

Report from Ashridge

GERTRUDE A. HANKAMP

During July and August I had the opportunity to participate in the UNESCO Seminar on Teacher Education at Ashridge College, Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire, England. It seems particularly appropriate to include an account of that experience in this issue of *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP*. In addition, since the Association's executive committee made it possible for me to be away from Washington in order to participate in the seminar, I am taking the privilege of using these pages to report to the members of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. It is not a complete report; you will recognize the limitations of space. Neither is it a formal report; rather, it says the things I want most to say to you. It is, however, a report calling for your reactions. I shall look forward to receiving them.—*G.A.H.*

TO COMPRESS A SIX-WEEKS SEMINAR into approximately 2000 words is no mean task. And to attempt to share the experiences which sixty-five individuals had during that time is presumptuous indeed. Finally, to select the right bits of living and working together and to fit them into place to make a picture which, if not complete, has a degree of unity is probably something which no one should attempt.

Would it be wisest to review in detail the work of one of the three study groups? Shall I concentrate on ideas which speakers shared with the entire seminar group? Would American readers profit most from an account of the outstanding educational films produced by other countries or one of England's Emergency Teacher Training Scheme? Could I tell effectively of the contributions which individual seminar members made to the total work of the group and how my knowledge and understanding of educational efforts in other countries has grown because of an opportunity to work with educators from countries other than my own? Or would readers of *EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP* be most interested in some observations on the group process growing out of the work of such an international seminar?

In this first report, however, I am going to avoid making choices. You will want to know, I am sure, bits about many aspects of the seminar work. So it is a bird's-eye view that you will have in this "Report from Ashridge."

Where We Worked Together

About thirty miles north of London is Ashridge, once a private estate, now an adult education center. Its location is ideal for six weeks of working together—far enough from the rush of

modern living to allow for long periods of concentrated work, close enough to centers of historical and current interest that a day's trip holds many satisfactions.

It was in this setting that sixty-five people from twenty-three countries



Sport & General Photo, London

learned to know a bit of England and its people, shared the English rations, and accepted the English rain. From here we traveled by bus to see firsthand some of England's Emergency Training Colleges and to visit briefly Oxford, Cambridge, London, Stratford-on-Avon, and St. Albans. Most important of all, it was here that we worked, discussed, wrote, ate, talked, and played together; that we learned to know each other as people; that we shared our common educational problems; that we became convinced that, just as UNESCO had provided the setting in which we might work together for a brief period of time, each one of us had a personal responsibility to further the work of UNECO in each of its member nations.

Who We Were

Because of the theme, "The Education and Training of Teachers," participants were, for the most part, in-

dividuals responsible for some aspects of teacher education in their own countries. Among them were staff members and administrators in teachers colleges, liberal arts colleges, and university schools of education; secondary school teachers and principals; supervisors; members of ministries of education; and individuals working in research centers.

Our Most Important Task

The work of the three study groups, focused on a survey of present practices and desired improvements in various aspects of teacher education—Child Growth and Development, Social Understanding, and International Understanding—comprised the core of seminar activity. With the exception of a few days on which trips were scheduled, groups met for discussion three hours daily and individuals spent many extra hours in committee meetings and writing.

Each study group devoted its attention, in the main, to one of the three topics. However, it was clearly indicated that this need not limit group discussions in any way and that the various groups might easily find themselves concentrating on similar problems. The fact that this proved true in several instances indicates both the existence of certain common educational problems in countries represented and the atmosphere of freedom in which work moved forward. Throughout the seminar fairly good avenues of communication existed for sharing the work of the three groups.

A Concentrated View of One Group

Since I was a member of Study Group I, "Child Growth and Development," I'd like to share with you some of its accomplishments. Discussions centered around ways and means of improving the teaching of child growth and development and of putting into effect in actual learning situations accepted principles and results of research. Certainly neither the nature nor the content of the discussions differed materially from those in which we might participate in this country.

Because of the varied makeup of the group, however, the illustrations of practice and the needs for improvement reflected a world-wide point of view. Working with a leader from Australia and a secretary from the United States (yes, your editor discovered first-hand what it means to be a group recorder over an extended period of time) were fellow-educators from Wales, Czechoslovakia, Canada, South Africa, India, Ireland, France, Austria, Burma, Turkey, and England.

