

J.H.S. 52 Attacks Drug Peril By 'Sensitizing' Its Teachers

By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY

In the face of widespread use of narcotics by teen-agers, the city's Addiction Services Agency is trying to find out how to get students to listen to teachers and parents who warn them of the danger of drugs.

LAST WEEK, at JUNIOR HIGH School 52, Academy Street and Broadway, the agency began a novel attempt to give "sensitivity training" to teachers and interested parents at the school.

The program was initiated after school officials and parents, outraged over a drug case at the Inwood school last month in which a 14-year-old boy died and three others were hospitalized, stormed down to Mayor Lindsay's office to demand that the city take greater action against drug abuse.

The "sensitivity training," using the techniques of group dynamics, is the first step toward what officials hope will be honest encounters between adults and students about drugs. It is an attempt to impel the teachers to recognize by self-examination why teen-agers experiment with narcotics.

The leaders of the program also hope by their efforts to break the cycle in which every organization in the city concerned with drug problems—the police, the Board of Education, city officials, legislators, the media—points to one of the others as being responsible.

'Look Within Yourself'

"We have to realize that you can't keep talking about the problem 'out there,'" says James Dix, the director of school programs for the Addiction Services Agency. "First you have to look within yourself, but it's phenomenally hard to get people to take that first step."

The agency's techniques are adapted from the encounter therapy used to treat drug addicts in programs like Synanon, Odyssey House and the agency's own Phoenix Houses. It has been conducting sessions for unaddicted adults for about four years and began a program for teachers on a voluntary basis a year ago.

The experiment at Inwood, however, is the first time the agency has tried to deal with an entire school at one time. The school was closed for two days to allow the teachers time for the sessions. The cost for the two days was \$3,000. If substitute teachers had been required for the 95 participants, it would have cost an additional \$3,000.

Some Teachers Left

The participants were divided into groups of ten, and trained leaders from the agency were assigned to each group. Each group's first task was to identify the values—honesty, love, and so forth—that all agreed they held.

Each participant was then asked to give a five-minute autobiographical statement telling the others who he was. Although the teachers were told that they need not reveal sexual or other private matters, several left rather than make the statements on

the ground that their privacy was being infringed.

As the members of the groups got to know one another better, they were asked to evaluate other participants and identify attitudes in them that might put off teen-agers.

The core of the nine-hour program was an "encounter" session in which the participants were confronted with the disparity, which usually exists, between their pretensions and the reality others find in them. Although the participants were asked not to say things that only wound the others, the sessions were usually heated. Hostilities and buried attitudes about such matters as race often came to the surface.

The purpose of the experience was to make the adults more aware of themselves and to open them up to the insecurities that adolescents often feel. The theory is that teen-agers will communicate more readily with such a "sensitized" person.

An Aid to Communication

"If you're perceived as real and honest, somebody a kid would want to be like, then he might listen to you when you start talking about drugs," says Harvey Friedman, the director of the central staff for the agency. Mr. Friedman supervised the J.H.S. 52 program.

The next step in the program is selection of teachers to take an in-service training course in such things as how to recognize drug addicts or those likely to experiment with drugs. From those who complete that course, some are to be selected for further training in techniques of group dynamics and encounter therapy.

Despite the hostility of a number of teachers, the Inwood program appeared to have won considerable approval.

"I think it helped us to perceive the moral vacuum in the world," one teacher said. "We learned that there is not that much difference between the addict and the non-addict. It's just that some of us have chosen to conceal our imperfections by insisting on being straight," and others have chosen drugs."