BOOKS BY WILLIAM GLASSER, M.D.

Mental Health or Mental Illness?: Psychiatry for Practical Action
Reality Therapy: A New Approach to Psychiatry
Schools Without Failure

SCHOOLS WITHOUT FAILURE

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CHAPTER TEN

Classroom Meetings

In this and the following two chapters I shall give a detailed description of the previously introduced classroom meetings, meetings in which the teacher leads a whole class in a nonjudgmental discussion about what is important and relevant to them. There are three types of classroom meetings: the *social-problem-solving* meeting, concerned with the students' social behavior in school; the *open-ended* meeting, concerned with intellectually important subjects; and the *educational-diagnostic* meeting, concerned with how well the students understand the concepts of the curriculum. These meetings should be a part of the regular school curriculum. In my experience, they are warmly supported by teachers who agree with the educational philosophy of this book.

Social-Problem-Solving Meetings

The many social problems of school itself, some of which lead to discipline of the students, are best attacked through the use of each class as a problem-solving group with each teacher as the group leader. Teachers in their faculty meetings will do essentially the same thing that each class does in the classroom meeting: *attempt to solve the individual and group educational problems of the class and the school.* When children enter

kindergarten, they should discover that each class is a working, problem-solving unit and that each student has both individual and group responsibilities. Responsibility for learning and for behaving so that learning is fostered is shared among the entire class. By discussing group and individual problems, the students and teacher can usually solve their problems within the classroom. If children learn to participate in a problem-solving group when they enter school and continue to do so with a variety of teachers throughout the six years of elementary school, they learn that the world is not a mysterious and sometimes hostile and frightening place where they have little control over what happens to them. They learn rather that, although the world may be difficult and that it may at times appear hostile and mysterious, they can use their brains individually and as a group *to solve the problems of living in their school world.* Over and above the value of learning to solve their problems through class meetings, students also gain in scholastic achievement. This gain is described by Dr. Edmund Gordon, Professor of Psychology and Education at Yeshiva University, in his detailed review of the Coleman Report:*

> In addition to the *school* characteristics which were shown to be related to pupil achievement, Coleman found a *pupil* characteristic which appears to have a stronger relationship to achievement than all the school factors combined. *The extent to which a pupil feels he has control over his own destiny is strongly related to achievement.* This feeling of potency is less prevalent among Negro students, but where it is present *"their achievement is higher than that of white pupils who lack that conviction"* (emphasis added).

School children have many social problems, some of which may call for discipline, some not. Under ordinary conditions, because there is no systematic effort to teach them social problem solving, school children find that problems that arise in

* *JACD Bulletin,* Ferkauf Graduate School, Yeshiva University, Vol. III, No. 5, November, 1967.

getting along with each other in school are difficult to solve. Given little help, children tend to evade problems, to lie their way out of situations, to depend upon others to solve their problems, or just to give up. None of these courses of action is good preparation for life. The social-problem-solving meeting can help children learn better ways.

Working with an eighth-grade class of an elementary school, I recently held a social-problem-solving meeting that can serve as an example. Although I do conduct social-problem-solving meetings, they are more difficult for an outsider such as I to hold than for the classroom teacher; students usually feel that someone who doesn't know them well has no business probing into their problems. In terms of Reality Therapy, before one can successfully change behavior, one must be involved. It is difficult for a class and a total stranger to become sufficiently involved with each other to make the meeting successful enough to serve as a demonstration. In contrast, the other kinds of meetings, open-ended and educational-diagnostic, are very easily led by someone the class does not know because these meetings do not present nearly the threat of the social-problem-solving meeting.

A serious problem with the eighth-grade class in the spring of 1967 was truancy. On some of the warmer days, as many as six or eight out of a class of thirty-five would be absent from school. The same children were not absent every day, although some missed school more than others and some always came to class. I was asked to focus on truancy during the meeting. Although no one expected that one meeting would solve such a serious problem, my goals were to get the class to think both about their own motives in cutting school and about some ideas that might help the whole class toward better attendance. The meeting started with my asking the class if everyone were present that day. There was considerable discussion, timid at first but shortly more frank, revealing that about eight students were absent and

that those present knew that most of the absentees were not ill that beautiful spring day. When I asked whether some of the students present also frequently skipped class, many admitted that they did. The students sensed that I was nonpunitive and that I was inquiring because I was concerned about their not coming to school.

We discussed at some length what they gained by cutting school and what problems it was causing. We also discussed the school's methods of handling truancy and their parents' reactions to these methods. The students maintained that school was dull and that they saw little sense in what they were learning. They gave the impression that their lives were so full of interesting things to do outside of school that they didn't feel they could attend regularly. They rationalized their position by saying that this year was the last time they would have a chance to cut because next year, when they entered high school, they would have to toe the mark. Questioning their rationale, I said that I doubted that they would attend high school any more regularly. I added that I did not believe that the things they complained about in the eighth grade would be much different in high school. As we continued to talk, most of the students admitted that the reference to high school was rationalization; from their experience with sisters, brothers, and friends, truancy was just as common in high school as in the eighth grade.

At this point we had accomplished what in Reality Therapy would be called exposing the problem for open, honest discussion. My warm and personal attitude helped the class to open up. Talking only about the present problem, we got it out on the table for everyone to examine. Getting this far probably would have been sufficient for the first of a series of meetings aimed at a real solution to the truancy problem. Because the meeting was a demonstration, however, I wanted to go further, and I started pressing the class for a solution. I asked them if they would talk to the absent students to try to get them to stop

cutting and to attend school regularly. I knew that unless the students made a value judgment that going to school is worthwhile, they would not attend regularly. It was clear that the statements they made about the value of school were merely lip service. Unless their attitude toward school could be changed, I or anyone else faced an impossible task in trying to get them to come regularly. As was pointed out in Chapter 5, the relevance of the school work must be taught, and where too much irrelevant material is in the curriculum, it must be replaced by material more meaningful to the children.

I attempted, nevertheless, to get from the students present a commitment to attend school the next day. Their wariness toward me and toward anyone who suggested change was apparent in their refusal to make this commitment. The refusal was also a perfect example of the difficulty we have in getting students to participate in irrelevant education. They gave every reason they could think of why they might not be in school the following day. To end the meeting and to help the students understand the importance of making a commitment, I introduced a technique that sometimes works even when a value judgment has not been made: I asked the class to sign a statement promising to come to school the next day. About one-third of the twenty-nine students were willing to sign the statement. The others were very leery about it, giving all kinds of excuses such as that they might be sick or they might be run over on the way to school. They did not want to do anything as binding as signing a piece of paper saying they would attend school. To the nonsigners I said, "If you won't sign a paper stating you will come to school tomorrow, will you sign a paper stating that you won't sign a paper? In other words, will you put your lack of commitment in writing?" After much heated discussion, about one-third more said they would sign the second paper. Although signing this paper did not commit them to come to school, it might still help them to understand the commitment process. One-third of the students remained who refused to sign either paper. I asked them if they would sign a paper stating that they would sign nothing, but they were too smart for me and still refused to sign. I said, "Under these circumstances, will you allow your names to be listed on a piece of paper as students who refuse to commit themselves in any way regarding truancy?" I would put their names on the paper; they would not have participated in the commitment process in any way. To this they agreed, and we obtained the three lists at the end of the meeting.

