

## THE GROUP ORGANIZATION IN THE PARENTS' UNION SCHOOL.

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THE unit of organisation in the Parents' Union School at its conception and during its years of development was always a small group of children either in the Home Schoolrooms or in the Preparatory or Private Schools. The problem of large classes did not arise until the principles and methods began to be extended to Public Elementary Schools. For a quarter of a century the great truths expounded by Miss Mason had been applied by her disciples to forms which, compared to the unwieldy size of classes in our large town Elementary Schools, consisted generally of a mere handful of scholars. It was ideal! In those conditions the system was perfected. The child fortunate enough to be in the Parents' Union School was, in truth, "A PERSON who proved that he really *had* power of attention, avidity for knowledge, clearness of thought and the power of dealing with many subjects," that "he *was* moved by the same springs of conduct as his elders," and that "his potentialities *were* as great as theirs." And the teacher? She was really "enabled to deal with individuals, to afford direction, sympathy and guidance, to inspire and to take her part in the delightful commerce of equal minds." Yes! The unit in the Parents' Union School was the group. The delicately balanced programmes of work, the psychological principles, the methods—were all centred round and upon the individual child in the small group.

How could such a system, perfectly organised for small groups, be introduced into schools where classes were large, without a breach of principle or method? For both principles and methods must be kept intact. There must always be the real belief in the principle that a child is born "a person" and

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in the method of compulsory narration of some kind after a single reading. And in addition to the problems of transfer of principles and methods to different conditions there was the real difficulty of expense. How could it be afforded that each child in Elementary Schools "should have and read for himself his own books as set out in the programmes?"

At the P.N.E.U. Conference eleven years ago, the mistress of the pioneer Elementary School said, "I found myself absolutely in agreement with Miss Mason's principles and also with her methods, when dealing with very small classes. How these methods could be adapted to large classes I did not know, but determined to try a few experiments." This was one of her experiments:—She said, "We have economised in the matter of the cost of books by dividing the class into four sections, getting ten instead of forty books in English History, French History, Geography and Natural History, and reading these subjects in sections." Gloucestershire schools also undertook experiments which resulted in the circulation by the Secretary of practical suggestions for group organisation, which, while retaining all the Ambleside principles and methods, lowered the cost of books. These experiments with groups within a class continued from year to year until they were generally recognised as the only satisfactory way of working the scheme in an Elementary School. Their progress had been closely followed by Miss

Mason. She gave them her convinced approval and recommended the organisation to schools newly entering the Parents' Union School. Another authority, closely watching the group method at work, has given this testimony:—"The experiments, which were undertaken for reasons of economy, have more than justified themselves on educational grounds."

Now let us look more closely into this group method of organisation, its structure, its possibilities, its advantages, when it is used and when not. It is not a standard pattern. There is no hard and fast rule about it. You cannot make regulations to govern its use, for there is as much diversity in its structure as there is in the type of teacher and school using it. A class is simply broken up into groups and there is great variety in the size and number of groups. A convenient size is six, but the teacher must take his own measurements. The conditions, composition and size of his class, together with a consideration of the syllabus and the number of books

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supplied, will determine the size and number of groups.

Each group must have a leader. The teacher "supervises" the whole, but, as each group has its different book and subject, he obviously cannot "take" the whole. The class teacher, the Officer, is the Platoon Commander; the group leaders, his N.C.O.'s, are the Section Commanders. At one time, not many years back, it was laid down for those concerned that "the unit in Infantry Training was the Section within the Platoon." It can now, with equal truth and force, be stated that "the unit of narration is the group within the class." The selection of group leaders and groups is most important. All persons are not born leaders; it is only the few. The teacher knows his children's characters and capabilities. By careful observation of them in and out of school—and particularly at games—he can detect those who *would* take control of others, those who *care not* to be controlled, and those who *always must be* controlled. The group leader is the link between his own little group and the teacher of the class. He is a very important little person. His minimum duties are—responsibility for his group's having the right books at the right time and place, some preparation before the lesson, control of the reading, silent or oral, and control of the narration, silent, oral or written, which follows. These duties may be extended at the discretion of the teacher. For instance, in some classes and with some leaders, the duties may include control of discussion and even of a preliminary correction of written reports and written narration. To ensure a perfect supervision and to make the group leader a perfect link, there will be weekly conferences of teacher and group leaders. He will give them their time-tables for the coming week, advise them as to their own preparation and direct them as to the amount to be read before narration, the kind of reading and the kind of narration to follow. They will bring their difficulties to him: he will guide, direct, sympathise and supervise. The teacher's part is never an easy one. In the actual group lessons he is always there passing from group to group, hearing this child read, that one narrate, encouraging this group leader, advising that one. He is the power behind—the group leaders must always feel confident that he is just there, always the authority and guide behind them. He is the director and organiser. He sets up the machinery: they work it. From the termly P.U.S. programme he plans his weekly syllabus.

