

The Teacher and International Understanding

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Under the auspices of the American Council on Education, a conference was held last summer at Estes Park, Colorado, dealing with the role of colleges and universities in promoting international understanding. Helen Dwight Reid, chief of the European Section, Division of International Educational Relations of the U. S. Office of Education, reports that the conference participants agreed that the education of teachers is an indispensable first step in fostering world-mindedness among our people. In this article Miss Reid discusses the specific proposals that were made at this conference for the training of teachers in the area of international understanding.

We shall never achieve an international relationship marked by understanding, peace, justice, and good will, unless we make full use of the instrument of organized education to that end.—Alexander Loudon, The Netherlands

The end of traditional American isolationism involves new responsibilities for education. Membership in the United Nations and in several score of specialized international agencies requires a new awareness of world problems. In the midst of sensational headlines flaunting controversy and crisis in world affairs, American education must train for clear thinking on complex issues, and must provide adequate and accurate information as the basis for sound public decisions.

Our Responsibility

These are times that call, above all else, for clarity of thinking. America has indeed drifted so far from the easy optimism of 1945 that we are now in grave danger of being swept to the brink of disaster by a wave of disillusionment.

A mood of cynicism—posing as realistic facing of the facts—has the peoples of the whole world in its grip. It is in just such times that our teachers have a vital role to play. The very safety of the nation may rest ultimately in its ability to mobilize the trained minds of its people so that they may find a valid solution for the overshadowing problems of international relations.

Elihu Root once pointed out that under autocracy the danger of war lies in sinister purpose, whereas under democracy it lies in mistaken beliefs, and that while there is no human way to prevent a dictator from having bad intentions, "there is a human way to prevent a people from having an erroneous opinion. That way is to furnish the whole people . . . with correct information about their relations to other peoples . . . about what has happened and is happening in international affairs, and about the effects upon national life of the things that are done or refused as between nations; so that the people themselves will have the means to test misinformation and appeals to

prejudice and passion based upon error."

It must be admitted that it is possible for the mass mind to be less informed, more easily swayed by emotion, more chauvinistic than the most irresponsible autocrat would dare to be. But we have only to recognize the nature of the difficulties to realize that they can be overcome, and that the responsibility is largely ours. Indifference, ignorance, bad judgment—these are the primary dangers; ours is the task of meeting them by awakening public interest, by disseminating knowledge, by stimulating clear thinking, and by the effective expression of intelligent opinion, individual and collective. A growing realization of the impact of world events upon our daily lives provides incentive for a new emphasis in teaching.

Evidences of Concern

The growing concern of teachers and civic leaders with their role in the post-war world is reflected in the thousands of requests which the Office of Education receives for information and materials suitable for developing international understanding. In former years most such requests were for material on the other republics of the Western Hemisphere, but now they concern countries in all parts of the world as well as the United Nations, UNESCO, and other international organizations. Teachers of elementary and secondary schools want to know where in the United States effective programs of international understanding or intercultural education are being carried out so that they may share experiences or obtain practical suggestions for developing similar programs.

During the year 1949 alone, over 5,000 American teachers, students, and leaders of civic groups requested information as to sources of materials on other nations; assistance in developing international projects; reports on effective programs in operation in American schools; or guidance in establishing contacts with foreign schools for the purpose of carrying on correspondence, or exchanging arts and crafts, or books and professional publications. It is apparent that American educators are awake to their responsibility, but that they feel a need for some professional guidance in venturing into a field still new to many of them.

Estes Park Conference

Of outstanding significance in our attempts to educate for better understanding of world affairs was a conference held at Estes Park, Colorado, this past June. Under the auspices of the American Council on Education, a hundred leading educators, representing sixty-eight sponsoring educational organizations, five foundations, and several foreign universities, together with officials of UNESCO, the UN, and five major U. S. governmental agencies, met to discuss the role of colleges and universities in international understanding.

They all agreed that in the process of furthering world-wide mutual understanding, the education of teachers is an indispensable first step, and that there should be even greater emphasis than heretofore on the international aspects of teacher education. Such programs as those for international exchange of teachers, leave-of-absence arrangements to permit American teachers to study abroad, and bringing of overseas edu-

cators to this country to observe our educational system or to obtain special training, deserve wider encouragement and support.

It was the unanimous concern of the delegates at the Estes Park Conference that no student should be graduated from an American college or teacher training institution without an awareness of the basic factors affecting the policies of nations, an interest in international relations, and a readiness to participate as an informed citizen in the determination of foreign policy. The program of general education in every institution of higher learning, they suggested, should include considerable information about the diverse cultures of the world and about international organization and action, and should seek to develop a sensitiveness to world problems.

Colleges and universities have traditionally included in their curriculum within the commonly accepted disciplines much material useful in the furtherance of world understanding. Courses in political and social philosophy, comparative government, diplomatic history, economics, geography, world literature, fine arts, and comparative cultures have important contributions to make. Proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking at least one modern foreign language can give a "two-window" outlook on world affairs. Scholarship in most fields is universal, for international boundaries do not change the laws of physics nor alter the principles of mathematics—nor even affect the validity of the basic facts of history, in spite of possible national distortions.

International relations courses, even

when they are available, may not reach all the students in an institution. Only if teaching about international problems pervades the entire curriculum can there be any assurance that every student will come to realize how intimately all aspects of life are affected by international developments.

Basic Understandings

Yet there remains a body of distinctive knowledge which is necessary for a full understanding of the world today. The problem is now, within the pressures and limitations of the prescribed curriculum, to enable all students—and particularly those who expect to become teachers—to become sufficiently familiar with this field of knowledge so that their attitudes with respect to world problems may be well grounded.

