

Education and National Defense



National Unity Through Intercultural Education

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Responsibility of the School

What can the school, that greatest of American forces for democracy in action, do to preserve our American way of life, and thus to protect us against the threat to our democratic forms, to the morale of individual Americans, and to the future of American culture and civilization? It is true that the school, little able to remedy economic and political underprivilege, can supply only partial solutions for the issues raised. However, it can lay significant groundwork in its functions of (1) providing experiences for the individual which will develop character and personality, and (2) integrating that character and personality with responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy. "For," says the United States Commissioner of Education, "democratic education is the organized and persistent effort to widen the areas of rationality in human conduct, to open up new vistas to the mind, to release the creative intelligence of men in an atmosphere of good will. Education is the archfoe of unreasonable prejudice and of stupid intolerance."⁶

What Is Intercultural Education?

President Roosevelt has said:

We are rich in the elements from which to weave a culture. In blending these elements into a national fabric of beauty and strength, let us keep the original fibres so intact that the fineness of each will show in the completed handiwork.⁷

This is the ultimate purpose of intercultural education. It seeks to give to all the children in the United States, both of dominant and minority groups, the basis and the disposition for mutual understanding and appreciation. It seeks to give to children of minority groups the feeling of security, of belonging to and of accepting the life of

the country. It seeks to relieve tensions and to release creative achievement on the part of all; to overcome prejudice and to preserve democracy in human relationships. Finally, it seeks to enrich American culture through the contributions of all Americans, and to make that culture stronger and more beautiful through the very diversity of its blended elements.

The School Should Pave the Way

In any program of intercultural education designed to achieve these ends, the school is a logical medium for reaching the children and youth of plastic age. It may serve also through its adult education program those who are no longer young. It can help to assimilate the foreign-born, to inculcate community friendship and tolerance, and to bring about mutual appreciation on the part of all races and nationalities.

Specifically, the responsibility of the school lies in three spheres of activity. First, it must translate abstract concepts of democracy into concrete realities in the daily experience of American children, and thus instill positive attitudes toward democracy. Among the ideals to be protected and cherished are the respect for differences among people and for the worth of all loyal Americans, regardless of race, color, or creed.

Let schools . . . base their practices upon the democratic faith. Let them stand as examples of equal opportunity for all. Let them tolerate, respect, and value minorities in their midst.⁸

In the second place, schools must develop integrated individual personalities. There are basic emotional needs which must be satisfied if American children are to have balanced personalities necessary for creative

⁶ School Life, 26:65, December 1940.

⁷ Folk News, 48:93, March-April 1939.

⁸ Educational Policies Commission, A War Policy for American Schools. Washington, D. C., The National Education Association (p. 18).

and responsible participation in democratic life. Teachers must be able to recognize and to deal with personality maladjustments, some of which may be due to feelings of inferiority or of prejudice. Among the basic needs of children which should be borne in mind are:

- (1) *The need for a sense of security and adequacy.*—The desire for an assured place in social as well as economic worlds. Modest pride in family and group can be built up in children of minority groups, through recognition of the cultural contributions made by the group, to counteract feelings of nothingness and inferiority. A feeling of belonging to American life and a sense of being a part of humanity, its struggles for freedom and liberty, are essential.
- (2) *The need for recognition.*—The desire for status. This is closely related to the wish for security. It is sometimes called the wish for superiority and dominance, the wish to rise as high as possible in one's social world, and it sometimes unfortunately leads to ethnocentrism or the feeling of racial or group superiority. The desire for status, for feeling that one is valuable and appreciated, can be satisfied in children of minority groups by providing opportunities for them to identify themselves with distinguished representatives of their culture.
- (3) *The need for new experiences.*—The desire "to go places and do things." New friendships, social activities, and school service should be shared by all.
- (4) *The need for response.*—The desire for love and fellowship of all kinds. Development of the spirit of camaraderie in the schools, with the opportunity for free participation by all, is an important element in intercultural education.