One meeting with little involvement, no real value judgment, and weak commitment produced, as I expected, no improvement in attendance. There was, however, much discussion not only among these students but also in the entire seventh and eighth grades concerning the class meeting. I had set the stage for a series of meetings to attack the problem of truancy. If this first meeting could have been followed with regular meetings several times a week, the students could have discussed the importance of attending school and been led toward value judgments, plans, and commitments. In class meetings teachers must listen to the reasons given for poor school attendance. When reasons with some validity are given, we must consider changing our teaching to make the school worthwhile to the students where it is not. In addition, we must teach the value of school.

Social-problem-solving meetings such as the one just described are valuable to students and to the school. I suggest that all students in elementary schools wishing to implement the meetings meet regularly during the week for a reasonable time to discuss the problems of the whole class and of individual students within the class. Both students and teachers should consider the class meetings as important as reading, history, or math. The social-problem-solving meetings should be conducted according to the following guidelines that have proved

effective both in the public schools and at the Ventura School for Girls, where I first used this technique. Although better guidelines may be developed as the meetings progress, the following should give a good start.

All problems relative to the class as a group and to any individual in the class are eligible for discussion. A problem can be brought up by an individual student about himself or someone else, or by the teacher as she sees a problem occur. In a school with a unified faculty involved with each other and with all school problems, subjects for discussion can be introduced in any class by any student or any teacher, either directly by a note to the group or indirectly by an administrator with knowledge of the problem. In addition to school problems, problems that a child has at home are also eligible for discussion if the child or his parents wish to bring them up.

To adults reading this book, my suggestions may seem strong. As adults, we usually either struggle with our own problems in privacy with little help from friends and family, or we sweep our problems under the rug and try to act as if they don't exist. Thus it may sound as if I am demanding too much of small children. Having held meetings for several years, I have found that children do not think that discussing their problems openly is as difficult as we adults do. The children are concerned because they are learning to deny the existence of their problems. They would much rather try to solve them, and school can give them a chance to do so. Before they come to school, children discover that it is reasonable to try to solve problems. We must be careful, therefore, not to do as we do too often at present: extend our adult anxieties and inadequacies to children and thereby teach them to be evasive as they grow to maturity. In my experience, a class of six-year-olds will freely discuss difficult problems, even one such as stealing (ordinarily a very emotional subject for older children and adults), and try to work out a solution. A solution may require more than just trying directly to get the child to stop stealing, although this of course

is the ultimate goal. A solution may include the discovery in the meeting that a child steals because he is lonely, hungry, or jealous, and the working out of ways to correct these causes. Teachers learn during meetings that small children can stand only small temptations. Teachers who do not adequately safeguard lunch money, for instance, are subjecting children to temptation that they may not have the strength to withstand. If children can find a reasonable solution at age six and can concomitantly learn the value of honesty, it is likely that they will never steal again. If someone does steal in a school where discussions are a continuing part of the school program, the stage is set for solving the problem later. The students know that the purpose of all discussion is to solve problems, not to find fault or to punish. Experience in solving social problems in a non-fault-finding, nonpunitive atmosphere gives children confidence in themselves as thinking, worthwhile people.

We have stated that the social-problem-solving meeting is open for any subject that might be important to any child, teacher, or parent related to that class or school. *The discussion itself should always be directed toward solving the problem; the solution should never include punishment or fault finding.* The children and the teacher are oriented from the first meetings in the first grade that the purpose of the meeting is not to find whose fault a problem is or to punish people who have problems and are doing wrong; rather the purpose is to help those who have problems to find better ways to behave. The orientation of the meetings is always positive, always toward a solution. When meetings are conducted in this way, the children learn to think in terms of a solution—the only constructive way to handle any problem—instead of the typical adult way soon learned by school children—fault finding and punishment. The pseudo solution of problems through fault finding is one of the most worthless pursuits continually to occupy all segments of our society. Its constant companion, punishment, is equally

ineffective.* Punishment usually works only the first time, if at all. After the first time it works only with successful people, who ordinarily don't need it. Much more often punishment serves as an excuse for not solving a problem rather than leading toward a solution.

It should also be understood that many problems arise that are not readily solvable, that have no single right answer, whose best solution might be a not-so-bad alternative. Sometimes these more difficult problems can be discussed over and over again with little seeming to happen and causing the class and the teacher to become discouraged. A class bully who pushes other children on the playground, dominates the games, and is physically abusive in and out of class often presents such a difficult problem. It seems that the more he is discussed, the less effective the discussion proves to be; the solutions offered by the class work poorly. Even for such a serious problem, the strength of the classroom meetings can be used in two ways. First, often the solution to the problem of such a child lies not so much in coming up with an exact answer, but in the discussion itself. As individual members talk about him, as they see his faults and shortcomings, they become less frightened and less able to be intimidated. Allowing the problem to come out into the open for discussion increases the strength of the bullied students so that gradually, sometimes almost imperceptibly, though the bully's behavior hasn't changed, it becomes less destructive because the others now have more strength. Second, after he is discussed several times, discussion of the bully might be avoided. Unless he does something worthwhile or constructive,

* Two excellent articles support these points. The first, "Whose Fault Was It?," by Charles I. Gragg, *Harvard Business Review*, January–February, 1964, discusses the futility of fault finding. The second is a chapter, pp. 62–67, from *The Human Side of Enterprise*, by John Haberman, McGraw-Hill, 1960. This article deals with an unusual labor-relations program that eliminated punishment completely and that was highly successful. Theoretically, it followed almost exactly the ideas of Reality Therapy as expressed in Chapter 2 of this book.

he is not talked about; if he does something constructive, it is mentioned. This technique removes the attention that he is getting through aggressive behavior and focuses on constructive, positive actions. The teacher might say, "There is no sense talking about Johnny because he is doing the same thing that everyone is complaining about. Let's wait until we can talk about something else he might do that the class would like." Johnny, hearing this and needing attention, will often improve his behavior.

It is important, therefore, in class meetings for the teacher, but not the class, to be nonjudgmental. The class makes judgments and from these judgments works toward positive solutions. The teacher may reflect the class attitude, but she should give opinions sparingly and make sure the class understands that her opinions are not law. Each child learns that he is important to every other child, that what he says is heard by everyone, and that his ideas count. When children experience the satisfaction of thinking and listening to others, they are not afraid to have ideas, to enter into a discussion, and to solve their own problems and the problems of their class by using their brains.

Once an atmosphere of thinking, discussing, and problem solving is established, and it can be established rather quickly, situations that ordinarily would cause serious disturbances in class and that might cause a child to be sent to the principal's office can be handled effectively within the class. Children learn that their peers care about them. They learn to solve the problems of their world. Then it is easy to accept the teacher who says, "We have a problem; these two boys are fighting. At our next class-meeting time we are going to discuss the fight, but now would you boys be willing to stop fighting and wait for the meeting?" This simple request has proved to be effective. The boys stop fighting and wait because they know there is a reasonable alternative to their misbehavior—a solution from the meeting. When they believe that even if they stop fighting they will

be punished or expelled from the class, they often continue to fight because the alternatives offered aren't any better than fighting. Classroom meetings can serve to siphon off steam in the class by providing a better alternative. Often the problem is dissipated before the meeting, and the children agree it would be a waste of time to discuss it. The availability of the meeting allowed the children to use the normal ways children have to solve problems.