How Group Process Worked

Readers of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP will be interested, I believe, in some aspects of the group process which are particularly evident in an international group. For, although the fifteen members in Group I were much like any fifteen people working together in any situation, the very fact that we came from widely separated parts of the world introduced factors that would not hold true, to such a marked extent, in a national group.

□ **What happens, for example, when two languages must be used? What effect does the interpretation of every statement into either French or English have on the flow of discussion? How does even a minimum of such interpretation affect individual contributions and group understanding?**

□ **How does one deal with differences in terminology when the same language is used? How many of my American colleagues would, I wonder, comprehend immediately what the English mean by "infant school," "sixth form," or "public school." And would you not, as I did, come to the conclusion that some of our American pedagogues is both fearful and wonderful, when you attempted to translate it into terms understandable to all.**

□ **Would you modify your opinion that long speeches have no place in discussion sessions? When you reflect, for example, how little you know about the education of New Zealand or Turkey, might you not agree that it would be well to have one person talk at length if you are to move forward with a degree of understanding?**

□ **How do varied responsibilities to governments affect the kind of work done in light of both individual and group purposes? Seminar participants were not official government representatives, but many will be asked to file reports.**

□ **How do widely differing national cul-**

Educational Leadership

tures, political ideologies, and means of solving social and economic problems affect the way in which a group attacks problems?

¶ What do constant visitors and press representatives do to the makeup of the group? In an agency such as UNESCO a high quality of public relations is not only imperative but most desirable. Can effective group work move forward under such circumstances?

In spite of—or because of the recognition of—the existence of the aspects indicated above, both members and observers agreed that there had been a high quality of human relations evident in all of the work of the group. In evaluating its behavior over a period of six weeks it was generally agreed that:

—there had been a consistently high level of member participation. Certainly skillful leadership was a major reason for this degree of success.

—the group early achieved a spirit of “we-ness”—a group sense. Very soon identification with countries became relatively unimportant. Essentially, individuals became a group looking for ways of improving the education of children and youth through improved teacher education. —questions of misunderstanding and disagreement were talked out until a consensus was reached. Not once was it necessary to take a vote to reach agreement. This quality of group thinking was particularly characteristic of the preparation of group reports. In the process of their preparation there was discussion, writing, examination and suggestion, and rewriting. There resulted, therefore, reports which, if not headline making, were genuine group efforts representing the combined thinking of people from a dozen countries.

A comment on the work of all of the study groups comes from H. C. Dent, editor of the *Times Educational Supplement* (London), of August 28,

1948. Mr. Dent visited the seminar on two separate occasions. He says:

It was an exhilarating and vastly encouraging experience to sit as observer with these groups toward the end of what must have been an extremely arduous period of concentrated study and to feel the warm friendliness and the comradely atmosphere which inhibited no out-spokenness and encouraged no evasion, even for courtesy's sake. It was begun in the hearts of men, surely here was illustration that peace begins thus also.

And that, I believe, must be reckoned the outstanding achievement of this seminar. “The educative influence of the members upon each other,” as one participant described it. “Intangible benefits,” said another. But there were tangible, and even visible, benefits as well. Members who arrived shy, diffident, constrained matured into the best of good companions and first-rate contributors to discussion. Many learned more in six weeks than they could have done in six years at home.

Some of the Ideas We Shared

Certainly one of the functions of UNESCO's Education Division was served through the sharing of new developments and identified needs in teacher education. American participants and others, for example, left with an understanding and appreciation of:

—*the way in which England is courageously and positively meeting the teacher shortage problems.* Some eighty emergency colleges have been set up. In these colleges students take a year's intensive course. In observing these colleges it was interesting to note that each individual staff plans the curriculum with relative freedom and that, in general, curriculums are based on the needs of learners rather than on a traditional framework. Neither is completion of the secondary school certificate necessary to entrance. While a large proportion have completed secondary school, most of the

students are mature individuals with some background in business or industry or a university degree. Tuition is free and maintenance allowances are available. —*the financial underwriting of preparation for teaching to which several countries subscribe.* Not only England but also such countries as Australia and New Zealand provide generous financial assistance to teachers in training. The implications for both recruitment and selection of future teachers are obvious. —*the positive way in which countries such as France and Turkey are attacking the education of teachers for rural areas.* —*India's courage in extending educational opportunities at the elementary level to all its people.* In one province the goal for the next five years is 22,000 new village schools. During the past year 4500 new ones have been started and in many cases villagers have themselves built the school. The problem of teacher education in such a situation is difficult for us to comprehend.

