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HOW DO TEACHERS FEEL about the summer workshops in intercultural education in which they participate? What are their most persistent questions about such workshops? Do these questions fall into any pattern?

An Approach to Improvement

These are the problems with which we are concerned here. The discussion is confined to questions which teachers have expressed about defects, supposed or otherwise, in intercultural workshops and it presents these doubts pretty much as teachers themselves have expressed them. The suggestions given are based exclusively on verbatim reports over the past five years from workshops from coast to coast with whom the writer has worked as staff consultant.

The purpose of this account is by no means to question the value or utility of intercultural workshops. There is no doubt that intercultural workshops are of considerable value, and virtually all the teachers whose criticisms are cited agree. The purpose, rather, is to present the doubts and queries which teachers have raised so that we may refine our thinking about workshops, sharpen objectives, and improve methods.

Queries about Workshoppers

Teachers ask questions about the criteria used in selecting or admitting people into workshops. Are there any criteria? Is just anybody admitted who wants to sweat it out for the summer in the name of good human relations? Is any effort made to get a group that is homogeneous? Or is it heterogeneity and diversity that workshops are after?

These questions arise as soon as workshopers have had a chance to look at their fellow students, if not before. Some workshopers come for points or credits. Some come because they want a "change" for the summer, because they received a scholarship, or because their supervisor said that it would be "good for them." Some of the people are as unsympathetic interculturally as they could possibly be. One wonders why they have come. Others are extremely "sympathetic," have all the answers, belong to the right movements, and know all the good materials in the field. And, again, one wonders why they have come, what they think they are going to get from the summer experience. Do workshops want either type—or both—or neither?

And so a workshopper looks around at the fifty-seven varieties that make up a group and asks, "Why did the workshop select her?" or "How did he happen to get a scholarship?"

Then he turns to himself and asks, "Why was I chosen? What am I expected to do here? What am I expected..."
to do when I get back home? What can I do? What can I do?"

These last are the crucial questions. The serious and searching people raise them before they even go to the workshop. And throughout the workshop the questions remain to harass the critical and self-critical. The questions may change in focus or may achieve a higher level of objectivity. But at bottom, they are variations on the themes: How did she come to be here? How did I come to be here? Too often workshoppers are no more enlightened about such questions at the end of a workshop than at the beginning.

Questions about Workshop Staffs

There are questions, too, about the workshop staff—the director and his associates and consultants.

A frequent criticism is that some members of the staff are too impersonal and lack warmth. Workshoppers feel that the personal factor is vitally important in an intercultural workshop. It can make or break it.

A great many people have been troubled by the dogmatism of staff members. Frequently the workshop is set up on a preconceived plan, with meetings filled in for three to five weeks, subjects assigned, and speakers selected. The workshop director may lecture for the first week or more. The key-word is Schedule. It is no wonder that workshoppers are a bit perplexed when they are assured in the face of these circumstances that the workshop is set up to meet their needs, that they must play a primary role in determining the content and direction of the shop.

A sub-problem of this category is, "When is a workshop not a workshop?" The answer is, "Most of the time." When it is all pre-planned, when there is no room for creative planning and thinking by the group, when most of the experiences are "lectured at" and "receiving end" experiences, when the workshop is the reflection almost completely of the thinking and values of the staff—these are the times when a workshop is simply a series of lectures packaged for eye-ear appeal.

On the other hand, workshoppers are not much happier with a staff which is judicially and imprudently "permissive"—no planning of any sort, no respect for group decision but all deference to individual decision. The result is often anarchy. There should be an effective median path between the anarchy of no planning and the despotism of everything pre-planned and pre-chewed.

Someone Ought to Tell Them

Teacher-students have many serious questions, too, about the breadth and genuine liberalism of staff. They are annoyed by staff members who are so eager to produce paragons of intercultural understanding in six weeks that they have no time to wait a day or a week for natural growth. They are annoyed by the intolerance of some people who "know" the anthropological-sociological-psychological facts of life so well that they shoo-shoo those who are less informed and drive them back into themselves. Many workshoppers obviously feel that there is room for effective experimentation with non-directional approaches and free and unstructured situations. Said one workshopper, "Let people talk themselves and their prejudices out. But too many..."
staff 'experts' like to hear themselves talk." Staff people ought to know more about "handling" prejudiced and unsympathetic persons and groups.

More seriously, workshopers are annoyed (though a bit amused) by the stereotypes and intercultural "blind spots" of some staff people. Frequently a staff is so intent on rooting out all negative intercultural generalizations that it unconsciously begins fostering positive intercultural stereotypes of its own. Intercultural staff personnel have come out with expressions like "passionate as a Negro," "generous as a Jew," "our fine Negro people," "the wit of a Frenchmen," "the solidarity and dependability of a German." The extreme of this approach is to flee from objective study and to discuss all intercultural groups and situations in only the most sentimentalized terms.

On the other hand, from time to time there are the interculturalists who have their own private baggage of negative stereotypes. Often they are the people, described above, who hold on fiercely to their positive stereotypes. This may seem paradoxical, but they restrict themselves to the positive to compensate for their inner doubts and insecurity. And gradually, or suddenly, as the workshop situation scratches away at the protective layers, day after day, week after week, one layer comes off, and another, and then . . . revelation!

But there are quite a few staff personnel who are negative from start to finish. They may be insensitive to minority group sensitivities and use phrases like "You're a Negress," "that's darned white of him," "our white hope"—give examples confined to "Jewish businessman," "Negro porter," "Chinese laundryman." They may be "good" on the Jews but "weak" on Catholics or Protestants, "good" on Negroes and Japanese-Americans but "weak" on Mexican-Americans and Chinese-Americans.