Meetings should always be conducted with the teacher and all the students seated in a tight circle. This seating arrangement is necessary if good meetings are to occur.

Classroom meetings should be short (10 to 30 minutes) for children in the lower grades and should increase in length (30 to 45 minutes) as the children grow older. The duration of a meeting is less important than its regular occurrence and the pertinence of the problems discussed.

Children who must be excluded from class because their behavior is not tolerable to the teacher or the students will have a better avenue for reentry into the class through the use of class meetings than they have at the present time. Under ordinary school procedures, a principal dealing with a problem child who has been sent out of class finds himself meting out some sort of punishment. He usually swats the child, lectures him, calls in his parents, excludes him from school, or assigns detention time after school or during school. These procedures tend to work less well each time they are applied to any individual child. When the classroom meetings are a part of the school program, the principal has an important added wedge in working with the child. He asks the child sent to his office what he was doing and helps the child understand that *what he did* caused him to be excluded. The principal conducts the discussion with a goal of sending the child back to a class meeting in which the same points will be pursued. The principal counsels the individual child in a way that emphasizes what the child did. In an atmosphere of problem solving instead of punishment, the child usually will discuss his part in whatever happened. The principal then asks the child whether he has any plan to go back to class. Working with the principal, the child is asked to make a plan to get back into his class. If he does not want to go back, he is told that the class will nevertheless try *to help him* the best they can without him. He is asked to work out his plan in some detail, which usually does not take much time. For example, the boy may have been fighting with another boy so much that the teacher finally sends him out of the class. In a school where he is not threatened with punishment, he will admit to the principal that he was fighting and, after a while, admit the part he played in the fight. The principal then asks him to think about how he could stop fighting. Usually he says he would do better away from the other boy. This discussion sometimes takes a little time; maybe the other boy has to come in so that they can agree together on a plan to stay apart for a while. Both boys take the plan back to the class and the class may agree to help by not egging them on. In future meetings the class can work on the underlying problem, which may be jealousy, and the teacher can work on the boys' failure in school, which usually is a part of behavior problems.

The principal works with the child in a nonpunitive, problem-solving way. Using the class meeting, the child has a built-in entrée to return to class. As the procedure becomes operational and the children see that it works, they are happy to use it because it makes their lives easier. The whole disciplinary structure of a school should revolve around the class meeting. Individual discussions with children concerning their problems should be directed toward individual, and then group-accepted, solutions.

As time goes on, fewer and fewer disciplinary problems arise, so that class meetings about behavior disturbances become infrequent. Children learn through problem solving in the group how to avoid trouble in school and sometimes at home, although it is the rare home where children are encouraged to

solve problems by discussion and planning. If they learn to do so in school, however, the knowledge will prove of value all their lives. Although social-problem-solving meetings often deal with behavior problems, many other subjects can be discussed: friendship, loneliness, vocational choice, and part-time work are examples. The description in Chapter 11 of a series of class meetings and the listing in Chapter 12 of sample questions for meetings both cover many topics for meetings other than behavior problems.

In my experience, much of which has been in schools where discipline was a prime concern, I have found that direct disciplinary meetings are often ineffective in getting children involved with each other in a warm, positive way. They gain *positive involvement* more quickly through meetings in which they discuss ideas relevant to their lives. Earlier in the book I discussed the irrelevance of much of education to the lives of the children in school. I made the point that behavior disorders and educational failure were directly related to this irrelevance. Here it can be shown that classroom meetings, initiated to solve disciplinary problems, can be used effectively to gain and to sustain educational relevance. To understand how this is done, we need to describe two additional kinds of classroom meetings, neither of which directly relates to behavior problems.

Open-Ended Meetings

Probably the cornerstone of relevant education is the open-ended classroom meeting. It is the type of meeting that should be used most often, even where behavior problems are common. When behavior and other social problems are minimal, social-problem-solving meetings will be used infrequently. The open-ended meeting, however, is always applicable; the more it is used, the more relevance can be added to education. In the open-ended meetings the children are asked to discuss any thought-provoking question related to their lives, questions that may also be related to the curriculum of the classroom. The

difference between an open-ended meeting and ordinary class discussion is that in the former the teacher is specifically not looking for factual answers. She is trying to stimulate children to think and to relate what they know to the subject being discussed.

For example, in meetings with second-grade classes, I have introduced the subject of blindness. In answer to my question, "What is interesting to you?" one class said they would like to talk about eyes and ears. Although the five senses are not a specific part of the second-grade curriculum, from this introduction an open-ended meeting was held that provided a way for the students to gain greater motivation to read and to take more interest in the world around them. In the central-city school where I first held this discussion, the second graders usually did not show much intellectual curiosity. What they didn't know about the world didn't seem to interest them; at least, it appeared that way. Yet, when an unknown was introduced in a way that made sense to them, they became excited and showed as much curiosity and as much good thinking as children who come from more stimulating environments. I asked the children what they did with their eyes, and they all said, "See"—a good, simple, factual answer. In a discussion with small children, it is best to let them begin at a simple level where they have confidence in their ability to give a good answer.

Going to a more complex question, I asked, "What do you see with your eyes?" They mentioned many things, including "the words in our books." Again they were succeeding in answering a question; they enjoyed it and were becoming involved. At the same time, I was able to direct them toward books and reading in a way new to them. Children are just as stimulated by new approaches as we are, and they are just as bored with sameness as we are. One value of the open-ended meeting is to give new ways a chance to be used. I then asked them about people who can't see, and they said, "They are blind." A short discussion on

what blindness means followed. Despite an apparent understanding of blindness, most of the children believed that blind people could really see if they tried hard. We worked at length before everyone understood that blind people could not see at all. The children closed their eyes tight and kept them closed. Slowly, through this participation and discussion, it began to dawn on the class that if you are blind, you cannot see.

By now the children were all involved, but so far they hadn't done much thinking or problem solving. It was important at this time to introduce a problem related to their school work that they could solve if they worked hard. I asked, "Could a blind man read?" The reaction I received from the second graders was laughter, puzzlement, and incredulity. To think that a blind man could read, after they had just confirmed that a blind man couldn't see, was absurd. I asked them to keep thinking to see if someone could figure out some way that a blind man could read. Of course, I implied that there was an answer. I wouldn't ask second graders a question that had no answer, although in this case the answer was not easy. I insisted that they keep trying to solve the problem; their first reaction when the going got tough was to give up. In school the children had rarely used their brains to solve problems. Accustomed to simple, memorized answers, they gave up when these answers didn't work.

The discussion so far had piqued the children's interest and awakened their faith in their brains. They kept trying, but they were in trouble. The leader must judge when to give them help; he must not do so too soon. I decided to help them at this time by asking if someone would like to take part in a little experiment. We had an immediate raising of hands; they were all eager to help, partly because they sensed that the experiment was a way to keep the discussion going. I selected a boy who, I detected, was not one of the better students or better behaved members of the class. He was waving his hand, eager to volunteer. Calling him over, I told him to shut his eyes very tight and

hold out his hands. I asked him if he were peeking; he said, "No." Putting a quarter in one of his hands and a dollar bill in the other, I asked him if he could tell me what I had put in his hands. The entire class was now glued to the experiment. Some of the brighter students immediately began to glimpse the idea. The boy was able to tell me what was in his hands. I asked him how he knew. Although he wasn't very verbal, he finally said that anyone could tell a dollar bill from a quarter. When I took the dollar bill away and put a nickel in his hand instead, he was still able to distinguish the nickel from the quarter. I then asked him to sit down. Again I asked the class, "How could a blind man read?" Thoughtful students now began to express the idea that if a blind man could feel the letters on a page, he might be able to read. I said, "How could he feel the letters on a page? The page is smooth." And I ran my fingers over a page. One bright child said, "If you took a pin and poked it through the page, you could feel where the pin poked through." From that, most of the class—and they were very excited—was able to get the idea: you could feel the letters on a page!

