. To this tradition they had to conform, at least to some extent, in their classroom practice. They could, therefore, be described as an anti-authoritarian minority within the educational system of their society.

Though the project was planned as a three-phase program, the question of there being a second or third phase was not taken up with the group until a point had been reached, towards the end of the preceding phase, when the problem of the group's future became acute. It was then worked through until an agreed solution was reached.

The first, or *discovery*, phase consisted of 10 weekly meetings of one-and-

a-half or two hours duration. The group worked out its own program of topics, on one of which a short paper was presented each week by a particular member. Discussion then proceeded in a free manner. A near-verbatim record was kept, of which another member prepared a summary for circulation at the beginning of the next meeting.

The first author, as the consultant working with the group in the face-to-face situation, had two related roles: *interpretative*—to help the group to see its task in terms of its own behavior; *educational*—to help it to relate its own group experience to the common outside work field. Since the object of increasing the insight of group members into group phenomena was to improve their work as teachers, the two roles had a common relationship to the *W* that constituted the group task. For this reason it was felt that no inherent contradiction between them need be expected.

The first role was dominant during the first phase, when a considerable “battle” took place between consultant and group over its insistent demand for intellectual teaching. But during the second, or *execution*, phase, when the group settled down to the examination of a single basic problem over a further series of 10 meetings and had also learned to accept the examination of what was going on in itself as a regular part of its task, there were many more teaching opportunities. Nevertheless, there was often strong, though decreasing, resistance to accepting the consultant as a *contributor* as well as a *social therapist* and the problem was not fully worked through by the end of the phase. The group’s difficulty was in giving up the consultant as a therapist.

The third, or *evaluation*, phase was brought into existence by the feeling that arose in the group that they must find some way of reporting back their group experiences to other teachers, and the question was broached of their writing up their own version of these experiences for communication to an educational audience. At this point a special meeting was held at which the head of the department concerned and the second author were present as well as the first author. This was the meeting at which the group had to give up the first author as a member of the group, which from now on was to meet alone. The object of the special meeting was to help the group, by an actual demonstration, to perceive the first author as a member of a technical group and to show them that if they must now lose her as a member of their own group they could still have a relationship with her as a member of this technical group whose support both she and they would need for the next phase of the task.

The outcome of this meeting was that the group decided to undertake the assignment of writing up an account of its experiences for publication to the profession, accepting full responsibility for making its own executive arrangements and the necessary internal role allocations. All this it proceeded to do, with an efficiency and a speed which provides another instance of the reward to be reaped, when it comes to executive action, of preliminary working through.

The group was now able to accept the first author as a *collaborator* with a complementary task, the second decision of the meeting being that she should prepare a parallel account of the group's development as she had perceived it from her position as their consultant. Meanwhile the head of the department undertook to preface both accounts with a critique of the project as an exercise in post-graduate teacher training. The task of the second author was to collaborate with the first in the technical appraisal of the material from the point of view of a research organization concerned with the development and application of group methods in working institutions.

In the subsequent scrutiny of the total material it appeared that certain group phenomena observed during the project might be of general interest, particularly the institution by the group of an absent leader in opposition to the *legitimate* leader during the ninth meeting of the first phase. Accordingly, this episode has been abstracted and in what follows an account of it is presented from a group dynamics rather than an educational viewpoint, which will be that emphasized in the account of the project as a whole to be published elsewhere by the first author and the members of the group.

The Ninth Meeting

Note: The first session of the course was taken up with dealing with the group's reactions to the consultant's refusal to give formal lectures. This produced a format in which each member was to prepare a paper on an agreed topic for discussion by the group. Themes covered were: the difficult child; handicapped children; pilfering; improved discipline; the "crush" in girls' schools. The topic for each session arose out of the experience of discussing that for the current session. In every case the theme was found to have a parallel in the relation of the consultant to the group in the here-and-now. These parallelisms were interpreted and opened up the dynamics of the situation. A paper on truancy, prepared by a headmistress, was postponed by the group three times—the topic was specially threatening—but was finally given in the last but one session, now to be reported. The first author speaks throughout in the first person in her interpretative role.

SUB-GROUP ROLE-TAKING

The ninth meeting opened with a message from the member who was to have spoken on truancy. She sent a letter in which she stated that pressure of work would prevent her from attending this meeting and the next—the last two of the session. As she had previously said that, in the event of the group meetings

being continued the following term, she would not be able to attend, her letter was a final leave-taking. She had, however, sent her paper, which the bearer of the message had consented to read.

