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## Table of Contents

	Page
On the Dependence of O-H Bond Length in Hydrogen Bonded OH---O Systems Venkataraman Ananthanarayanan .....	6
An Approach to the Fiction of Miguel de Unamuno Alma C. Allen .....	10
The Problem of Theoretical Approach in Economic Investigation Sarvan K. Bhatia .....	15
The Development and Status of Industrial Arts in Georgia Schools Clyde W. Hall .....	22
Synthesis of 4:6 Thio 1, 3, 5-triazine Derivatives [1] Kalmalaker B. Raut.....	29
Flow Parameters Behind Three Dimensional Shock Wave Nazir A. Warsi .....	31
Ability Grouping: Pros and Cons John Wesley Jordan .....	34
In Our Other America Raymond Pace Alexander.....	50
Isolation of Lignoceric Acid from Acorns Charles Pratt .....	58
Why Climb Mount Parnassus Miles M. Jackson, Jr.....	60
An Appraisal of a Pre-Freshman Summer Program Robert D. Reid.....	65
Desegregation and Library Education Elonnie J. Josey.....	72

## Table of Contents – (Continued)

	Page
Certain Condensation Reactions with Copper Powder as a Catalyst Kamalakar B. Raut .....	78
Qualifications of College Teachers: 1918 - 1962 Philip D. Vairo .....	80
A Study of the Second Year Female Academic Probates at Tuskegee Institute Tommie M. Samkange .....	90
Experimental Studies Exploring the Effectiveness of the Group Method in Counseling Philip D. Vairo and Sheldon Marcus .....	108
Thermodynamic Parameters Behind Three Dimensional Shock Wave Nazir A. Warsi .....	112
Development Planning Under Democracy: The Case of India Sarvan K. Bhatia .....	116
Synthetic Preparation of Apiose from Dihydroxy Acetone Charles Pratt .....	126
Deflection of Streams Behind a Curved Shock Wave Nazir A. Warsi .....	131

# Experimental Studies Exploring the Effectiveness of the Group Method in Counseling

by

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and  
Sheldon Marcus

Hoppock,<sup>1</sup> a leading student of occupational information, points out that the group technique has been considered by many educators less important and less effective than individual counseling. He challenged this concept as an absurd hypothesis and advocated that the group method, not individual counseling, be considered the indispensable part of the guidance program.

This article summarizes nine experiments in which the value of the group method as a technique for disseminating occupational information was explored. Conflicting results from different studies indicate encouraging success in some cases and failure in others. Apparently the success or failure of disseminating occupational information depends upon many factors about which the writers of this article can only speculate. The experiments are arranged according to school level.

## Secondary School Level

Bruch<sup>2</sup> compared four classes of tenth-grade pupils at Abraham High School in San Jose, California, using one as a control group during the experimental period. No occupational information was presented to this group. A second group divided its time between activities geared toward acquiring occupational information and taking interest and abilities tests. A third group spent all of its time studying occupational information. The last group spent most of its time taking a battery of tests and devoted very little time to occupational information *per se*.

Bruch found that the pupils in the experimental groups acquired more understanding of the world of work and the advantages offered by particular occupations than the pupils in the control group.

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Hoppock, "Current Concepts and Status of Group Guidance in Secondary School," Paper read before the Guidance and Counseling Training Institute, University of Missouri, June 29, 1961, p. 1. (Mimeographed)

<sup>2</sup>Barbara Bruch, "Vocational Plans as Influenced by Three Experimental Guidance Procedures," *Abstracts of Dissertations*, Stanford University (1951), 16.

The experimental group spending all its time studying occupational information acquired the most occupational information. On the other hand, the group spending its time taking a battery of tests acquired the least information about occupations among the three experimental groups.

Cuony<sup>3</sup> undertook to determine whether or not the group method of disseminating occupational information would produce an amelioration of an individual's earning power and job satisfaction. He taught a course, Job Finding and Job Orientation, to an experimental group of high school seniors. He compared the experimental group with an equated control group not given occupational information, in terms of job satisfaction and earning power.

The combined annual earnings of the experimental group exceeded those of the control group by \$7,719.00. Job satisfaction was found to be more prevalent among the members of the experimental group than those of the control group. There was less unemployment among the pupils in the experimental group than those in the control group.

Four years later after the first study was made, Cuony<sup>4</sup> again compared the same experimental group and control group used in his first experiment. The average pupil in the experimental group was earning \$3,105.00 per year, while the pupil in the control group was averaging \$2,614.00 per year. The combined earnings of the experimental group exceeded those of the control group for the same year of \$14,226.00. The entire cost of the course to the school was \$1,542.00.

Dobberstein's<sup>5</sup> experiment involved three groups of equated eighth-grade boys and girls, each consisting of 50 pupils. Two groups were exposed to occupational information. No occupational information was presented to the third group. Before and after the experiment all the pupils took tests on occupational information. The two experimental groups showed significantly greater gains than the control group.