I still wasn't satisfied, however. I said, "Suppose you *could* feel the letters on the page; I still don't think you could tell one from another." They said they could. I said they couldn't. Suggesting another experiment to try to prove whether or not they could recognize a word by tracing the letters without seeing them, I asked whether they could write their names on the blackboard with their eyes closed. During this discussion I had noticed a little girl sitting next to me trying desperately to follow what was going on. Now she raised her hand vigorously. Every other hand in the class was also raised, but I called on her. Very slowly, somewhat inaccurately although still recognizably, she wrote her name on the board. While she was at the board the teacher, with some alarm, passed me a note saying that the girl was mentally retarded and cautioning me to be prepared for her to fail. Retarded or not, she was fully involved in the experiment. She had managed to scratch something on the

board that both she and the class could recognize as her name. Because they were bursting to try, I let some of the other students go to the board to write their names. Most of them did it very well. Through this effort they were able to see the possibility that if they could write their names with their eyes closed, a blind person might feel words in a book. And the smile and eagerness of the "mentally retarded" girl proved that she was as much involved in the discussion as anyone else in the class. Later the class asked what books for the blind look like. They wanted the teacher to bring some in, which she promised to do.

In the discussion after the meeting with the class teacher and several other teachers who were observing, I noted that the meeting could be used as a way to stimulate children to learn to read. The teacher could point out, or have the children point out to her, the advantage of having eyes; reading, difficult as it is for many of these children, is much easier for them than for the blind. The children were deeply involved in the meeting, enjoyed it, and used their brains to think about and solve what seemed at first an insoluble problem. They experienced success as a group and success as individuals. Meetings such as this one in the second grade can be used as motivators in many subjects of the curriculum. In addition, a class that is involved, thinking, and successful will have few disciplinary problems.

In the lower grades, the open-ended meeting may have to be related to the curriculum by the teacher; in the higher grades the class can make the connection. Having a thoughtful, relevant discussion on any subject, however, is more valuable than forcing a connection to the curriculum. In fact, if enough thoughtful discussions are held on subjects not in the curriculum, we should study the curriculum to see where it should be changed.

Educational-Diagnostic Meetings

A third type of class meeting, the educational-diagnostic, is always directly related to what the class is studying. These meetings can be used by the teacher to get a quick evaluation of

whether or not teaching procedures in the class are effective. For example, in an eighth-grade class in another school district, I was disappointed to find that the students, despite studying the Constitution for a semester and a half, seemed to know very little about it. Although they had studied its clauses and many of them could recite certain sections from memory, the students had a nonthinking view of the Constitution. Even before the meeting, based on my experience with other classes, I doubted that the students understood the meaning of the Constitution to them as individuals or to the community. To test my opinion, I was given a bright class for the meeting. The questions I asked might be considered unfair by some educators, but we did get a discussion going, and the audience learned that the students had some extremely unconstitutional ideas about the Constitution. Because I had previously complained to the superintendent of schools that the students seemed to have difficulty in handling concepts, I had invited him to join me that day; the meeting I was proposing might pinpoint the difficulty.

My first question to the class was, "What is the Constitution?" The class seemed to be taken aback by this question, but I repeated it several times, adding, "I just want to know if anyone here can tell me what the Constitution is." Looking for some sort of definition or description to start the meeting, I saw immediately that the students were in trouble. It had never occurred to them that anyone would ever ask them what the Constitution is; assuming that everyone, including themselves, knew, they hadn't bothered to think the idea through. The best answer I could get was that the Constitution is something written in books to be studied. I asked them, "Does the Constitution exist? Is there a Constitution on a piece of paper nailed to a wall somewhere that people can see?" The class doubted that it existed in the form I had described. Finally I had to tell them that the Constitution did exist and that people could go to Washington, D.C., and see it. (I usually don't give answers, but I was filled with frustration at this point.)

From this small factual start, I went on to see whether the

students understood the ideas of the Constitution. Following their assurance that they had studied it in detail, I asked them to name some of its important features. When they mentioned the Bill of Rights, I said, "Do these rights pertain to you?" It took some time before they understood what I meant and more time to agree that in fact the Bill of Rights did pertain to the students sitting there. Some of them thought the Bill of Rights did pertain to them, while others thought that it was just for adults. To some extent the latter group was correct because, until the recent Supreme Court decision in the Gault case, minors had almost no protection under the law. Of course they had not learned this in their study of the Constitution.

The key question, however, which brought on a discussion confirming my doubts about the students' understanding of the Constitution, was, "What happens if you do something on your own property that is against the law? For example, may you drive a car on your own property even though you don't have a driver's license and are too young to drive? May you drink a can of beer in your home if your father offers it to you, even though you are legally too young to drink?" I don't know the correct legal answers in these two examples, but that was not the point of the questioning. There was heated discussion. Many of the students suggested that you have no right to break the law on your own property and that you should be punished if you do. I then raised the question of how you could be caught. "Do the police have the right to spy on your house and then come in and arrest you if they think you are drinking beer with your father?" The class said they thought the police did have the right and should do so. I then asked them how the police would know whether a child was having a glass of beer with his father. Although they said that this would be hard to discover, they did have some constructive ideas. One of them was that the police should have a television set focused in everybody's home and, as soon as the police saw anyone doing anything wrong, they should come and get him! Many in the class agreed with this

idea and no one disagreed strongly. At that point we dropped the discussion.

It was clear that the discussion was provoking individual thinking about the Constitution. My affirmation of the existence of the Constitution in Washington was the only time during the discussion that I corrected the class or offered them a right answer. In the educational-diagnostic meeting, the leader should not incorporate value judgments into the discussion. The students should feel free to voice their opinions and conclusions in any way they see fit. The teacher learns points of weakness that require additional teaching by her and additional study and discussion by the class. In memory education, where discussions probing understanding rarely occur, students may get answers right on tests and still have no working, living knowledge of something as important as the Constitution and how it pertains to them. Unless the teacher takes a completely nonjudgmental attitude, however, she will never discover these distortions. Cueing to her judgments, students see no reason to discuss their own ideas and opinions.

It is hard for a teacher to conduct an educational-diagnostic meeting because of her involvement with the subject and consequent possible inability to recognize the points that the class may have missed. To see more clearly what a class knows, therefore, teachers might sometimes exchange classes to run these meetings. The blind spots could thereby be eliminated. The educational-diagnostic class meeting should never be used to grade or evaluate the students. It should be used only to find out what students know and what they don't know.

I have described the three kinds of class meetings that I have used during the past several years in my work in the schools. These meetings have proved interesting to students and teachers alike. The technique is not easy for teachers to learn because the required class leadership is not ordinarily taught. Few teachers will conduct meetings without some guidelines, some

chance to observe a group, and much approval and encouragement from their superiors. Successful meetings occur only through practice, through evaluating what happens, and through following the guidelines given earlier in the chapter. Unless the meetings are nonjudgmental and open-ended, they will fail.