It seemed indeed as if truancy was not only to be discussed but enacted. Seven members in all absented themselves on this occasion, the largest number since the first session. Of these, only one, who had sent a note of apology, was to return. The headmistresses' sub-group had completely disappeared. The largest element among the remaining twelve members was the grammar school assistants' group. There were six of them, one man and five women, who made up half the attendance. The others were divided as follows: two junior school masters, one master from an all-age school, one mistress from a school for handicapped children and two secondary modern school masters. Their common characteristic was that none belonged to a grammar school. To take another sub-division, the group fell into two halves according to sex: there were six men and six women. Furthermore, there was a distinct group of persistently silent members. The total group was also divided into two halves in this respect: six silent members listened throughout the evening to six speakers.

The various groups did not coincide but the resulting set-up presented a considerable advantage: every member could at any time rely on the support of another five who had something in common with him or her. (Six people had grammar school experience, six lacked it; to talk was to belong to a group of six speakers; to be silent was to belong to a group of six silent members.) See Table I; note that italic letters designate women.

Lest it should appear—as is often thought in committees and debating societies—that only the speaking members play a part in discussion, it should be emphasized that the silent members were very much part of the group and, on the present occasion, were destined to play a crucial role. If, for a moment, one supposes the silent members to have been absent—i.e., to have joined the absentees' sub-group—the importance of their presence soon appears. In this particular case the speaking members formed one-third of the original group. If two-thirds had been absent those remaining would have represented a very much mutilated, and therefore threatened, minority. The silent members held the balance. By choosing to be present they helped to perpetuate the life of the group. Their passive attitude put them in the position of an audience and the future of the group depended on their being persuaded by the speaking members to continue to attend.

The absentees' sub-group also constituted a force that exerted a considerable effect on the proceedings. Absentees have once belonged to a group and have contributed to making it what it is. Conversely, the group has contributed to making them what they are. On this occasion their participation was evident, since the paper to be discussed embodied the views of one of them and, indeed,

TABLE I Equal Sub-Groups in the Ninth Meeting

<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Grammar schools</i>	<i>Non-grammar schools</i>	<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Silent members</i>
A, B, C, D, E, F	G, H, I, J, K, L	A, C, D, E, F, G	B, H, I, J, K, L	A, B, C, E, G, K	D, F, H, I, J, L

was about absenteeism. The absentee sub-group was also six strong. The original number of members had been 19—an odd number—which left 7 absentees; but the position of the absent speaker was equivocal. She could not be said to be *absent* since she introduced the topic of discussion; nor *silent* since the words were hers; nor could she be described as *speaking*, since she was not present in person. Thus, on the one hand, she did not belong fully to any of the three sub-groups; on the other, she belonged to them all, for she partook of some of the qualities of each.

My position, as consultant, was similar to hers for I could not be said to belong fully to any of the sub-groups either. I was not *absent* since I was there in person; nor *speaking* since I had refused to lead the discussions or indeed to make any personal contributions unless they were called for by members' remarks; nor *silent* since I summed up the arguments and formulated problems raised by members. Conversely, both she and I were ubiquitous since we belonged intermittently to various sub-groups. By this means the members in each sub-group were kept at six, for she and I cancelled each other out.

The recurrence of the number six was not due to chance. Officially, six members constituted the smallest number for whom a course could be held. The group knew that, in the preceding term, a course of lectures on psychoanalysis had been stopped after the second meeting because only five members had registered for it. Throughout the twenty sessions of the seminar, whenever the numbers present approached this threshold the group became anxious lest it should be officially stopped. Thus the threat to the continuation of the group was actual, but this was not always realized. The appearance of anxiety was the sign of it. Anxiety had been noted each time the topic of truancy was raised and had led to repeated postponement of its discussion. On this occasion, when a third of the group had "played truant," the threat had become greater and more imminent. But it did not come from the absentee members alone, though they appeared to be responsible for it. In order to keep the group alive, the speaking members had to be victorious over the negative attitude present in *themselves* towards the *W* that constituted the group task. All the sub-groups had to contend with ambivalence in this regard. The speakers, in so far as they were dissatisfied with the pattern imposed on the group, would wish to absent

TABLE 2 The Situation at the Beginning of the Ninth Meeting

<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Silent members</i>	<i>Absentees</i>
A	D	M
B	F	N
C	H	O
E	I	P
G	J	Q
K	L	R
(PL)		(AL)

PL = present leader

AL = absent leader

themselves from it, but the wish to continue was stronger and made them choose to stay in the group and fight for it. The absentees had enough positive feeling to shrink from remaining in the group and overtly attacking it: their belongingness led them to compromise by choosing *flight* rather than *fight* to express their dissatisfaction. In the six silent members the balance of positive and negative feelings made the fight and flight reactions of equal strength, so that they were prevented from taking any action: they did not absent themselves, neither did they fight for the survival of the group.

