

## Preferred Group Interaction Styles of Rural and Urban Students

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This paper describes differences in preferred modes of group interaction between pre-adolescent children from four relatively distinct social environments: rural, suburban, urban and inner city. Rural and inner city groups prefer similiar modes as do urban and suburban groups. Implications and suggestions are made.

Group workers including teachers and counselors, believe that goal-directed social interaction and group support are necessary conditions for academic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and community problem solving [5]. As a result of participation, group members interact and influence each other and their behavior becomes modified by their participation in the group.

Dinkmeyer and Muro [1] concluded that professionals using group techniques need to know what type of forces affect a group, what forces tend to destroy it, and how these same forces promote or retard individual growth. Shertzer and Stone [8] noted the need to evaluate several phases of the group process such as the group climate and process. The teacher or counselor has to consider practical concepts such as group composition, group size, physical arrangements for the group, voluntary or required participation, and conformity and group behavior. Jensen and Parson [7] have identified socioeconomic status, clique formation, rural versus urban residence and group cohesiveness as structural variables which affect the group process. Duncan and Gumaer [3] concluded that before helping professionals can effectively begin to practice group work, it is essential that they organize carefully and plan extensively.

Gazda [4] pointed to the need for further research with specific groups. He reported that the greatest number of studies have been conducted using college students or adults and that there has been a paucity of studies looking at factors which affect the group process of children, particularly pre-adolescents.

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether group work and content style differ between urban and rural students. More specifically, the problem studied concerns the pattern of preferences for group work style by urban, inner city, suburban and rural students using the Hill Interaction Matrix as a theoretical framework.

### Method

#### *Instruments*

The Intermediate form of the Children's Interaction Matrix (CIM) [2] consists of 64 items in which the youth are asked to respond by checking "usually," "sometimes,"

or "not often." The test is based upon the conceptual framework of Hill [6]. Hill utilizes a two dimensional framework to describe a person's preferred content and work-style modes of group behavior. The CIM grid is a four by four grid with the rows representing work styles and the columns representing content style. The categories are described in Table 1. Four items are included in each of the 16 cells.

The split-half reliability of the total scale (Total Acceptance Score) is .85. The split-half reliabilities of the work style dimensions range from .71 for conventional to .75 for confrontive. The concurrent validity of the CIM was studied by comparing scores with peer and teacher nominations [2].

#### *Sample*

The sample consisted of 743 students, 378 males and 365 females from grades 4 to 8. There were 273 in fourth grade, 264 in fifth grade, 152 in sixth grade and 54 in seventh and eighth grade.

Four types of school districts were represented in the sample: inner city, urban, suburban and rural. There were 115 students from inner city schools in Cincinnati, Ohio, 115 from urban Columbus, Ohio schools, 134 were from suburban Merrimack, New Hampshire schools, and the rural sample consisted of 250 boys and girls from the Veazie and Skowhegan school systems in Maine.

#### *Procedure*

The CIM was administered in classrooms by home-room teachers and school counselors.

#### *Analysis*

One way analyses of variance were computed on each of the nine scales of the CIM by type of school district. Duncan's Multiple Range test was utilized to test differences between the means of the four groups.

### Results

The means and standard deviations for each scale by

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**Table 1**  
Categories of Interaction in the CIM

Category	Description
<b>Work/Style (rows)</b>	
B—Conventional	Behavior that is socially appropriate for any group. The interaction may be so socially oriented to be devoid of any content and be no more than pleasantries and amenities.
C—Assertive	Argumentative, hostile or assertive statements.
D—Speculative	Speculative, intellectual, or controlled approach to pertinent therapeutic issues.*
E—Confrontive	Penetration to the significant aspects of a discussion; and because of this penetration, these statements confront members with aspects of their behavior usually avoided.
<b>Content/Style (columns)</b>	
I—Topic	Statements about any one of an infinite number of topics of general interest, exclusive of the group or its members being the topic.
II—Group	The speaker identifies with the group as an entity, and personal reactions to the group are probed for or are given in answer to such probes.
III—Personal	Interaction having as its topic a group member and is usually a member's actions, problems or personality.
IV—Relationship	Demonstrates (acts out), alludes to or discusses a relationship between members or between a member and the group.

\* In the authors' thinking we substitute the word developmental for therapeutic.