Enough teachers are conducting class meetings now so that some feedback is available. Many teachers are starting to use some of the techniques involved, especially the circle and the open-ended question, in regular teaching. Going from the open-ended question to some factual material, they encourage students to use judgment and to give opinions. As I write this book, however, most teachers in the schools in which I work have not incorporated classroom meetings into an integral part of their class program. Unfortunately, it is usually isolated from regular teaching. Most teachers conduct meetings one, two, or three times weekly; some report successful, continuing meetings every day. Although some teachers, despite their principal's permission to conduct meetings, still feel guilty about "wasting time" or "playing games," the success of the meetings is slowly winning them over. Students have responded very favorably in every class. Reminding the teacher when a meeting is due, they become involved quickly in the meetings. Because the students don't know that it is hard to have a good meeting, they soon have good meetings, especially in the lower grades. They are eager to participate in discussions relevant to their lives.

When one asks students whether their school work is in any way related to their lives outside of school, most of them reply incredulously, "Of course not." By the tenth grade, students are firmly convinced that school is a totally different experience from life. One learns to live and, completely separately, one learns at school. The three types of class meetings described herein can provide a stable bridge across the gap between school and life.

For the meetings to be most beneficial, they should be used by a majority of the teachers in the school. Children need experience in problem solving and in relating education to life throughout the elementary school period. Learning to think thus builds from year to year. The children gain the important beliefs that they can control their own destinies and that they themselves are a vital part of the world they live in. These beliefs are rarely acquired at present. When I have asked students whether their ideas or interests are important in school, I have been told vehemently in meeting after meeting that, "Our interests have no value in school."

Class meetings keep a class together because the more and less capable students can interact and because students can always succeed. In a meeting, no one can fail. One person's opinion is just as good as another's; there is no right and wrong. The only "wrong," perhaps, is not to participate at all, and this has been a minor problem where meetings are held regularly and with enthusiasm. Overparticipation and talking out of turn are much more common. When, in the open-ended meetings and, to some degree, in the educational-diagnostic meetings, the child succeeds in the eyes of his peers and his teacher, he becomes motivated to do some of the less exciting fact finding necessary to make the judgments and decisions that may evolve from the meetings. If meetings become important and facts become necessary to successful meetings, then it is worthwhile learning facts. The meetings provide the internal stimulus missing from an education that too often starts and ends with facts.

Although I suggest that class meetings be held at a regular time at least once a day in elementary school and perhaps two or three times a week in high school, there is no reason that teachers cannot use the technique for arithmetic, history, science, and other subjects. Whole-class teaching reduces isolation and failure. We use large, cooperative groups in most of the extracurricular subjects. The team, for example, is the basis of competitive athletics. But in the class curriculum, where it

could be equally effective, it is little used. By treating the whole class as a unit, the same spirit of cooperation can arise as arises on athletic teams. By eliminating failure, by accepting each child's thinking (at least during the time of the meeting), and by utilizing his mistakes as a basis for future teaching, we have a way of approaching the child that supports him. The present system of accentuating his mistakes tears the child down and makes him unable or unwilling to think.

Another advantage of class meetings is the confidence that a child gains when he states his opinion before a group. In life there are many opportunities to speak for oneself. The more we teach children to speak clearly and thoughtfully, the better we prepare them for life. When a child can speak satisfactorily for himself, he gains a confidence that is hard to shake.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Getting Meetings Started

Chapter 9 was concerned with the general process of implementing new programs. Here I shall outline the specific steps necessary to implement the classroom meetings. It is unfortunate that the schools are not set up to implement new programs easily, because the way the classroom meetings or any other new program is introduced has a major effect on its success. The principal and the school counselor should take the main responsibility to introduce classroom group meetings into a school. Even if the counselor is part-time, as he usually is in elementary schools, he should devote a part of that time to help implement the new program. In Chapter 9, I discussed the need for the principal to organize the faculty into a working, problem-solving group. The principal can use the help and the skills of the guidance counselor. Together they can work to organize constructive faculty meetings.

Although the principal's role in a school is rather clearly understood, the role of the guidance counselor is less well understood by parents, teachers, and children. Ordinarily, we think of a guidance counselor as one who works with individual problem students and helps them to solve their problems, much as a psychologist or a psychiatrist might work in his office with a patient. Some satisfactory counseling is done this way, but the

time required for the many children with problems far exceeds the time that hard-pressed guidance counselors have to offer to individual children. Guidance counselors also work with teachers and parents to help them deal more effectively with children. This work naturally varies from school to school and from counselor to counselor. In most schools, contacts between the guidance counselor and the classroom teachers that are beneficial to both rarely occur. Part of the problem arises from the mechanics of the situation. Working with students at the same time, they have little chance to talk to each other.

The role of the guidance counselor is, however, the main reason for the poor relationship between counselor and teacher. The counselor receives a referral from a teacher, tests the student extensively, writes a report based on the test results, and submits the report to the teacher. Both guidance counselors and teachers are unhappy with this often meaningless procedure based upon the unsound idea that tests will point out areas where children can be helped. What tests actually do is convert the teacher's observation of what is wrong with the child into the jargon of psychological diagnosis. The teacher will say the child seems withdrawn and timid; the guidance counselor, after testing, will report that the child is a borderline schizophrenic. This description does not help the teacher. Instead, it frightens her and makes her feel that she is dealing with a serious psychological problem for which she has had no training. When, as is often the case, the guidance counselor can offer no help for the child, either because he is too busy or because the child is an extremely difficult case to work with, the teacher becomes skeptical of the value of the referral procedure. Because the referral procedure is traditional, however, few people have seriously questioned its value.

Guidance counselors, except for those few who are most limited and least perceptive, are unhappy with their roles as psychometric diagnosticians. Teachers are unhappy because they are unable to use the material the guidance counselor

obtains. Principals often rise above the whole procedure by paying little or no attention to it. Rather than continue the ineffective referral and testing procedure, tests, except in rare and well-defined cases, should be abandoned. The guidance counselor should learn more about group processes and then work directly in classes demonstrating to classroom teachers how to deal with their classes effectively as counseling groups. Although most guidance counselors haven't the skill to do this at the present time, they have the educational and professional background to take group-counseling courses which, while not exactly applicable, do provide some help in learning to conduct class meetings. Counselors are usually more interested in learning group work (and they have more time to do so) than the average principal. A counselor could still work with individual children when he is urgently needed. He would, however, stop devoting most of his time to the traditional but meaningless procedure of testing and instead go into the classroom to help the classroom teacher learn to conduct class meetings effectively.

Before a guidance counselor could spend time in the classroom helping teachers, he would need the permission and cooperation of the school superintendent and the principals of the schools in which he worked. It goes without saying that new programs cannot be implemented without full support from the top. One of the reasons for writing this book is to obtain this support. Working in the schools as a consultant psychiatrist, a role similar to that of the guidance counselor, I have, with administrative support, implemented the class-meeting program in the following ways. Nothing I have done is outside the traditional school structure. Everything can be accomplished during the time of the average school day.