It was the conviction of the Conference that as a foundation, all colleges and universities should provide a general basic course in international affairs which all students should be encouraged to take, regardless of their respective fields of specialization. In their view such a course might properly include three essential components:

► A survey of the basic factors which influence international affairs, such as the nature of the world in which we live, the pressure of population, the sociological and psychological reactions of national groups to each other, and the economic factors upon which states depend for their existence

► An analysis of the political organization of sovereign states which peoples have built up to conduct their affairs, the agencies and procedures by which states carry on their relations with each other, and the system of power politics which has resulted

► The recent development of international

organizations, governmental and non-governmental, and the steady growth of economic and sociological influences tending toward the establishment of a world society.

The small liberal arts or teachers college of less than 1,000 students should be able to provide an international orientation for all its students, whether through a single basic course or the establishment of a core program. The courses suggested by the Conference are already found among those offered by most of our colleges. They need only to be brought together in a student's program to establish a broad foundation for international understanding. Interdepartmental consultation could weld such a program into an integrated and profoundly influential experience, particularly if the international approach can also be introduced throughout the entire curriculum. Whether or not such a core program is formalized as a requirement for all students, some of the same results can be attained through skillful advisement, so that each individual acquires the balanced training needed.

A formal sequence of courses in the international field should probably not be attempted, but a simple basic course is important, even though it might require the addition of a skilled professor to the college faculty. One or more teachers from abroad may exert a useful influence, living in a closely knit college community.

Where departments are larger and more specialized, interdepartmental cooperation becomes both more difficult and more essential. There is real danger that, amidst the diversity of courses offered, the individual student may grad-

uate without choosing any in the international field. It is particularly important, therefore, that larger institutions provide a single basic course, so that every student may have some understanding of international affairs, no matter what his field of specialization.

At the Estes Park Conference colleges and universities were urged to participate, whenever feasible, in adult education programs on international affairs. It was agreed that faculty members have a distinctive responsibility to promote international understanding by active cooperation with the adults of their community. Through classroom instruction, lectures, institutes, forums, conferences, and broadcasts, higher education institutions can become a significant force in stimulating better understanding of the peoples of the world. As international tensions mount, the challenge of the universities to take positive action in the area of adult education becomes sharper.

Preparation of Teachers on All Levels

For the preparation of college teachers who are competent to teach the recommended courses in international relations and world affairs, we must of course look to our graduate schools. The need is for teachers who are able to help students understand the whole range of problems and subject matter involved. This requires the broadest possible preparation—much broader than has been traditional in graduate study—though without loss of scholarly attainment.

The training of secondary teachers for this purpose need not differ materially from that involved in the general curriculum recommendations for

all colleges and universities, namely, that every teacher should make international understanding one of his objectives, regardless of his field of specialization.

The conferees agreed that the teachers in our elementary schools occupy a unique and important place in education for international understanding, because they work with all of our future citizens at a most important time in the formation of basic attitudes. Elementary teachers should have not only the basic education recommended in the general curriculum but should also have special instruction and experience in relating this material to the teaching of children in the elementary school. This may be accomplished through study of materials in curriculum libraries, or through participation in special workshops or in international education programs in campus training schools.

We must look to administrators and existing faculties for the maintenance of in-service training programs which will enable teachers in all subject matter areas to comprehend the modern world and thus to help students understand the relation of each specialized area of knowledge to the modern world situation. General and departmental staff meetings and local workshops might be helpful in indicating the implications for each subject or course. The Conference urged administrators to encourage teachers to "participate actively in local, national, regional, and international meetings concerned with the development of international understanding," and to take advantage of any opportunities for temporary service with international organizations, the Department of State, or other agencies en-

gaged in the actual conduct of international affairs.

The teaching of international understanding is a new curriculum area, and while there is general agreement on the objectives, it is apparent that progress will require a continuing emphasis on research and experimentation both in the selection and organization of materials of instruction and in methods of presenting such materials. The Conference, therefore, recommended that wherever possible provisions be made for systematic evaluation programs to measure not only the acquisition of the basic knowledge and interpretations necessary for understanding the world scene, but also the extent to which interests and attitudes become functional in good world citizenship.

The Conference also urged the creation of a National Coordinating Commission to serve as a clearing house for information on successful types of curriculums for the development of international understanding, and to effect better liaison between institutions of higher education and voluntary organizations interested in world affairs.

International Significance of Education

Nazi distortion of the educational processes of a highly civilized and educated people, with appalling consequences for the lives of millions all around the globe, can leave no doubt of the international significance of education. We have come a long way since the futile efforts at Versailles to persuade the harassed framers of that peace treaty to recognize education as an essential foundation for international understanding.

At San Francisco the representatives of fifty nations agreed to give the word "education" an honored place in the Charter of the UN, and UNESCO was soon afterwards created "for the purpose of advancing, through the educational and scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world, the objectives of international peace and of the common welfare of mankind."

American teachers are deeply interested in the problem of how best to carry out these objectives through their teaching at all levels. They have been

experimenting in the development of new methods and techniques so that our citizens of tomorrow may know and understand the new agencies of international cooperation which now constitute part of the government under which we live. The schools are not only incorporating study of the UN in their regular curriculum at many levels, but are encouraging extra-curricular activities that may be still more influential. We cannot build peace in the minds of men except where there is real understanding of the peoples of other lands.

OUR GROWING WORLD

By Mitchell and Others

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