Jessup<sup>6</sup> taught a 10-week unit on occupations to a ninth-grade class. The objective of the course was to impart occupational information that would be helpful to the pupils in choosing vocations. After completion of the course, a test based upon material covered in the unit was given to all the pupils in the class. Jessup also gave the test to an eighth-grade class which had not received any occu-

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<sup>3</sup>Edward Cuony and Robert Hoppock, "Job Course Pays Off," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, XXXII (March, 1954), 389.

<sup>4</sup>Edward Cuony and Robert Hoppock, "Job Course Pays Off Again," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, XXXVI (October, 1957), 116.

<sup>5</sup>W. P. Dobberstein, "A Study of Two Methods of Occupational Orientation for Junior High School Pupils," *Dissertation Abstracts*, University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, XIII (1953), p. 1086.

<sup>6</sup>Robert Hoppock, *Group Guidance Principles, Techniques, and Evaluation* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1949), p. 190.

pational information. From the results of the tests, Jessup concluded that a course in occupations does not impart enough occupational information to justify itself at the ninth-grade level.

Kutner<sup>7</sup> conducted an experiment with two successive graduating classes at Paterson Technical and Vocational High School in New Jersey. The January class of 47 pupils was divided into an experimental and control group, and the June graduating class of 73 pupils was similarly divided. The January experimental group was taken on 10 occupational field trips and the June group was taken on 8 occupational field trips. The control groups did not go on any occupational field trips.

The experiment was followed up a year later using the following criteria: (1) employer ratings, (2) weekly wages, (3) job satisfaction. Kutner found that there were no significant differences in the experimental and control groups according to the criteria.

### College Level

Lowenstein<sup>8</sup> attempted to discover the effects of an occupations course taken by students in high school on their adjustment to college during their first year. He found that a higher percentage of the students in the experimental group said they based their occupational selection on interviews with people in their chosen profession. Second, the experimental group chose a wider variety of occupational fields than the control group. A smaller percent of the experimental group indicated that they were influenced in making their career selection by their parents or close relatives.

Hoyt<sup>9</sup> organized three groups of twenty male freshmen each at the University of Minnesota. Each student was individually assigned by a random method to one of the three groups. The first group received vocational counseling on an individual basis; the second group participated in the group program; and the control group was not exposed to either of the two programs.

All sixty of the students indicated their tentative occupational choice, how certain each was of it, and how satisfied each was with his choice before and after the experimental duration. He concluded from these samplings that both the individual and group methods were effective in producing positive changes in occupational choice.

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<sup>7</sup>J. E. Kutner, "An Evaluation of Occupational Field Trips Conducted by Paterson Technical and Vocational High School in Terms of Vocational Success," *Dissertation Abstracts*, University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, Michigan, XIII (1958), p. 2030.

<sup>8</sup>Norman Lowenstein and Robert Hoppock, "High School Occupations Course Helps Students Adjust to College," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, XXXIV (September, 1955), 21.

<sup>9</sup>D. P. Hoyt, "An Evaluation of Group and Individual Procedures in Vocational Education," *Journal of Applied Psychology* (February, 1955), 26-30.

Miller<sup>10</sup> divided Fairleigh Dickinson freshmen into three equated groups of 33 each. With two groups Miller used the group method to disseminate occupational information. He left the third group without instruction as to occupational information. Before and after the experiment, all the participants took an occupational information test. The test results revealed significantly greater gains in learning about occupational information for the experimental groups.

At the University of Minnesota, Stone<sup>11</sup> found that a course in occupational information decreased the number of students who were judged by their counselor to have made poor occupational choices in relation to their abilities. In addition, he found that a course in occupational information plus individual counseling decidedly helped improve their social adjustment.

### Summary

The purpose of this article has been to investigate the effectiveness of the group method as a means of disseminating occupational information. This has been attempted through a careful reading of experiments dealing with the group method as a technique of disseminating occupational information. Nine experiments were studied in this investigation. Seven experiments, in varying degrees, corroborated the effectiveness of the group method as a means of imparting occupational information; two did not corroborate the effectiveness of the group technique. Six of the experiments studied were conducted on the secondary school level and three on the college level.

### Recommendations

This investigation revealed several areas where further study is needed. The first of these is the need for study of the group method as a technique for disseminating occupational information. Second, is the group method more or less effective than individual counseling? Third, this study has led to another important question to be considered: Which are the most effective activities that will best promote learning occupational information through the group method? Several additional problems that have also suggested themselves as a result of this research are:

1. When should a course in occupations be taught?
2. What material should a course in occupations include?
3. Who should teach a course in occupations?
4. Should a course in occupations be required in high school?  
In college?

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<sup>10</sup>R. A. Miller, "Teaching Occupations Using Films and Field Trips," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, XXXI (March, 1953), 373-375.

<sup>11</sup>C. H. Stone, "Are Vocational Courses Worth Their Salt?" *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, VIII (Summer, 1948), 161-180.