As described in Chapter 9, first it is necessary to hold a meeting of the teachers in which the principal, with my help or the help of the guidance counselor, explains to the faculty the purposes of the program. During the meeting, reference can be made to other group work being done in the schools. Time is

available for answering questions and for discussion. As teachers show interest, they are invited to join voluntarily in a pilot program. Attempts to go too fast, or to pressure teachers into adopting a program whose value they doubt, will serve no purpose. As part of the introductory process, class meetings are demonstrated in classrooms or in the auditorium in front of the faculty. Demonstration meetings that I have conducted have aroused much interest. Teachers must see classes involved in discussion to understand the procedure and how it works. When teachers see how capable their students are during a demonstration meeting, they become interested and excited. Trying to conduct meetings themselves, however, they often find it difficult.

It is important to stress the difficulty of what looks so simple when someone with experience does it, and to explain to teachers that they should not be discouraged if they don't get good meetings from the start. In my work with the schools, I demonstrate three or four meetings a day to different groups of teachers. It is best to demonstrate with the same classes from week to week for five to ten weeks so the teachers can see progress. Sometimes the meetings are very effective, sometimes they fall flat. I was very nervous when I started to do these demonstrations because I was concerned that, if the meetings went poorly, the teachers would feel they were not worthwhile. I was surprised after one poor meeting when several teachers came up to me and said, "That was great! That's what happens to me!" Instead of causing them to lose interest, the poor meeting reassured them that leading a class meeting is difficult and that even experienced leaders fail. My belief that each demonstration meeting had to be perfect may have, for many teachers, done just the opposite of what I had intended; that is, I made the teachers think that the procedure was too hard when they didn't get similar results. Learning to conduct class meetings takes practice, just as learning to do anything else does. The class learns as well as the teacher. There are good meetings and

bad ones. Teachers shouldn't be discouraged or give up because things don't work out to their expectations from the beginning. This point cannot be stressed enough. Teachers as well as students are not encouraged by failure. If we expect students to work to understand and implement new ideas, we must not be afraid to do the same.

After a teacher sees the demonstration meetings and expresses interest, the principal or counselor goes to her class to work with her to get the meetings started. For the principal to be effective in assisting teachers, they must be comfortable with each other, an uncommon situation in most schools. The faculty meetings suggested in Chapter 9 can help principals and teachers to be able to work together without strain. A teacher need not be uneasy when the principal comes into her class and attempts to help her get meetings started, because conducting meetings is not a skill that the teacher is expected to know. The principal can say that he has had little experience in developing the skill himself. Now the teacher and principal are on common but unfamiliar ground; in a sense they are partners in a strange land. The development of the skills to run the meetings can be used to become comfortable working together. In addition, working together breaks down the artificial barrier between teacher and principal with regard to the teacher's classroom performance.

The summary of a series of social-problem-solving meetings follows. The principal conducted the meetings at first, with the teacher watching. Later, the teacher took over and ran the meeting herself.

We met in the fourth-grade class for the first time on February 23 from 11:20 to 12:00 and every Thursday at the same time until the end of the term. There were about 17 class meetings. I [the principal] did about 10 or 11 and Miss Allen the rest.

We both feel that the changes in attitude and behavior were phenomenal. This was a group of 37 (19 boys, 18 girls) nine- to ten-year-olds. While it included many individually capable and won-

derful children, their class feeling was pretty much "dog eat dog!" They had developed fairly complex skills of putting each other down, and the children they "respected" were high-handed and bullying in their leadership. What seemed to turn the tide, I think, was feedback from the class to John, who was the class leader. He expressed surprise and dismay that other children were hurt and unhappy about the way he treated them. At this point, John and I had some one-to-one talks and he was wholeheartedly willing to use his leadership in a constructive way. He became instrumental in class meetings in creating a climate of frankness and honesty. He would not let the others get away with alibis for their behavior. And because he was serious, even passionate about expressing his opinions, the meetings became vital and exciting.

I'm hoping the meetings will take hold throughout the school in September. I have found the discussions a powerful, effective instrument for changing group behavior; the absence of punishment (which includes "nagging") has made it possible to keep a fascinating dialogue going and creates a much happier, open relationship between children and teacher.

The principal also asked the teacher for her comments on what went on in her class. Following is her report:

Evaluation of the class at the beginning of the term:

Very bright, anxious children, eager to learn and with a wide background of experiences. However, much tension in intergroup relationships, very little willingness to "give" or bend, much selfishness displayed, and an eagerness to "get ahead" at the expense of others. Much tattling and an eagerness to get others in trouble. Seemed to be a group who could hardly work together.

Some brief descriptions of what happened at some of the class meetings:

The question was asked, "How many think this is a kind class?" About eight boys thought that it was. Those who did were the boys who were mostly unkind themselves, except for two. The class then gave the opinion that these boys themselves were not kind boys. It was true that especially John (the leader of the dissident group) and Bill (his cohort) had often done cruel things to

others. They took great pleasure in ambushing and beating up Mike, making remarks of a very cutting nature to most of the other children, hiding articles belonging to others, stealing money, leaving school early, and blurting out negative opinions in class at will (this last being a problem of John, not Bill). The boys in question were quite shocked that the others held such an opinion of them, and appeared a little shaken. Their own self-images seemed to be a bit different from that of their peers. The class discussed the difference between humor which was funny and that which was cruel. They talked about what it feels like inside when a person laughs at the expense of others, how it hurts. This led to another topic, what feels good in a relationship and what feels bad, a topic which we discussed the next time. Before ending this meeting, David wanted to know why the class had not let it be known if he was a kind person. It was explained to him that he had not been one to say he felt it was a kind class. He wanted to know anyway, and was happily shocked to see they felt he was a kind person. He had mixed it up with whether they liked him or not, and beamed when he received this vote of confidence. He said he always felt no one liked him before, and that he was an outsider.

Joanne opened another meeting with the topic of friendship. She was new to the school and felt she had no friends in the class. The children discussed what had happened to them when they had been new to the school that made them feel good. Harriet and Ann told how they had approached Carol when she first came to school and Carol told what a warm glow she experienced from their attempts at friendliness. The children also discussed what had sometimes happened to them that made them feel bad. They seemed to agree that careful explanations of rules and practices without getting mad at a new person was most important. They also talked about what characteristics a friend has. Jerry felt it was someone who didn't tattle on you when you did something bad. The other children let it be known that this in the long run hinders the friend if he is in need of guidance, rather than helps him. (The example he cited was hitting the driver of a passing truck with his BB gun and another boy seeing it but not reporting him.) It turned out that Joanne's problem was much caused by her own actions, which the others called "being spoiled," and that she did not try to

adjust or conform to their standards of behavior or rules. Helen patiently explained to her that they were trying very hard, but that it requires give and take on both sides and that she really wasn't trying her hardest to be fair. Raye, who also was exasperated with Joanne, was less patient. The girls agreed to try much harder and were made very much aware of Joanne's problems and feelings. However, as the semester progressed, the others reached their frustration level and felt like giving up with Joanne, who reportedly was not trying at all to cooperate.