To other participants American education also had ideas to offer. The workshop idea, our extensive program of in-service education, the cooperative work of colleges and public school systems, and various techniques of child study—such as the sociogram—are aspects in our program of teacher education which were relatively new to many from other countries.

The Problems Common to All

It is interesting in this connection, also, to note common problems that seemed crucial ones to a large portion of the seminar members. From every group, for example, came a report with suggestions for teacher recruitment. In Group II this concern was directly related to the social status of teachers; in Group I it grew out of a consideration of the mental health of teachers as it

affected the mental health of children. Group I also found the problem of social understanding an integral part of all problems of child development; and in one of its final reports "Education and International Understanding" dealt with the particular contribution of the human development approach to international goodwill. Again and again, in all group reports, came the plea for a more functional and realistic approach to teacher education. Various countries are moving forward in this respect, but in no one is there complete satisfaction with programs as they now exist.

What We Said About Ourselves

I wish that all of you might have sat through the two final days of sharing and evaluation. There was overwhelming agreement that such international seminars should be held regularly and that one dealing with teacher education should be repeated within three to five years. Participants agreed, also, that pre-planning on the part of UNESCO and on the part of governments with respect to participants would materially improve the working period. The statements of strengths far outweighed weaknesses, however, and it is encouraging to note that suggestions for improvement tended to emphasize the desirability of the workshop approach.

A Task for ASCD

"Six unforgettable weeks" was the evaluation of one seminar participant. For ASCD's executive secretary they were just that. To share with you a bit of that experience is now my responsibility. For I am convinced that in this world in which we live today any

educational efforts which confine themselves continually to the shores of any one country are not realizing their full potentialities. I propose that ASCD can extend its area of professional service and enrich itself by:

☐ moving as rapidly as it can to the completion of its project to bring an educator from another country to visit American schools and colleges and, fully as important, to share with us what other countries are doing. Our fund for financing such a visitor is two-thirds complete. I invite all ASCD people who have not contributed to the fund to do so immediately. Personally, I know of no other project on which we might more profitably expend our efforts.

☐ including in the pages of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP some contributions from educators in other lands as well as reviews of outstanding professional books from other countries. In our knowledge of professional developments beyond our own shores we, as educators, are as guilty of the term *isolationist* as are some of our public officials we so glibly accuse.

☐ participating in some of UNESCO's ongoing projects and offering our services to that body of which we are a member nation. Supervisors, teachers, and children can cooperate actively in the UNESCO tensions project. I hope very soon to give you more detailed information on that. It would seem also that ASCD has within its membership a committee willing to draw up for the UNESCO Education Section a description of outstanding developments in teacher education in the United States, with places where such experimentation is going on and individuals available for consultant service. Neither would it be beyond comprehension that such a report might indicate some of our own areas of weakness in which consultant service from other countries would be helpful.

☐ actively promoting, in our own jobs, greater opportunities for improvement of international understanding and knowledge of the agencies working for world goodwill, through programs of adult education as well as in work with children and youth.

ASCD's program is *your* program. Your reaction to these proposals will help to make it even more so.

May we emphasize two concrete proposals for furthering the cause of international understanding through education.

1. Curriculum centers in Germany will welcome as many curriculum bulletins as you can send for their use. According to information we have received there is particular need for bulletins dealing with the social studies, citizenship education, teacher-pupil planning, literature (emphasis on children's literature concerning America and other countries), curriculum laboratory set-ups, school planning, and workshops. If you can spare fifteen copies of each bulletin, all the curriculum centers can be served. Wrap these materials carefully and send them immediately to Chief, Education Branch, E. and C.R. Division, OMGUS, APO 742, c/o Postmaster, New York, N. Y. It will be wise to send a covering letter to Germany indicating that you are sending the curriculum bulletins. We will appreciate it if you inform the ASCD office of any materials sent.

2. Do you have in your personal, professional library or school library a copy of *Education for International Understanding in American Schools*. This valuable publication sells for \$1 and can be ordered from the ASCD office. We believe that every school library should have a copy and that educational leaders should be familiar with this publication.

Copyright © 1948 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.