Throughout this meeting the speakers made use of the absentees' sub-group as a reference group (Newcomb, 1952) into which they projected their negative feelings. They cast the absent speaker, as a reference individual, in the role of spokesman of the absentees, an *absent leader* (AL). To her they gave their allegiance whenever they wished to express their criticism of me, the *present leader* (PL), and take flight from the group task. At this point, however, they were confronted both by their need to continue with their task and to have my help in enabling them to do so; fear of my loss and of retaliation on my part made them swing back to me. AL and PL never appeared in the same sub-group (see Table 2).

INDIVIDUAL ROLES

The speaking members had unwittingly arrayed their forces in such a way that each assumed a role which he kept throughout the session. The discussion would be started indirectly by a passage of arms between two of them (A and G), who continued the fight started at the eighth meeting between the men's and

women's sub-groups. Very soon a third, *K*, would intervene, as if to remind them that they should sink their differences, since something of greater moment—the continued existence of the group—was at stake. *K*'s role was that of *PL*'s "champion," his efforts always being aimed at rallying the group under her leadership. His interventions followed a similar pattern throughout: he would indicate explicitly or implicitly that there was no cause for disagreement within the present group, would sum up the arguments, and thus open the way for a new departure. The fourth, *C*, consistently played the role of mediator between the absentees and the present members. She took the role of *AL*'s champion in opposition to *K* whenever the absentees were excluded. The other two, *B* and *E*, acted as supporters of the speakers' group, and it was one of them who formulated the topic for the next meeting, which was to focus the work of the group during the subsequent phase of its existence.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE SPEAKERS' GROUP WITH THE "LIKED CHILDREN"

Before the paper was read the record of the eighth meeting was circulated. It gave rise to a brief discussion in which all six members spoke who were to discuss the paper later. The report of the preceding week's discussion on homosexuality was the immediate cause. The young master, *G*, who had raised the topic at the end of the previous meeting to repeat that "it did not exist between masters and boys" returned to the charge. "It had gone unchallenged," he said, "the group had shifted away from it." *C* agreed that the discussion had proceeded rather irrelevantly. *K* disagreed, "the point had been thoroughly discussed."

But still, in complete disregard of the evening's task, and of *K*'s reminder, *A* and *G* continued the feud about homosexuality in men and women teachers. To *G*'s reiterated assertion that men teachers were guiltless of it *A* retorted that "it did not make much difference whether homosexuality existed between boys and masters or only between boy and boy; the crush of boy for boy and girl for girl proved the homosexual content." The exchange became more and more rapid and the enjoyment of the two protagonists more evident. The more *G* denied the homosexual attitude of men teachers the more *A* refused to be convinced and airily reaffirmed her own contradictory belief. It became apparent that the excitement roused by this discussion was of a flirtatious kind, which, in view of the topic—homosexuality—might at first seem strange. But if people are preoccupied with heterosexual feelings they often find it easier to talk about homo- rather heterosexuality, for the social taboo on the former makes its expression in reality impossible, and the discussion safely theoretical, whereas heterosexual feelings may lead to actual relations which cannot be admitted in public. It is notable that *A* meets *G*'s denial of his homosexuality

not by denying her own but by maintaining that "there is no difference between his feelings and hers."

Curiously enough she disregards the available "tu quoque" reply, for a teacher-boy relationship, which was described in the seventh session, was not unlike a two-way crush. No one thought of it. The men attacked and the women pleaded guilty. This collusion in accepting a statement contrary to evidence shows how carefully the whole group will push aside any facts that do not serve its immediate unconscious needs even though they might justify the behavior of some individual member on the *sophisticated* level. If the men's sub-group had recognized their homosexual tendencies they would by this admission have suggested that they could not have a heterosexual relation with me. But the women's case was different: a love relationship with me could only be a homosexual one. Thus it was from the same *group* motive that one sub-group declared its immunity from a condemned form of behavior and the other accepted the accusation of it.

By a kind of pun on the word homosexual it is made to mean "we are both sexual *in the same way*," i.e., "we are both offering our love to you." Since A could feel sure that G would not go back on his denial—which incidentally was also an offer to her as a woman—and run the risk of my misunderstanding him, she could safely afford to push him further and further. It was this that gave the impression of sparring, of a kind of Beatrice and Benedick dialogue in which the protagonists paired under the cover of spirited attacks that ill disguised their underlying friendliness and the similarity of their feelings.

For a while the group took pleasure in this dialogue. A and G, both members of the speakers' sub-group, appeared to be acting as its *spokesmen* in making me a love-offer, since it put them all in the role of liked children (the crush had been described as a two-way situation, and if they loved *me* I must love *them*). Gradually, however, the rest of the speakers' sub-group became uneasy. The "Beatrice and Benedick" pair monopolized the conversation to such an extent that everyone else was relegated to the silent members sub-group, so losing "liked children" status (Table 3).