At another meeting, Mike was introduced as the topic. Physically overweight and not too clean-looking in appearance, with hair in his eyes and a very loud, offensive voice, and holes in all his tee shirts caused from biting and twisting and chewing on them, he was not pleasant to behold! Mike said he didn't like the class because they didn't like him. When asked why they didn't like him, he said it was because he was fat. The children eagerly disagreed. They said that had nothing to do with it. Mike wanted to know why, then. He was given the opportunity to call on those children he wanted to explain to him what they found offensive about him. Someone said it was because he wears funny hats to school, like the pilot's helmet he wore the day before. (Incidentally, he never wore it again.) Some said he dressed sloppily. Martin said it was because he said things that hurt people. For example, when Martin came home from Europe and showed the class several treasures that he brought to share, Mike said he didn't believe they were from Paris and that he bought the same things here. Martin said that hurt his feelings. David said that when he shared things with the class, Mike blurted out similar derogatory remarks. (Mike still has not cured himself of this, by the way.) John, who had become much more introspective and perceptive, said it was because Mike always made funny faces and looked up at the ceiling with a disgusted look on his face when people tried to talk to him. While he was saying this, Mike was doing just that. John said, "See, Mike, you're doing it right now, and you don't even know it." Mike was asked if anyone, in his opinion, went out of his way to be nice to him. He said, only Alice, whom he liked. Everyone giggled. Alice said she didn't care if everyone did laugh at her, she liked Mike and was not ashamed to be his friend. She liked

being nice to him. We talked as a group about the importance of having one friend at least. The others found that no one really tried to go out of his way to be his friend, but each person would try to make some gesture to show they would try in the next week. They really rose to the occasion, but soon forgot about it and were their usual apathetic selves. However, no one seemed to go out of his way to be nasty, which was a change. Alice continued being nice to Mike, and the children stopped teasing her about it. Harriet, who was one of the girls who was teasing Alice, apologized in a class meeting for doing so, and she said she had once been teased for befriending someone without other friends, and that it took more courage to be his friend and yet she wanted to. She told Alice that, even though it had hurt her feelings when the others teased her, she had forgotten and teased Alice and that she was sorry, as she could really understand how Alice felt. There has been a tremendous change in Mike this semester. He is not lackadaisical about his work or appearance, speaks more quietly, uses more self control, plays a fairer game in the yard, gets along much better with others, and has more (or some) friends.

Joe was brought up at another meeting, because he follows around the noon-aides. He said he doesn't like to play the games because at his old school they were played differently. The team explained that even though he wasn't a good player, they still needed him and his absence made the teams unequal. The children agreed to tell him kindly their rules, and he promised to make an effort to be always present. It solved itself in this way.

As the class saw their individual and class problems working out, they tried to solve bigger problems. They said that, in the yard, balls from other areas are kicked to opposite ends of the playground instead of being returned to the area from where they came, thus delaying and spoiling the game. The girls felt that kindness would be repaid with kindness, and that if a ball came to their area and was handed back to the owner, it would be remembered next time their ball went into a strange area, and then their ball would be handed back rather than be kicked away. The boys said it would never work, and that the older children would still get pleasure out of kicking the ball away no matter how many times they handed theirs back. They suggested I talk with the other

teachers and some kind of rule be made that this was not proper behavior. Older children who continued to kick the younger children's ball would be excluded from that area until they were willing to stop. This is what actually happened, and games are now more pleasurable, at least in that respect.

In one of the last meetings, we discussed hurt feelings due to unfairness of certain team captains. We talked about what a team captain should be like and which boys had been good examples of team captains. The children who were not the skilled players felt that they should get some good positions occasionally, instead of being out in the field all the time. They said the only way they could get to be better players is to be allowed to try or practice in some of the choice positions. Bill said he tries to give everyone a chance, sometimes in some choice positions, and the others agreed he was pretty fair. The good players complained that if the poor players held key positions, the team would never win, so a good team captain should keep this in mind. They felt Sam did a good job of keeping this objective in mind without always monopolizing certain positions with certain players. Sue's team felt she was a good captain because she never gave positions to people who begged for them. Paul, a good player, was told by the others that if the umpire or rules say someone is "out," whether he agrees or not, he should hold his temper. When he was a team captain he had certain authority, and now that he isn't, he should respect the authority of the team captain elected.

Evaluation of the class at the end of the term:

Great improvement in ability to explore what it is that is bothering them and to express their hostility and anger by communicating with their peers and looking for a solution collectively, rather than to tattle or be interested in revenge as their main goal in any hurtful situation. Attitudes toward others of a much more understanding nature. Deeply influenced by peer acceptance and feelings, much more so than that of adults in authority. The absence of serious punitive measures for telling about things they had done or were doing let the air be cleared and consciences eased, and peer reaction seemed to influence their future behavior in this area. Leadership ability that had been channeled negatively was shown to be a great asset to the group when channeled positively. All in all, the class became more perceptive and willing to help one another.

In other schools, where the principals are in my class, similar results have been obtained during the first year that class meetings have been held. Teachers from these schools have come to observe my demonstrations both during the day at the 75th Street School and in the evenings (on their own time) at various schools. The enthusiasm of the principals in my class for class meetings is perhaps both cause and effect of the excellent results that many of their teachers are getting through using them. At Miramonte, an 1800-student elementary school near the 75th Street School, the teachers themselves have organized a study group led by a teacher who is a member of my class. Her principal and superintendent were able to get salary point credit for this class. Attendance has been excellent. Many teachers at Miramonte have been implementing the class meetings in their own rooms based upon a few demonstrations and a lot of conviction that the meetings are worthwhile. In the several districts of the Los Angeles city school system in which I have worked, there has been good support by the superintendents. I believe that the program will expand considerably over the next four or five years.

I shall restate here the procedures required to initiate and maintain class meetings:

1. The educational philosophy outlined in the earlier chapters of this book is discussed by the school faculty. In my experience, agreement is usually reached among the teachers, the administrators, and the counselors that the class meetings are a possible solution to some of the educational problems so prevalent in the school.

2. If at all possible, a teacher, counselor, or principal who has had some experience in working with a class in each of the three types of meetings demonstrates meetings to individual teachers and to the whole faculty. If no one in the school has had direct training, the principal or counselor must try to learn to conduct

meetings on his own and take the initial responsibility. To do so, the principal or counselor works with the classes of one or two interested teachers and then uses these classes for demonstrations. A teacher who is trained and willing to demonstrate her skill to other teachers will help the program to expand more rapidly than if all demonstrations are done by the principal or counselor.

3. I have tried meetings using almost every type of seating arrangement available in a class. The large-circle arrangement, with the teacher and the class sitting in a single circle, is by far the most effective. With any other seating arrangement, some children cannot see or hear each other. It is then almost impossible to establish communication and hold a successful meeting. Having had successful meetings, many teachers change the arrangement of their classes from the traditional rows for regular teaching. They find the children so responsive in the circle that they approximate this arrangement for all teaching by arranging the desks and chairs in a U. Then they need only fill in the top of the U to make a meeting circle. There is then little disorganization in getting from the classroom seating to the meeting circle. Teachers have also found that, if the chairs are arranged in the circle while the children are on the playground during recess or lunch, there is less confusion. Many teachers have appointed monitors to arrange the chairs during these times. This job is excellent for a child who ordinarily doesn't participate well in the meeting because it makes him feel that he is an important part of the process.

4. The teacher sits in a different place in the circle each day. In addition, she makes a systematic effort to arrange the children so that the meeting will be most productive. Boys who squirm and nudge one another can be separated. Boys and girls are interspersed, as are the vocal and the quiet children. Sometimes the teacher sits next to children who tend to disturb the meeting so that she can restrain them. Sometimes she sits next to children who are uncommunicative because her presence often encourages them to talk. Some children, however, will not talk when they sit next to the teacher; she must move often enough to ensure that she does not inhibit these children.

