

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

It is an indisputable fact that human beings are social animals by nature. From the time of birth, almost all individuals belong to a group. Marvin E. Shaw, a noted authority in the study of groups, said that the typical human being spends a major portion of his waking life in groups of one sort or another. Life itself may be said to originate in groups.¹

The literature about groups has gone back to the distant past but serious research on the importance of group dynamics has only started in recent years. Cartwright and Zander confirmed that “Group dynamics began, as an identifiable field of inquiry, in the United States toward the end of the 1930’s. Its origination as a distinct specialty is associated primarily with Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) who popularized the term, group dynamics, and in 1945 established the first organization devoted explicitly to research on group dynamics.”²

Lewin’s views on group dynamics is widely accepted by his colleagues. As noted by Forsyth, “Despite variations among group dynamicists, virtually all agree with Lewin’s basic concept of *interactionism*: behavior is a function of the person and the environment.”³ In Lewin’s opinion, a group can be defined as “a collection of individuals who are interdependent on one another.”⁴ This position was further refined by Fiedler who defined a group as “a set of individuals who share a common fate, that is, who are *interdependent* in the sense that an event which affects one

member is likely to affect all.”⁵ McGrath added that “a group is an aggregation of two or more people who are to some degree in dynamic interrelation with one another.”⁶

It should be noted that the recent growth of interest in group dynamics is not only a result of the merging of certain trends within the social sciences but at the same time fulfilling a need for human beings to have a better understanding of the social world they live in.⁷ It is undeniable that group dynamics is an important factor in the way a group operates.

This study explores the role that group dynamics played in the various tasks of The National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) for music (1996). As reported by Crooks and Flockton, the NEMP “commenced in 1993, with the task of assessing and reporting on the achievement of New Zealand primary school children in all areas of the school curriculum. Children are assessed at two class levels: Year 4 (halfway through primary education) and Year 8 (at the end of primary education). Different curriculum areas and skills are assessed each year, over a four year cycle.”⁸

According to Crooks, groups were used in the NEMP tasks because ‘much of the work that is done in schools and in our society is performed in and by groups. Our national curriculum places emphasis on social skills, which are able to be assessed in groups. Groups also allow less capable students to be supported by more capable students. Finally, there are curriculum goals which can only be achieved and assessed in groups: such things as group music performance, drama, and other goals which require interaction among participants.’⁹

He added that the group size of four was deliberately chosen as many of the NEMP tasks involved both pair-work as well as group work. Groups of four were considered good as no members would be left out and also, 'groups larger than four would have been unwieldy and hard to videotape'.¹⁰

This paper aims to look at the interaction process of a group from four main areas which have been perceived to be the most relevant to the focus. These are the importance of peer influence in a group setting, the spatial arrangements in the group situation, the physical characteristics and the musical abilities of the group leaders and the gender of the group members.

1.2 Peer influence

The age groups of the pupils who participated in the NEMP test were 8 years old and 12 years old. As a child grows older, he/she tends to spend more time away from home and during this period, peers become more influential as teachers and models. There is no doubt that every child wants to be socially accepted by his/her peers and at the age of 8 and 12, the child will be very easily influenced by friends or even by someone who has strong personality. Forsyth confirmed this statement. He commented that "we tend to think that we personally pick and choose our beliefs, attitudes, and values through thoughtful reflection. Yet the groups that we belong to are, in many cases, the true source of even our most private and cherished beliefs."¹¹ Taking this into consideration, it will be interesting to observe the role played by peer influence in the group and team tasks and how it affected the results.

1.3 Spatial arrangement

Another aspect of group dynamics to be explored in this research will be the importance of the spatial arrangements in the group situation. Shaw noted that there seems to be relatively little research devoted to this area of group dynamics. He remarked it is quite true that “spatial arrangements in groups exert significant influences upon the perception of status, the patterns of participation, leadership activities, and the affective reactions of group members.”¹²

In the group and the team tasks of the NEMP, the four pupils were placed in specific positions. As we shall discuss in a later chapter, such an arrangement might have influenced the results for certain tasks. The quality of the interaction between group members can sometimes be determined by the seating arrangement. Shaw also believes that there is a relationship between spatial arrangements and leadership.¹³ This view is further supported by a related study conducted by Bass and Lubeck in 1949.