The verbal duel had had its use as a temporary resurrection of the main defense of the eighth meeting, but if it went on it would disrupt the speakers' group by reducing it to two members. More than two-thirds of the whole group would be put out of action. The remaining speakers, having been driven into the silent sub-group, might from there eventually join the absentees. In addition it made contact with me impossible. All this roused K in his champion role, making him call Beatrice and Benedick to order; the real battle for the survival of the group must be joined, "we have an urgent task to which we must return." They accepted the reproof and settled down to listen to the paper on truancy.

TABLE 3 The Situation Produced by the "Beatrice and Benedick" Episode

<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Silent members</i>	<i>Absentees</i>
A	D	M
G	F	N
	H	O
	I	P
	J	Q
	L	R
	B	
	C	
	E	
	K	
PL		AL

THE ABSENT LEADER'S PAPER (CASES OF TRUANCY)

The paper was read by C. By accepting to pass on the words of the absent headmistress she established herself in the role of AL's champion.

AL's account of a series of actual cases of girls who had run away from school was preceded by two introductory remarks. First, AL had been struck by the derivation of the word "truant" from a Celtic word that means "wretched." Next, she reported that a headmistress of a boarding school, whom she had asked what her worst experience had been as a headmistress, had replied, "*the disappearance of a girl.*" Her own personal experience of this had concerned a girl—Susan—who had been evacuated from a bombed city and was in need of help, the immediate cause of her running away having been a *row with an impatient young mistress* (but there were no details of her later history). She went on to quote further instances of truancy that had come to her knowledge.

Marjorie (12 yrs.) had played truant from school. She had intercepted letters of enquiry, was buying her meals out and spent her time playing with paper dolls. Her home was poor, her parents went to work early and meals were inadequate. She had run away before when evacuated to another town and had been given lifts on lorries (trucks).

Jean (12½ yrs.) had been holding up letters to her home. She had played truant when the district in which she lived had been bombed and while her father, of whom she was very fond, was in the army. She truanted again when her father went to Italy. She lived in a world of fantasy and had written love letters to another girl as though the letters came from a man in the R.A.F. Jean said she

heard voices telling her not to go to school. She had spent days tramping the streets with a few pennies for chips, buns or a meat pie.

Joyce (13 yrs.) sent a letter purporting to account for her absence and explaining that she was caring for a sick dog. On enquiry this was found to be untrue. Her parents had separated. She had become "boy mad." Letters written by her to a boy had been found by the boy's mother, who threatened to show them to the police.

Mary (15 yrs.) forged her mother's signature on a letter of excuse after playing truant. The mother thought that the girl's interest in politics—she was a member of a Young Conservative group—had some connection with her delinquency. In this instance emotional instability was associated with intelligence of a high order and the child, the speaker said, suffered agony of mind accordingly. (It is also to be noted that she sought security "upwards" in the more traditional groups of her society.)

Finally, all the five girls cited were stated to be in need of medical help. Mary and Joyce had been referred to Child Guidance Clinics and had done well, especially the former. Jean's parents would not allow her to attend for treatment. Nothing was said about the other two.

COMMENTS ON THE MATERIAL PROVIDED BY THE ABSENT LEADER

The picture given by *AL* was a sinister one. All the cases described concerned girls who had fled from school into a world in which they found themselves at war with society. All had become delinquent offenders—truancy being punishable by law—but in addition were mentally ill and needed medical help. Marjorie was backward; Jean had hallucinations; Joyce was said to be boy-mad; Mary suffered from "emotional instability." Such, then, were the dangers to be feared, about which *AL* warned the present members of the group. It is to be noted that for the first time in the history of the group school was described as a "bad" (hated) place from which people run away. Instead of learning they had become ill and wretched. And the etymological discovery which gave the true meaning of the word truant as wretched emphasized the "badness" of school. Thus Susan, the first truant, ran away after "a row with an impatient young mistress."

The aggressive content of the truant's behavior may be supported by further etymological investigation of the meaning of truancy as wretchedness, which provides a clue as to the origin of the wretchedness, for it appears that the word originally means "outcast, an exile." It has the same root as the word "wroec," to drive, and the word "wreak," to punish, to revenge. The truant is wretched, because he has been *driven* into exile, where as a disliked victim and scapegoat, he is loaded with the wickedness of the rest of the school. The person in authority who has thus driven him out must fear the consequences of his treatment. The disappearance of a girl ("the worst misfortune that could

befall a head mistress") appears as a punishment and a danger since a victim is always a potential seeker after revenge. If truancy were merely the expression of wretchedness it would be difficult to understand why it should be regarded as delinquent, but seen as an attack on the school—provoked by this wretchedness—its delinquent nature becomes apparent, especially as it carries the projection of the school's own delinquency.