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He determines which subjects shall be done in groups and which in the class as a whole. The smooth working, the easy running of the group system, without fuss and confusion, is

dependent on his thoughtful planning beforehand.

Here, I think, it would not be out of place to put before you a plan for working the group system in a school with, say, an average of thirty in each class, administered by a Local Education Authority which would supply six copies of any book needed for use by the children and one copy of any book to be read by the teacher. We will commence with Form III. where the boys attend Woodwork and Gardening Classes, and the girls, Domestic Science Classes. An examination of the programme shows that the books suitable for group work may be placed into three "sets," which, for convenience, may be called the "Science Set," the "History Set," and the "Reading Set." The "Science Set" would comprise, in the current term, six copies of each of the following five books:—(i.) *Winners in Life's Race*, (ii.) *Plant Life*, (iii.) *Voyage in Space*, (iv.) *Fairyland of Science*, (v.) *Physical Geography*. Again, five books, six copies of each, would constitute the "History Set":—(i.) *Arnold Forster*, (ii.) *French History*, (iii.) *Indian History*, (iv.) *The Golden Fleece*, (v.) *Ambleside Geography*. Similarly, the "Reading Set" would contain:—(i.) *Household of Sir Thomas More*, (ii.) *The Monastery*, (iii.) *Ourselves and the Age of Fable* (alternately), (iv.) *Hellas the Forerunner*, (v.) *The Golden Treasury and Marmion*. In each of these three sets there are thirty books which would accommodate a class of that number, and, as there are five different titles in each set, the class would be broken up into five different groups. So, whenever the words "Science Set" appear on Form III. time-table, there will be five groups of children each taking one of the five titles comprising that set, and, in order that every child may read every book once per week, "Science Set" must appear five times on the time-table. "Five days in the week, five titles in the set, five groups in the class." In a similar manner "History Set" and "Reading Set" each appears five times on the time-table. The three sets together would give fifteen group lessons weekly. There is another group subject, that is, Picture Study, which only appears once per week. To complete the programme in this Form there are whole class lessons for Marshall's English Literature, Plutarch, and perhaps Poetry, when the teacher

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does the reading from a single copy, and for Shakespeare's Play when every child has a copy. Here is the suggested time-table to carry out this proposed plan in Form III. in a Mixed School:—<sup>2</sup>

DAY.	MORNING.					
	9.40 to 10.0	10.0 to 10.15	10.15 to 10.45	10.45 to 11.0	11.0 to 11.30	11.30 to 12.0
MON.	Physical Exercises	Mental Arithmetic	Arithmetic	Recreation	"Science Set"	"History Set"
TUES.	Domestic Science and Gardening					
WED.	"Reading Set"	Plutarch	Arithmetic	Recreation	"Science Set"	"History Set"
THURS.	"Reading Set"	Poetry	Arithmetic	Recreation	"Science Set"	"History Set"
FRI.	Physical Exercises	Mental Arithmetic	Arithmetic	Recreation	"Science Set"	Music