**Table 2**  
Comparison of CIM Scales by Type of School District

Group	U Rural (245)		S Suburban (134)		I Inner City (115)		U Urban (250)		F	Groups Differing
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Conventional	33.55	5.04	34.30	4.98	32.78	4.64	34.61	4.92	4.39*	U-R,I S-R
Assertive	28.13	4.25	27.62	4.10	28.50	4.56	28.29	4.77	0.95	
Speculative	29.63	5.22	31.04	5.12	30.01	4.95	32.20	5.49	10.87*	U-R,I,S S-R
Confrontive	28.43	5.24	30.08	5.66	28.56	5.93	30.95	5.71	10.11*	U-R,I S-R,I
Topic	30.82	4.52	30.99	4.72	29.97	4.11	32.42	4.71	9.46*	U-R,I,S
Group	29.34	4.94	30.26	5.07	30.17	4.76	31.61	4.73	9.18*	R-U,I,S
Personal	29.89	4.93	31.38	4.99	29.70	5.02	31.38	5.16	5.88*	U,S-R,I
Relation	29.69	3.99	30.39	4.10	30.02	4.35	30.67	4.70	2.28	
Total Acceptance	119.80	14.69	122.96	15.50	119.84	15.19	126.10	16.41	8.13*	U-R,I

\* $p < .01$

type of school district are presented in Table 2. There were significant *F* values on seven of the nine scales. There were significant differences at the .01 level on the Conventional, Speculative, and Confrontive work styles. There were no significant differences on the Assertive scale among type of school districts.

There were significant differences at the .01 level on the Topic, Group, and Personal Content scales but not on the Relation scale. There was a significant difference on the Total Acceptance scale also.

On the Conventional scale, the Urban students had a significantly higher mean than the Rural and Inner City students. The Suburban students also had a higher mean than the Rural students. On the Speculative scale the Urban students had a significantly higher mean than the other three groups, and the Suburban students had a higher mean than the Rural students.

On the Confrontive scale, the Urban students had a significantly higher mean score than the Rural and Inner City groups. The Suburban group also differed from the Rural and Inner City groups.

On the Topic style scale, the Urban group had a significantly higher mean score than the other three groups. On the Group scale, the Rural students had a significantly lower mean score than the other three groups, and on the Personal scale, the Urban and Suburban students had significantly higher means than the Rural or Inner City students.

On the Total Acceptance scale, the Urban students scored significantly higher than the Rural and Inner City students.

### Discussion

There appears to be a different pattern of preferred group work and content style for rural youth than for urban and suburban youth. There are similarities between rural youth and those from the inner city. Perhaps these commonalities are a function of more restrictive social and educational environments. Both groups may have had fewer opportunities to develop interpersonal skills.

Rural students prefer the conventional patterns of interaction and general areas for discussion. Children at this age group probably tend to be more egocentric and are less comfortable with the Personal or Relationship categories. In the Topic category rural youth tend to talk about current events. In the Conventional mode it takes the form of likes and dislikes.

Teachers and counselors of rural students need to evaluate the type of group procedures they are using and keep in mind the level of interpersonal skills of the youth with whom they are working.

The teacher or counselor can effectively implement group procedure if he or she:

1. knows the experience background of the group.
2. knows the composition of the group, their interpersonal skill level, and work style.
3. reviews the materials to see that they are appropriate for the age, grade, and skill level of the

students to be involved.

4. has skills in working with groups.
5. sets realistic goals and objectives, as well as organizes appropriate activities, arranges for pertinent curriculum materials.
6. continuously evaluates the group activities, the process, the dynamics.

Some of the guidelines which need to be considered are:

1. Establish the appropriate size of the group based upon the developmental level of the members.
2. Explain expectations for the group exercise and set appropriate ground rules for group behavior and participation.
3. Make sure students understand the purposes, goals and objectives of the group as well as the time frame they have to complete the objectives.
4. Consider setting goals and objectives for individuals as well as each group.
5. Select materials appropriate to the developmental needs and interests of the students.
6. Get advice from other professionals as to other ideas, procedures and materials that might be available.
7. Encourage group involvement by training students to become familiar with the roles and expectations necessary for group functioning.
8. Encourage students to evaluate themselves and their group activities.

Professionals need to take into consideration the entry level of the students they have when organizing group activities. The CIM is one instrument which can provide information that might be useful for understanding the background of youth for group activities. Further research is needed to identify factors and procedures that should be considered by workers with rural youth.

### References

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