In the third place, the school must help to preserve and enrich American culture and civilization. It should recognize the value of all the varied sources of American culture. Instead of being concerned about the presence of people of Mexican background in the Southwest, of Oriental descent on the Pacific Coast, or of Polish origin in the Connecticut Valley, it should prize the colorful diversity which their presence makes possible, and treasure the

special contribution that each individual and culture group can make. Instead of destroying through bigotry and intolerance the unique value of each individual, it should recognize that differences resulting from diverse backgrounds and experiences can be utilized to enrich the common life of all Americans. It can seek ways in which the best of the varied traditions, customs, and folk ways may be shared. The Hans Christian Andersen School in Askov, Minn., carries on a program through which its many children of Danish stock may both give and receive the inspiration of cultural experiences that are theirs. Similar programs involving Mexican children and their parents characterize some of the schools in California.⁹

If James Weldon Johnson had not appreciated his own background, he could not have put into permanent poetic form, through his classic *God's Trombones*, the primitive Negro sermons. And yet, by so doing, he has made these poetical sermons a common inheritance and has preserved what was all but vanishing for lack of appreciation. For every James Weldon Johnson, however, there are millions of young Negroes ashamed and ignorant of their backgrounds. If Louis Adamic, an immigrant from Yugoslavia, had not found himself in the life of the New World, American culture would have missed the enrichment that has come from his writings. His *Native's Return*, *My America*, *From Many Lands*, and *Two-Way Passage* are examples of contributions of which the United States may well be proud. To the American school is given the privilege of fostering such creative achievements in the youth which it serves.

Role of the Individual Teacher

Before any teacher undertakes a responsibility for intercultural education, he should

⁹ For a description of such programs, see *Americans All: Studies in Intercultural Education*, listed on page 31.

possess factual information on scientific findings regarding race and on contributions and achievements of the various cultural groups.¹⁰ Most important of all, however, is the teacher's own attitude. It is assumed that his outlook on life is one which recognizes the worth of all mankind and the contributions which all have made to the building of America. It is assumed also that he keeps in mind the basic similarities which unite all human beings despite their cultural differences, and that he recognizes the value of such cultural diversity in the United States, the social needs of American children, and the principles that govern satisfying group relationships.

In making his plans, the teacher will remember that intercultural education begins where the pupils are, and that it concerns conditions and problems arising daily in the classroom; and he will use every means at his disposal toward conditioning students to build attitudes of mutual understanding. He will recognize also the importance of parental and community influences and will reach out into the home and the community for activities contributing to the program.

There are several distinct types of communities,¹¹ the needs of each of which should be carefully analyzed. There is, first, the community composed primarily of a homogeneous foreign-born population or racial stock. Second, there is the community in which there are a number of national or racial groups, some of which may even be antagonistic toward one another. Third, there is the community of so-called "American" stock which through four or five generations of living in this country has almost

¹⁰ Among the references given on pages 31 and 32 of this pamphlet are excellent sources of such information.

¹¹ Adapted from Marion Edman, "The Role of the Instructional Leader," *Americans All*, op. cit., pp. 306-310.

forgotten that it had its origin in foreign soil and has in some cases come to feel somewhat superior to "immigrant" or "minority" groups. Finally, there is the community similar to the one just described but having in its midst a small minority group of foreign-born.

In order to be of greatest service in his teaching program in any of these types of communities, the teacher should make a survey of the community agencies already doing something in intercultural education or related problems. Among such agencies may be found church organizations, women's clubs, culture group organizations, settlement houses, consular offices of various foreign governments, community centers, public libraries, civic clubs, and numerous specific organizations of national and international scope. He will do well to acquaint himself with the activities these agencies are carrying on, to identify himself with one or more of them, and to coordinate the school program with appropriate community experiences. In working out effective plans, he will attempt to answer such questions as the following:

- (1) What situations or materials can be used in introducing intercultural education into the school program?
- (2) How shall curriculum materials be organized? Shall topics dealing with intercultural education be interwoven with the subject matter of other fields? Shall teaching in this area be largely incidental? At what grade levels are certain topics best taught?
- (3) From what sources are materials of instruction available? How shall material which is definitely propagandistic be recognized and handled?
- (4) What techniques of instruction yield best results in presenting these materials?
- (5) How can the effectiveness of the program be evaluated?