The truant, on his or her side, is constantly in danger of what is now seen as retaliation on the part of the school (into which, of course, will be projected the aggressiveness belonging to his or her own original "forcing" behavior). Every one of the girls described had to guard herself against persecution. Susan's absence was discovered by a mistress who gave the alarm; Marjorie when questioned said she had a cold and carefully intercepted letters addressed to her parents by the Head of the school; Jean had done the same; Joyce had sent a letter explaining that she was caring for a sick dog and Mary forged her mother's signature. They all lived in fear of being "caught" by the school they had harmed by their behavior. They feel persecuted; when they are judged, they are usually found "guilty but insane" and put in the hands of the psychiatrist. One of the truants mentioned (Mary) had done well under treatment. We are told that she had intelligence of a high order and that "*with her cooperation* the Child Guidance Clinic had put her on the road to recovery." Nevertheless, even her high intelligence had not saved her from the "wretchedness" which had caused her to play truant. Jean, the girl who "heard voices" and obviously was in need of medical help, was not allowed by her parents to attend the Child Guidance Clinic.

THE GROUP'S INTERPRETATION OF THE ABSENT LEADER'S PAPER

AL's paper was instantaneously interpreted by *C* in her champion role as an indictment of *PL* (as the bad parent). "The bad influence of the parents," she said, "is obvious in all the cases of truancy described." The same had been said at the preceding meeting about bad cases of crushes. Since I had been increasingly attributed the parental role in one or other of its forms, the comment constitutes a call to desert me as a false and unreliable leader, as the truants had deserted their parents. The reaction of the speakers' group was to answer this call, and, vigorously supporting *C*'s thesis, to align themselves during the next phase of the discussion with the absentees' group, making *AL* their leader and leaving me, *PL*, isolated (Table 4).

As the discussion went on I received blame not only as a parent but also in the other roles attributed to me. *AL* had said that, not content with making their children wretched, some parents also refused the help of the psychiatrist. If we interpret the word "of" as giving the phrase the meaning "*the help that the*

TABLE 4 Blaming PL in Answer to C's Comment

<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Silent members</i>	<i>Absentees</i>
	Silent members' sub-group	Absentees' sub-group Speakers' sub-group
<i>PL</i>		<i>AL</i>

psychiatrist can give," it can be seen that this reproach was also leveled at me, since I had refused to teach them psychoanalysis.

What, they asked then, can the *teacher* do when *parents* refuse the help of the *psychiatrist*? This started a disquisition on what I might have done in my original role (the teacher expected to lecture), since I had not helped in the role of parent or of psychiatrist. G having said that bewilderment in lessons is associated with truancy, A, his usual friend and adversary, took him up, saying that she failed to see why children should stay away from *school* because they were unhappy *at home*. This apparent contradiction of G's condemnation of parents was in fact a way of reinforcing the attack on me in my teacher role. (I was not providing knowledge in the group that would help them with their professional difficulties at school.)

If we compare the situation of school children with that of group members we find a clear parallelism. For if the latter had come to study "human relations" in the group, it appears that they had not been satisfied with their "relations" in the school—their last group experience before they had come to the group, just as for the children the family was the group experience that preceded school. The *group* is to the members what *school* is to the children, the latest stage in their history; whereas *school* is to the members what *home* is to the children, i.e., the last stage but one in their history.

The absentees had failed to find better relations in the group and so had left it. The problem to be faced by those aligning themselves with them was how to avoid the fate of the truancy children who had all become ill and wretched. However, one of these children—Mary—had been saved. Her mother had not understood her but she had, *by her own co-operation*, made a good recovery under *proper treatment*. Here was the model to be followed. Of all the truants described, Mary, who was intelligent and had impersonated her mother as she should have been—a good mother—was the one with whom the group could identify *AL*. By accepting such an identification for themselves they found a way of returning to the dependent position I had refused to countenance, but this time under *AL*, whom they set up as their true (though absent) leader (good mother), in opposition to me, their false (though present) leader (bad mother). Their hostility to me was thus projected into *AL*, who, in the omniscience ascribed to her, could be trusted to make safe use of it on their behalf.