Children welcome visitors to the meetings. Visitors, who usually stimulate and improve meetings, always sit in the circle with the children and are encouraged to participate as regular members of the group. The teacher can decide the number and the kinds of visitors. As meetings continue, both children and teachers from other classes are encouraged to come as visitors. The principal is a regular visitor at various meetings throughout the school year.

5. In learning to conduct meetings, it is good for teachers to team. Provision is made to relieve a teacher so that she can attend a meeting in her team teacher's class. The team teachers should have equal opportunity to attend meetings in each other's class. They should then have an opportunity to discuss their progress, both in regular faculty meetings after school and informally as time permits. During the meeting, the team teacher can be either an observer, perhaps taking notes that are used as a basis for later discussion, or a coleader. Teachers are teamed voluntarily; usually good friends among the faculty make good teams. The teams should be shifted periodically, however, so that interested teachers have an opportunity to work with several other teachers.

6. Subjects for open-ended discussion may be introduced by the teacher, as she sees fit, or by the class. The teacher encourages the class to think of relevant subjects. Sometimes she may allow the students to start the meeting and then shift to a subject that she would like them to discuss. For example, an important subject to be discussed in school is the problems of democracy. The teacher can begin by asking the class what they would like to talk about. If they mention some entertainment facility, as they often do (Disneyland being popular near Los Angeles), the teacher can translate the mention of Disneyland into an actual democratic, problem-solving process by asking, "Who

would like to go to Disneyland?" Almost every child will want to go. The teacher may then say, "Suppose someone gave me two tickets to Disneyland and said I should give these tickets to two children in my class. To whom should I give the tickets?"

In the many times that I have used this question as a basis for discussion in second- through sixth-grade classes, the discussion has always been heated. The children are vitally concerned with deciding fairly and democratically. The final solutions have ranged from the class getting together and earning money so that everyone, not just two, could go, to giving the tickets away because the class could not make a democratic, thoughtful decision. The latter solution is very infrequent. The most frequent solution is to select two students, one good and one poor, who have never been to Disneyland. The students' reasoning is that good effort should pay off, but that in school it pays off too much. Those who do badly get nothing and have little incentive to do better. The children believe that a trip to Disneyland would give the less successful student incentive to do better in school. They also say that the good students and the poor students rarely associate; getting together for a pleasant afternoon at Disneyland would be beneficial to both. Few adult groups could equal this application of democracy. Once a teacher gets the feel of the meetings, she becomes skilled in shifting a class-suggested topic to a thoughtful, open-ended question.

7. Disciplinary meetings should not be repetitive. Discussing a problem child day after day does more harm than good.* Open-ended and educational-diagnostic discussions that are interesting enough to attract the participation of the problem children

* This is illustrated by the charming note sent to a principal who had been having meetings:

> Dear Miss Allen:
> Could we please stop discussing Joanne's prombles at the class meetings. The class is getting *tired* of her prombles!!!
>
> Your Friend,
> Marianne M., Room 10

lead to improved behavior. On the other hand, when important disciplinary problems arise, there should be no reluctance to name names and bring the difficulty out into the open in the class meetings. One meeting leads to another; often problems brought up in Monday's meeting and barely touched upon can form the basis for meetings the rest of the week.

8. Meeting duration should depend upon the age and meeting experience of the class. In the beginning primary-grade children find it difficult to maintain attention for more than 10 or 15 minutes. The time can usually be worked up to 30 minutes, a good meeting length. Fourth, fifth, and sixth graders can meet for 30 minutes or longer and hold interesting discussions. In my experience, holding the meetings to a specific duration is better than allowing meetings to vary in time from day to day. Thus teachers should feel free to cut off a meeting, even during a hot discussion, and tell the students that they are at a good place to start the next meeting. The meeting should not be allowed to drag overtime and become an excuse for the children to avoid other responsibilities during the day. Sometimes, however, especially during disciplinary meetings, it is necessary to extend the meeting a little to allow time to work out a beginning solution.

With primary-grade children, meetings are more effective if they are held before recess, before lunch, or before the school's closing time. These times both provide a natural cutoff for the meeting and allow the interesting meeting to fill a time in the day when children's attention normally lags.

I believe that meetings should be held daily and at a regularly scheduled time. Once a week is the minimum frequency; meeting less often than that does not provide enough continuity in the discussions. Thus one to five meetings a week are the minimum number necessary for the program to be effective.

9. Children seem to respond best if they are given an opportunity to raise their hands. Some teachers are able to run meetings in which children politely wait for an opportunity to talk

without hand raising. This desirable goal is difficult to reach. Because I have never been able to work with a group long enough to attain it, I rely upon hand raising. In calling on children who raise their hands, it is not necessary to be completely democratic. Certain children are going to contribute to a discussion and keep it going; others are not. Part of the skill of running a meeting is learning when and when not to call on different children.

Many children who do not seem able or willing to raise their hands are listening actively and have much to say. It is all right for the leader to call on these children, usually with a remark such as, "You have been listening very carefully; I wonder if you would like to contribute something?"; or, "I'm sure you have an idea about this, and I would like to hear from you." Positive, supportive remarks such as these often lead a child who will not raise his hand to participate. Not insisting if the child declines to speak at first, the teacher should add, "I'm sure you will have something to say in a little while; I'll come back to you then." Very often when I have said this, the child's hand is waving in the air in a few moments. As soon as possible I try to give him a chance to speak. Ordinarily, however, participation is not a problem once the children become accustomed to the meetings.

Some teachers at the 75th Street School have succeeded in getting the children to speak without raising their hands. They take turns politely and talk to each other rather than the teacher. Working with their classes in demonstration meetings has been very exciting for me. These teachers have gone beyond what I have been able to accomplish in my demonstrations. Their success shows how much can be accomplished in class meetings by interested teachers and the resultant involved students.

10. A teacher never interrupts a child to correct bad grammar, bad usage, or mild profanity. These interruptions are destructive. A child corrected when he is desperately struggling to express an idea or use his brain to solve a problem is so put down that he may never volunteer again. He may then become uninterested and disruptive during the meetings.

Sometimes a child will talk endlessly on a subject that interests him but that bores the class. This situation is handled by the teacher intervening after a reasonable period of time and saying, "We would like to go on to someone else; we'll come back to you in a little while," or some statement to that effect. If it is done properly, the child will not be put down.

11. Children will often become very personal, talking about subjects that ordinarily are considered private. These may include activities both at home or in their neighborhood. In this situation the teacher should keep in mind that in the class meetings free discussion seems to be beneficial and that adult anxieties are often excessive. Nevertheless, a child who discusses drunken brawls at home might be quietly asked to talk about something that has more relationship to school. Changing the subject in this way is sometimes unwise, however, because it is just those drunken brawls at home that have the most relationship to his school progress.

In my experience, if we follow the guidelines given for class meetings, children rarely lapse into fantasy or lie. When flights of fantasy do occur, the teacher can simply call on someone else. When the teacher does suspect lying, she can ask the class whether or not they believe the child is telling the truth. The class, not the teacher, should judge. If enough meetings are held, the truth eventually comes to the surface; lying is best combated by holding meetings regularly and often.

Class meetings work as well as the imagination, ingenuity, and conviction of those who run them. They will not, however, take the place of other educational changes needed and described in Chapters 3 through 8.