

THE CONCEPTION OF THE "WE" AND ITS VALUE IN
EDUCATIONAL DIFFICULTIES.

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(1) THE "we" means the inner or subjective side of group-experience, expressed grammatically in the first person plural. For instance, the mother giving her child a bath says to it, "We are having a bath now, and then we are going to sleep", whereas it is only the child who is going through the ceremony.

(2) The child is born into his family as a part of it. It is "we-feeling", and not, as some psychologists say, egocentric. Egocentricity awakes at the moment when this "original we" is disturbed or broken up by the adult. Now the child becomes "difficult", aggressive, touchy or stubborn. Most of the usual character difficulties in early childhood are to be understood as results of the "rupture" of the "we".

(The "we" in our terminology is near to MacDougall's "group-instinct"; but our term "egocentricity" does not correspond to his "individual instinct". It is not co-ordinated to the "we", or, better, the "we-feeling"; it represents a deviated or erroneous form of the "we".)

(3) The task of therapeutic education, seen from our point of view, may be described as the restitution of the "we". But the new form of this relationship of the individual towards the group cannot be the same as it was before. We call it the "maturing we" in opposition to the "original we". The difference is to be found in the fact that the "maturing we" includes and accepts differences and incongruities between its members. It needs struggle for its growth and more subtle differentiation; while the "original we" presupposes full harmony and inner peace.

(4) The restitution of the "we" comes about by certain acts of loyalty on the part of the adult. He has to understand and to forgive those different attitudes to recognize the nucleus of good (the remainder of the "we") in the child's character, and in this way, by degrees, give him the experience of a new "we", which is indestructible and creative in spite of all inner struggle.