Mary, their immediate model, had, it may be recalled, joined a Young Conservative club which was disliked by her mother. Similarly, I had shown that I disliked the conservative (traditional) pattern of education. With *AL* they could set up a rival group. Did not they, like Mary, know what was best for them? This rival group—their own prescription—would seek to preserve the structure of the school as they had known it, while being progressive (young) enough not to be averse to some reforms under traditional leadership, which would suffice to meet all problems. Was the pain of radical change really necessary? In such a group there would be proper lectures such as *AL*'s paper and a reliable safety net for truanting casualties (proper treatment). In such a group they would make progress through their own cooperation with what they themselves knew to be right. Moreover, this progress would be shared by all so that this rival group of theirs would be a group that would always remain whole and never become extinct. No one would be forced—as I had forced them—to depend on his own direct experience for advancing his understanding. Each would be given what he wanted. Protected from wretchedness, no one need truant from what need not be faced without sufficient guidance. The rival group and the rival leader sought by the speakers was the dependent group and the dependent leader. My refusal to enter into collusion with the recourse to this basic assumption was the cause of the opposition to myself. Since I would not permit the group to be dependent, the only way to secure dependence was to leave the group, i.e., join the absentees. *AL*'s paper was interpreted as giving earnest, as though through a dramatic and magical message, that the required Elysium might be found with her. The fate of this phantasy must now be traced through the subsequent discussion.

THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF EXPECTATIONS (IN SCHOOL AND IN THE GROUP)

K, in his customary constructive role, now proposed that they should investigate “what children want from school which truants failed to find in it.” Once more the here-and-now situation inspired the members' suggestions: in enumerating the motives that might make children want to come to school, the members expressed their own motives for attending the group. First, “they want to be with and to compete with children of their own age.” The desire to be with other members had repeatedly been expressed and had been manifested in the fear of seeing the group disappear.

Next it was said that they want the attention of a grown-up whom they can have for themselves—an expression in the here-and-now of the group's wish for dependence and a description of the teacher as an adult who specializes in preparing them for adulthood. “They are interested in some project” equally described the task of our discussions, while “they also want to learn” is

perhaps an indication that the flight from *W* was not as wholesale as might have appeared. Yet the quest for dependent security reinstated itself in the remark that followed, “they come to school also for the sake of orderliness,” which refers to the methodical arrangements of school life with regard to time-tables, rules, discipline, etc. It is a demand for a good external authority, since “order” has this double meaning—an authority of the kind they felt *AL* could give them.

The next remark, “they want to be helped to grow up,” led to the statement that *A* stream children, especially of 15-plus, because they are able to absorb knowledge and accept the standards set by the teacher, feel they are being helped to grow up and keep their confidence in school, but *C* children are disappointed and feel that school is *preventing* them from growing up. They do not receive the knowledge (“they can’t take it”) that could make them into adults. Approval, therefore, is withheld. The *A*’s are the good and happy children, the *C*’s the disliked and unhappy truants. The situation was similar in the group though in this case *C* and *A* did not refer to degrees of intelligence but to the capacity to conform to the “imposed” standard (of free discussion) and to absorb knowledge through it.

I pointed out that the more inaccessible the standard of the school the more rejected the *C* adolescent would feel. He would try to live out the more primitive way of being grown up and his phantasies, as in the cases described earlier, would often be of a sexual kind in which he would imagine adult love relationships. An unsuccessful adolescent had no compensation for being kept at school.

These remarks led to a discussion on sex education and of its value as generally understood. The school only gave physiological facts for there was a conspiracy of silence among all adults—parents and teachers—to keep the children ignorant of the psychological aspects. Their own experiences, such as the crush, were not frankly discussed as sexual phenomena, but either ignored or frowned upon. This made clear at last the nature of the knowledge that had unconsciously been asked for during the early sessions. Just as the child wants to be enlightened on sex matters and feels thwarted—prevented from growing up by the silence of the adults—they had felt my refusal of formal intellectual instruction as a method of keeping them away from me and out of the adult world.

REUNION OF THE GROUP UNDER ABSENT LEADER’S LEADERSHIP

Here *C* suggested that perhaps if the teacher gave love first the crush might be forestalled. This statement, expressing as it does the need to forestall the *crush*—not the *truancy* which was the situation under discussion—is a re-

TABLE 5 Unification of the Group with the Absent Leader

<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Absentees</i>
	Absentees' sub-group
	Speakers' sub-group
	Silent members' sub-group
<i>PL</i>	<i>AL</i>

minder that the crush, although a positive feeling, had been established as an undesirable one, a bad one. And it was bad not only because it could lead to truancy if the teacher's response was either *snubbing* or *encouragement*, but in *itself*. It had been presented as an aggressive means of forcing the teacher to give love. None of the speaking members was safe from the accusation of having made such demands. All had tried first to steal love (by pilfering) and then to force it (through the crush). The favored children had stayed in the group, the disliked ones had run away. My encouragement of the former and snubbing of the latter had divided the group, and I was responsible for the present state of affairs. So I stood condemned on all counts, for I had failed to provide a good external and impartial authority, and I had refused to give them learning or to help them to grow up. This completes the meaning of G's cryptic sentence, "What can the teacher do when parents refuse the help of the psychiatrist." I had failed as a parent, as a psychiatrist and as a teacher.