1.4 Attributes of group leaders

The third aspect of group dynamics to be explored is the importance of physical characteristics and the musical ability of the group leaders. According to Shaw, the influence of physical attributes such as size, weight, height, and general health and the effect they have on the behaviour of the individual group member and the responses of other group members to the outstanding child are important issues. However, he does acknowledge the fact that such physical traits can sometimes be overcome by “the effects of more powerful variables such as personality and ability.” He also feels

that there is relatively little attention devoted to the investigation of the effects of physical traits in group dynamics. For example, the skinny group member may be less accepted in the group and is hence less effective as a group member.¹⁴

The group and team tasks in the NEMP are performed by children in the same age group and from the same school. Therefore, there is a very high possibility that they are acquainted with each other before attempting the tasks. Knowing the musical ability of certain members of the group will also affect the results of these tasks as it is only natural for the less musically-able child to follow the child with better musical ability. Thus, the perceived or actual abilities of the group leader often determine how effectively he/she performs in the group and consequently, this will influence how the others react to him/her as the group leader.

1.5 Gender

Last but not least, the final aspect of group dynamics which will be relevant in this research is the gender of the group members. The gender of the group members can be seen as a fairly obvious factor which determines group behaviour. Perry stated that based on the cognitive-developmental theory, children are believed to have firmly established their sexuality by the time they reach the concrete operations state which, according to Piaget, begins at about 7 years of age. Children delight in perceiving themselves to be similar to their peers. It is also at this stage that they begin to learn the role of conformity.¹⁵ For example, the society has stereotyped boys as assertive and rough, while girls are demure and more reserved. On the other hand, girls are perceived to be more interested in music than boys. Thus, it will be interesting to see

how the respective gender actually conform to the stereotype image and this may yet be another factor which will affect their behaviour and in turn, the results obtain from the NEMP tests.

Apart from looking at the effect of group dynamics in the group and team tasks of the NEMP, this research paper also aims to determine the suitability of each of the tasks as a group or team activity. It is assumed at this stage that after a detailed analysis of the videotapes of the tasks provided, there will be certain tasks which will be more suitable to be offered as an individual task in future NEMP due to the conflicting nature of the group dynamics present.

1.6 Questions

The aim of this study is to find the answers for certain questions related to the workings of group dynamics in the NEMP for music (1996). These questions are: Were group dynamics present? Did the presence of group dynamics affect the results of the test? Were the children influenced by their peers? Did spatial factors have an effect on the group dynamics? Did physical attributes and musical ability play a part in the choice of a leader? Did the gender of the group members affect the results? Were the tasks suitable to be a group or team task or would it be better to offer them as an individual task?

1.7 Conclusion

The focus of this study is to examine the importance of group dynamics within the NEMP group and team tasks situation. However, group dynamics is a complex field

of study by itself and hence, this research paper will **only** focus on four main aspects. As the pupils participating in the NEMP are from Year 4 and Year 8, it is thus quite appropriate to look at the peer influence they have on each other and as discussed before, this peer influence stems from the social needs of a child of that age. One of the interesting point will be to how the pupils adjust to each other in the group and if this will in turn affect the results of the NEMP tests.

Another area of group dynamics covered in this paper is the importance of spatial arrangements in the group situation and the third aspect is to explore whether the physical characteristics and the musical ability of group leaders will affect the group dynamics. Finally, the issue of whether the gender of the group members affects the NEMP results is also discussed.

In addition to the four main areas explored, the suitability of each task as a group or team task is assessed. The desired outcome of this study is to provide more information on the role of group dynamics in the 1996 NEMP so that this aspect will be taken into consideration for future NEMP tasks.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Shaw, Marvin E. 1971 *Group dynamics: The psychology of small group behavior*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, p.3.
- ² Cartwright, Dorwin and Zander, Alvin Frederick. 1960 *Group dynamics: Research and theory*. Evanston, Illinois: Row, Peterson and Company, p.9.
- ³ Forsyth, Donelson R. 1990 *Group dynamics*. California, USA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, p.23.
- ⁴ Lewin, Kurt. 1951 *Field theory in social science*. New York: Harper, p.146-147.
- ⁵ Fiedler, Fred Edward. 1967 *A theory of leadership effectiveness*. New York: McGraw-Hill, p.6.
- ⁶ McGrath, J.E. 1984 *Groups: Interaction and performance*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, p.8.
- ⁷ Ibid, p.9.
- ⁸ Crooks, Terry and Flockton, Lester. 1997 *NEMP Music Assessment Result 1996*. Dunedin: New Zealand, p.4.
- ⁹ E-mail from Terry Crooks, 1 October 1998. (see Appendix Two)
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Forsyth, p.41.
- ¹² Shaw, p.129.
- ¹³ Ibid, p.135.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, p.165.
- ¹⁵ Perry, David G. and Bussey, Kay. 1984 *Social development*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., p.264.