It's Action that Counts

Workshoppers can see these intercultural "blind spots" a long way off and, like bloodhounds, sniff at each word, phrase, and gesture that a staff person lets drop. They are aware when an "interculturalist" favors a solution to intergroup tension genuinely based on a dynamic interaction between majority and minority groups—and they are also aware when he places the burden of responsibility and effort on the minority group alone. They know when a staff consultant "genuinely" favors cultural pluralism or cultural democracy—and they know when this is a mere verbal façade behind which hides the old, old solution of assimilation and melting pot.

In a word, workshopers have set up high standards for the staff personnel of intercultural workshops. A staff should know the facts of life, certainly—sociology, biology, psychology, anthropology, education, philosophy, humanities. A staff should know and like people—all kinds. A staff should have insight about itself, its defects as well as its virtues. "Don't talk democracy and run a nice, tight little autocracy for us," said one young teacher from the East. Said another, "Don't talk cultural pluralism and then laugh at the folly of cultural deviation from the norm."

Reflections on Workshop Content

Other questions center about what goes on in the workshop from day to
Workshoppers often are not clear about the orientation of the workshop—whether it is one of cultural pluralism, cultural democracy, segregation, assimilation, amalgamation; and, they say, this lack of clarity is only a reflection of a similar vagueness in the orientation of the staff. They don't want any dogmatic prescriptions or formulations, but they would like to feel relatively sure about the basic objectives and values of the workshop.

Teacher-participants have a related set of attitudes about the approach of many workshops to the causation and the solution of intergroup tensions. They feel, with respect to causation, that many interculturalists lack a sufficiently dynamic and pluralist approach. One “expert” will tend to emphasize the sociological and overlook the historical; another will emphasize the economic and overlook the educational and legislative. But many teachers who have done practical work in the field feel that there should be an understanding of the interaction among these causes, and that each factor should be understood in its proper setting with respect to the many other factors which play a part in the growth of intergroup tensions.

Similarly, with respect to solutions, workshoppers would like to see staff personnel give proper emphasis to each of the various factors which can conceivably play an important part in helping to effect intergroup and interpersonal understanding. They become confused when a visiting “expert” on one day suggests that all our problems could be remedied by a more equitable distribution of economic goods and services; and on the next day they learn from another “expert” that the solution lies through psychiatry, better church attendance, more effective training of teachers, or better patterns of family life. The difficulty is not in a mere difference of opinion but in a series of opinions which seem so isolated one from the other that workshoppers feel the ground slipping out from under them and begin to look for some convenient nook or corner from which to obtain a reasonably clear perspective. “Difference is all right,” said one workshopper, “but this is confusion.”

The Emphasis Could Be Re-examined

Another frequent complaint in workshops is that there is an imbalance in the content. Very often the participants feel that this imbalance lays undue stress on the Negro and on Negro-white relations. Sometimes they feel there is too much talk about race relations and not enough about a basic common denominator—intergroup relations which might include problems of race, religion, nationality, culture. Once or twice there have been similar feelings about too much emphasis on Jewish problems and aspects of Jewish life.

Apparenty what workshoppers want is neither an undue stress nor an overlooking of any one group. They want an approach that examines not only causation and solutions to intergroup tensions but also the various groups which are involved in these tensions.

Can the Time Be Better Spent?

Workshoppers often are made seriously unhappy about the “paper” or the “project” which the staff may feel is necessary. They are not made more
comfortable when the staff explains that
the only reason for the paper is that the
university demands such a project.
Workshoppers feel that they have more
important things to gain from a work-
shop than that achieved by their writing
a “paper,” and they have serious doubts
as to the magnitude of the contribution
which they can make by virtue of this
six-weeks effort, which frequently turns
out to be a two-weeks masterpiece.

Many teachers come to workshops
with practical problems. These often
clash with the Schedule which the
workshop staff has drawn up several
weeks in advance. When such a clash
occurs, participants become seriously
frustrated and start having real doubts
as to whether they are in a workshop or
at the receiving end of an organized
course. Many a workshopper has made
a fervent prayer that the staff, which
speaks so eloquently about dealing
with an educational situation in terms
of its specific needs, take a look at its
own situation.

Room—and Time—to Move Around

Finally—and perhaps this is as im-
portant a point as any—workshoppers
regret that in many cases there is not
enough opportunity for informal rela-
tionships. They realize how much can
be accomplished when people from
different parts of the country can eat
together, live in the same dormitory,
and have “bull sessions” until the wee
hours. It is then—and often only then
—that people let their hair down and
the sort of free-flowing conversation en-
sues which bears fruit in a remarkable
way long after the neat formulations of
the textbook have been forgotten. Some
of the best work in intercultural under-
standing has come about because a
teacher from Norfolk, Virginia, was in
a situation where there was time for her
to play ping pong each day with a
teacher from New Rochelle, New York;
or where a teacher from California
could work at arts and crafts every
afternoon with a teacher from Maine.

These are a few of the objections and
suggestions voiced by summer work-
shoppers. But these are, for the most
part, the same people who go home
and do a job in their school and com-

Community. And they are the ones who
come back again the next summer and
say, “The trouble with intercultural
workshops is . . .”

Curriculum Research

In this issue we introduce a new feature—a department headed CURRICU-
LUM RESEARCH. A Committee chaired by J. Cavee Morrison, State Department of Edu-
cation, Albany, N. Y., will report findings and developments in the curriculum
field to you monthly. C. W. Hunnicutt, acting dean of the School of Education,
Syracuse University, is editor. Other committee members are Hilda Taba, J.
Wayne Wrightstone, Arthur T. Jersild, Louis Rath’s, and Ruth Cunningham.