C's remark went unchallenged. The whole group became silent. In this manner C's remark reunited the speaking and the silent sub-groups with the absentees. She now completes her mission as AL's champion (representing the wish to leave the group that was in all of them) and unites the three sub-groups into one whole on the absentees' side, since the whole group now felt rejected by me. I, PL, am now the bereft person. By refusing the love that "would have forestalled the crush and its consequences," I have lost the whole group to AL. It is my turn to be the outcast and exiled individual (Table 5). From another point of view the situation could be described as the completion of the flight (from W) of the membership group to the reference group.

RETURN TO PRESENT LEADER

This desertion of the whole group roused K to act once more as my champion in opposition to C. Because of their identification with AL the group had been unable to face AL as the bereft person. C's intervention had shifted this role on to me but to face me (PL) as the image of the bereft parent (teacher, leader) was

TABLE 6 Unification of the Group with the Present Leader: The situation created when K's remark "love in the classroom" aroused general laughter

<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Absentees</i>
Speakers' sub-group	
Silent members' sub-group	
Absentees' sub-group	
<i>PL</i>	<i>AL</i>

even more painful—and more dangerous, since to damage me might lead to retaliatory behavior on my part in the immediate present, or to my incapacitation. In either case I would be no use to them as a consultant. Their actual membership group would end, whatever might continue in the reference group they had concocted with *AL*. But since this reference group was an expression of *baD* no change could be effected or new learning realized through its agency. Permanent capture by *AL*, as advocated by *C*, could only result in their being left with the whole problem on their hands that had convened the group in the first place. The intractability of their *W* by their reference group seemed to have produced a stalemate, when the silence was broken by *K*, who pulled back the "departed" members towards *PL* by a suggestion for the next meeting. Referring to a remark of mine to the effect that sex education in school should not be confined to the biology laboratory—for any lesson could provide a useful opportunity—he laughingly suggested that we should discuss "Love in the Classroom." This mock suggestion was received with a great burst of laughter. The laughter was general, infectious and noisy; the silent members joining in, thus breaking their silence for the first time. Amused by their teasing, I too laughed so that I was reinstated in the speaking group, with which, through their participation in the laughter, the silent members were now also identified. My joining in this laughter was felt by the whole group as a triumphal achievement and heightened the manic atmosphere.

K had sent out, as it were, a general call to all members to change sides: let us have "love in the classroom," i.e., in the speaking group under *PL* as our teacher-leader; if we have this, we can have all that we seek in the reference group without destroying the membership group. Such a course would reunite the whole group as a membership group, though it would isolate *AL*, the only member who had definitely said she would not return (see Table 6).

However, the remark and the group's reaction contain a disquieting element. If the solution offered had been considered as real it need not have been put in this disguised, humorous form, nor would it have been greeted with such unanimous laughter. The unanimity marks the psychic agreement of the pres-

TABLE 7 The Realization That the Absentees Have Been Excluded from the Group during the Burst of Laughter

<i>Speakers</i>	<i>Absentees</i>
Speakers' sub-group	Absentees' sub-group
Silent members' sub-group	
<i>PL</i>	<i>AL</i>

ent members to deny that the exclusion of *AL* and of any other absentees was a factor of which they must take account. It was as though, through an omnipotent current group decision "to have love in the classroom," they professed not only to be able to restore casualties in group membership that had happened in the past but to prevent their occurrence in the future. It was as if the very loudness of the laughter was intended to cover up the danger inherent in the situation and to deepen the underlying disbelief in the remedy (Table 7). This, in the limit, contained the assertion that there were no negative, hostile, disruptive forces in their midst, at least none that need be taken seriously, only positive, friendly, constructive forces. K's proposal was an invitation to the group to proceed on this hypothesis.

But could the parts of themselves which the absentees represented be disposed of by abolishing the reference group which these parts had created? To deny the reality of the problem represented by the reference group was difficult when there was also an actual absentee group and an imminent threat of further absenteeism in the present group which might easily lead to its failure to survive. What guarantee was there that those aspects of the group which had produced absentees in the past would not go on doing so in the future? Absentees and absenteeism were part of the group's life and process. K's solution was the obverse of *C*'s: obliteration of the reference group and denial of the reality of absenteeism, as compared with obliteration of the membership group and projective identification with the reference group. As much as *C*'s, K's solution was an invocation of the dependent group, for the phantasy of group life which it depicts with *PL* ("love in the classroom") is, if not an Elysium (which one has to go away into), an earthly paradise where all one's needs may be met (by staying put)—perpetually, so it would seem.