DAY.	AFTERNOON.					
	1.45 to 2.15	2.15 to 2.45	2.45 to 2.55	2.55 to 3.15	3.15 to 3.45	3.45 to 4.15
MON.	“Science Set”	Literature	Recreation	Drawing and Needlework		
TUES.	and Poultry and Fruit Culture					
WED.	Woodwork, Needlework and Drawing					
THURS.	“History Set”	“Reading Set”	Recreation	Picture Study	Composition	
FRI.	“History Set”	“Reading Set”	Recreation	“Reading Set”	Games or Shakespeare (Dramatic)	

In working to this time-table it is assumed that Religious Instruction is given from the opening of the school until 9.40 a.m. Although "Composition" appears only once—and that is a long lesson—there should be at least two written reports each day, which would be taken within the lessons, "Science Set," "History Set" or "Reading Set," at the teacher's discretion. [p 524]

Now a word as to method. The children in this Form have Programme and Record Note-books. At the beginning of the term the number of pages in each book set for the term is divided by the number of weeks in the term, and the result is entered as a weekly syllabus in these Note-books. They thus know just about how much has to be read each lesson. The quantity is such that one reading only is possible and there is no time to waste. Some of the books in the "Reading Set" cannot be read wholly in school, and hence there must be home reading of such books as Scott. There must be concentrated attention because of the certainty of some form of narration to follow. The reading in Form III. is almost always silent, and the amount to be read before narration is communicated by the teacher through the group leaders. This depends on the book. It may vary from a paragraph to a page or a chapter. In any case it must be large enough to prevent any attempt at committing to memory. Narration may be oral or written, or both, according to the character of the book, and is generally within the group. Where the groups are small, every child takes some part in every oral narration, whether as first narrator, or as supplying omissions, or as the criticiser. If written narration takes place in the lesson, it takes the form of a report or summary, or answer to a specific question, and occupies the last ten minutes or quarter-of-an-hour of the lesson. There is an opportunity during the week in the long "Composition" lesson for children to revel in writing at length. So much for Form III.

Now let us examine the work for Form IIA. There the books may be placed into *two* different "sets"—(i.) the "History Set," which comprises six copies of each of the following five books:—(a) *Arnold Forster*, (b) *French History*, (c) *Ambleside Geography*, (d) *Our Sea Power*, (e) *Round the Empire*, and (ii.) the "Reading Set," which is made up of six copies of each of the following five books:—(a) *The Monastery*, (b) *Dove in the Eagle's Nest*, (c) *Age of Fable*, (d) *Ancient World*, (e) *Citizen Reader*. The class would be broken up into five groups, and "History Set" and "Reading Set" would each appear five times on the time-table, giving a total of ten group lessons each week with, of course, an additional one for Picture Study. To complete the

programme there would be class lessons from single copies of the two Natural History books, *Life and her Children* and *The Sciences*, Plutarch and Poetry, [p 525]

and a class lesson for the play of Shakespeare. A certain number of children in this Form would attend Gardening, Woodwork and Domestic Science Classes. However, as there are only ten group lessons as against fifteen in Form III., this Form will have five half-hour lessons for other subjects.

For Forms IIb. and Ia. the organisation is very similar. As the children in these Forms do not attend outside classes, they have much more time for other lessons as writing, reading, word-work, Nature work. In each Form the books fall into two sets, each containing six copies of five different books, and the classes are organised in five groups for these subjects. In IIb. the "History Set" consists of (i.) *Arnold Forster*, (ii.) *French History*, (iii.) *Ambleside Geography*, (iv.) *Stories from the History of Rome*, (v.) *Round the Empire*. The "Reading Set" contains (i.) *Without Fear and Without Reproach*, (ii.) *Heroes of Asgard*, (iii.) *Poetry*, (iv.) A book set for reading under "Sunday reading," (v.) *The Prince and the Pauper*. In Form Ia. the "History Set" comprises:—(i.) *Tales from Canterbury Cathedral*, (ii.) *Ambleside Geography*, (iii.) *Plant Life in Field and Garden*, (iv.) *Wild Life Studies*, (v.) *Sir Francis Drake*; and the "Reading Set":—(i.) *Pilgrim's Progress*, (ii.) *Tales from the Russian*, (iii.) *Tales from India*, (iv.) *The Princess who grew*, (v.) *Tales from Troy and Greece*. In any of the Forms the teacher may find a book not suitable for group work in his particular class. He may then reduce his groups to four and treat the book as a single-copy book to be read by himself. The methods employed in the Lower Forms differ in some respects from those described for use in Form III. It is found that some of the younger children cannot so easily assimilate the knowledge from silent reading of certain books as from hearing them read. So silent reading decreases and listening increases—may be from the teacher as he passes from group to group, or from the group leader, or from a fluent and intelligent reader within the group. The "Reading Set" of course is also used in the Lower Forms for individual practice in reading.