The solution could only be presented as a joke, with the usual component of cruelty that such jokes are permitted to contain. Indeed, the remark was dismissed and did not even appear in the record of the meeting, but the underlying anxiety was present in the next statement, to be seriously expressed this time, that school is a *transitional* community in which the child tries out his love relationships. This was more than a mere serious repetition of the earlier joke, for it contained a reminder that the group was not permanent. The

fate that had overtaken the absentees might overcome any or all of the members. Excluding a member of any group, even if he is regarded as a traitor, brings guilt—fear of nemesis for the remaining members not only because of the *external* danger presented by the excluded member and his friends but because of the *internal* damage to the individual's feeling of belongingness. To hurt a fellow member is to hurt that part of oneself that is identified with the victim. Even the death of the member turned traitor is no solution, as is clearly seen in political purges. The killed victims, although unable to hurt the group externally, remain a danger. They draw members who had remained faithful and who might even have been instrumental in their death to join them and to become the victims of the next purge. To bring about the death of an external enemy makes for greater unity among the members of the group, but to kill a fellow member is to put oneself in danger from one's own internal need for the survival of the group in face of one's own destructiveness. To the rule that no man acts merely as an individual, but with a group—large or small, faithful or dissenting—members of the present group were no exception. They never made a move alone but always with one or other sub-group.

THE PARTITION OF THE SILENT MEMBERS

During the last part of the meeting, which was devoted to a brief discussion of future policy, it appeared that there was a change from the situation shown in Table 6. This was the ninth session and the last but one for the term. I stated that I was willing to continue for another term. This meant I was not giving up the group. Of the twelve members present nine wished to continue meeting. The nine included all the six who had spoken and three who had been silent. The other three of these said they would not return. Three of the silent members therefore had joined the absentees. With three silent members remaining, the continuing group would be reduced to half its original strength (Table 8), but, as the number was above the minimum officially required, the battle for continuation had been won.

It was finally decided to discuss "School as a Transitional Community" at the next meeting, the last of the session. Truancy had been a defense assuming that the group was permanent. Acceptance of its transitional nature (as of the school) represents a recognition of reality. They could now face the eventual extinction of the group and so were able to decide on their future behavior as members of it.

The knowledge that the group was to resume its activities with a membership reduced to half made it urgent to consider how it could live on as the transitional community it had proved to be. On the reality plane, the recognition that some of the difficulties of the school situation were due to its being

TABLE 8 The Situation at the End of the Ninth Session

<i>Speakers</i>		<i>Absentees</i>	
Speakers' sub-group	6	Absentees' sub-group	6
Half/silent sub-group	<u>3</u>	Half/silent sub-group	<u>3</u>
Total	9	Total	9
	(<i>PL</i>)		(<i>AL</i>)

transitional marked a definite advance in the pursuit of the group task, for whatever solution reached would have to take this transitional nature into account. It was on this theme, which turned out to involve special consideration of the school's (and the teacher's) relations with outside groups in the community, that the group, at its next meeting, decided to focus in its next term's work. Having found its "project" it was able to pass into the second phase of its existence.

Charisma and the Dependent Group

The session selected for detailed report illustrates the effective role played by an absentees' ("bad") group from which the ("good") present group cannot dissociate itself, since it represents part of itself—its own badness—and ultimately its own extinction. Its efforts to survive are constantly thwarted through re-introjection of the "badness" at first projected into the absentees.

At the level of group leadership this process appears in the institution by the group of an *absent leader* in opposition to the *legitimate leader*, the role of the absent leader being to provide leadership for the *basic group* (in the form of *baD*) with which the *work group* (*W*) under the legitimate leader has to contend.

An individual perceived as completely contained in a particular sub-group is not likely to emerge as the leader of his group as a whole. It was shown that, apart from *PL*, *AL* was the only ubiquitous member. She therefore attracted towards herself any forces in the group seeking an alternative leadership to that of *PL*. The attributes of her position, moreover, made her into a figure compounded of seemingly incompatible opposites—absent yet present in her paper, silent yet speaking through another member of the group. These were attributes which made it the easier to endow her with an omnipresent, magical and compelling omnipotence. It is this quality that constitutes her *valency* for the leadership of *baD*. The charismatic power which she developed appears to be directly related to this phantasmagoric hinterland. A question that has remained obscure in Weber's (1947) conception of charismatic leadership is the

nature of the sanction on which the authority of such charismatic leaders depends. A suggestion arising from the present study is that the source of this sanction is the basic group.

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