Again, in the Lower Forms, the amount of written narration decreases and oral narration correspondingly increases. Here, there must always be oral narration, and that within the group. There is, as we go down the Forms, more of the single-copy reading by the teacher, but even after such reading it is an advantage to break into groups and narrate within them. [p 526]

And so we come to Ib. where the set books are probably all single-copy books read by the teacher. Yet groups are formed for oral narration and for reading practice. To illustrate further this proposed plan of group work here is the time-table for Form Ia.:—<sup>3</sup>

DAY.	MORNING.					
	9.40 to 10.0	10.0 to 10.15	10.15 to 10.45	10.45 to 11.0	11.0 to 11.30	11.30 to 12.0
MON.	Music	Poetry	Arithmetic	Recreation	"History Set"	"Reading Set"
TUES.	Physical Exercises	Mental Arithmetic	Arithmetic	Recreation	"History Set"	"Reading Set"
WED.	Physical	Mental	Arithmetic	Recreation	"History	"Reading

	Exercises	Arithmetic			Set"	Set"
THURS.	Physical Exercises	Mental Arithmetic	Arithmetic	Recreation	"History Set"	"Reading Set"
FRI.	Music	Poetry	Arithmetic	Recreation	"History Set"	"Reading Set"
DAY.	AFTERNOON.					
	1.45 to 2.15	2.15 to 2.45	2.45 to 2.55	2.55 to 3.15	3.15 to 3.45	3.45 to 4.15
MON.	Composition	Nature Walk	Recreation	Drawing and Needlework		
TUES.	"Our Island Story"	Writing	Recreation	Picture Study	Reading	Poetry
WED.	Boys: Drawing Girls: Needlework		Recreation	Handwork		
THURS.	Word-work	Writing	Recreation	Nature Note-Books	Composition.	
FRI.	Word-work	Outdoor Geography	Recreation	News of Week	Map of World	Reading

Group work is, educationally, very sound. The second article of the P.U.S. teaching method is:—"As knowledge is not assimilated until it is reproduced, children should 'tell [p 527] back' after a single reading or hearing." The chances of the certainty of a child's narration are multiplied by the number of groups in the class, and the moral spur of increased certainty gives increased assimilation of knowledge. In groups, the brighter children are not kept back to the pace of the slower, and the teacher does not intervene unduly between the child and the book. Furthermore, group work has a good effect on the dull children; they get more encouragement from their fellow-workers in the group than they would in the class, and they receive more individual attention from the teacher. Then, see what an excellent training it is for the child—especially the group leader. If we believe in the greatest article of the P.N.E.U. creed, namely, "Children are born 'persons,' with the potency to do for themselves, moved by the same springs of conduct as their elders, capable of much more than they get credit for, possessing an infinitude of capabilities, needing only suitable training and genial conditions for their due evolution"—then we must have faith in the children. We must trust the leader to lead, we must have confidence in his ability to assert his authority and we must believe in his seriousness. "Every child is a potential citizen," and the successful child group leader must in later years be a valuable asset to the community. In our own privileged profession I would like to look forward to the time when, in Elementary Schools working in the P.U.S., no child should be recommended as a candidate for the teaching profession unless he had a history of good group-leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> This School works from the P.U.S. programmes for Forms I.–III.

<sup>2</sup> Teachers will be interested to have full details of one of the ways in which P.U.S. work can be done in spite of limitations.

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