

and simplicity to a non-industrialized one.

What is simple and what is complex? The answer to this question is largely dependent upon the meanings that are attached to the terms. What is simple to one person may not necessarily be simple to another. Or what is considered complex in one situation or at one time may not be seen as difficult in another situation or at another time. These terms are relative in meaning depending upon the individual.

When the importance of firsthand experience is seen in the development of children's social understanding, it becomes clear that the selection and em-

phasis in the elementary school curriculum can be based most effectively on problems of living which children actually face and not upon past civilizations and foreign cultures. Also, when the ineffectiveness of the culture unit method is seen for social education it becomes evident that a reversal needs to be made in the way in which foreign cultures are studied on this level. Problems of modern life need to receive major attention, with the culture units being called upon to explain them. To study remote and distant cultures as an attempt to develop an understanding of contemporary life is to put the cart before the horse.

Cooperative Project in Human Relations

THE PROJECT STAFF¹

Los Angeles County has evolved a cooperative project in human relations as a practical approach to in-service education.

PHENOMENAL GROWTH—new businesses, new cars, new homes, communities of forty thousand in areas which were bean and barley fields less than five years ago—this has become the accepted growth pattern in Los Angeles County. But, exceeding even this fast growing pace has been the development of the Los Angeles County Project in Human Relations.

After a series of preliminary conferences among school officials, the project was launched in September 1949 by three city school systems. By January

1950 the three original districts had grown to thirteen. In September 1950, twenty-one school systems were participating in the project.

PURPOSES OF THE PROJECT

What is this project? What does it attempt to accomplish? Millions of words have been spoken and written about democracy, but just what does this concept mean in everyday living? What understandings, what knowledges and skills must people have in order to live democratically as individuals, as group members, as citizens of America and of the world? The Human Relations Project addresses itself to the consideration of these problems.

¹ Gertrude G. Howard, Staff Consultant and Editor. Caroline Tryon, Robert Bartlett Haas, Staff Consultants. William Jack Stone, General Consultant and Director.

Those participating in the project accept human relations concepts which include life affirmation rather than life denial. They believe in inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness and realize that human likenesses and differences are both important to the welfare of all participants.

New Approach to Old Problems

Project leaders are greatly concerned that participants understand that human relations is *not a new subject* but simply a new approach to age-old problems that have plagued teachers and parents since schools began. "Taking a new look at kids," "ways of removing blocks to learning," are two phrases which teachers have used in describing some of the activities pursued within the project. This *problem-solving approach* is a very important characteristic. There are no prescribed courses to be "taken" nor programs to be "followed." Rather, district problems are examined and one or more selected for exploration and study.

Participation is voluntary on the part of individuals and districts. The program is not a mass education movement, but is designed rather to make consultant service, printed materials, audio-visual aids and other resources available for those who wish to use them and to allow for spread by "contagion" rather than by ultimatum. The scope of activity is broad—broad enough to include experimentation by a single teacher or principal, short-term to three-year studies by small groups, orientation of large groups to the general field of human relations, or to coordinate with programs of parent, university, and other allied groups.

Needs Being Met

Not only is the enthusiastic response of administrators, supervisors and curriculum directors indicative that the program is meeting real needs in teacher education, but the responses of the teachers themselves show this. During the past year 180 teachers out of a total staff of 475 in one district volunteered to participate in an intensive series of regular study conferences extending over a period of a year. At the beginning of this second year the pattern is being repeated, not only in this but in other districts. Unfortunately, because of the limited time of consultants, some groups have had to be restricted to representatives from each school rather than permitting the membership of all who are interested.

Why such growth in these busy times? The answer is easy. This cooperative, problem-solving approach toward eliminating blocks to good living and learning is so practical, so satisfying. It is dynamic, too. Although general goals are set in the beginning, they are constantly being re-defined and clarified. Agreed-upon ways of working release and foster creativity which, in turn, results in better ways of working and greater satisfactions.

PLAN OF THE PROJECT

The project is cooperative. Central Staff Consultants and the Project Office are financed by funds from the California State Department of Education (administered through the Office of the Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools), national foundations, and community groups. Each cooperating district provides a part- or full-time

staff coordinator who serves as leader in his district and also has staff responsibilities of planning, coordinating and evaluating so far as the total project program is concerned. Visiting consultants and program materials are likewise made available to staff members and participating districts through funds from these sources.

Personnel Available for Planning

Superintendents and other district representatives join representatives from the County Office, the State Department of Education and the Project Staff to form administrative and steering committees for purposes of policy formulation and over-all planning.

Local school, area and district-wide programs are also arrived at cooperatively. With the assistance of consultants each individual and group activity or study is planned by those concerned.

Action-research techniques are used. An attempt is made to make available to participants the latest findings of educational research in cultural anthropology, psychology, sociology and the other social sciences, which may be useful in solving their particular problems. Emphasis is laid upon *using* these findings, *not merely knowing* what they are, upon testing in actual practice principles which have been evolved experimentally.

Nor is it always necessary to await the findings of research. Often promising practices originating within a classroom, a school or a district are eminently worth repeating elsewhere. Through the various coordinating channels of the project, this can easily happen. Theory and practices are brought together—sometimes theory is proved or

disproved through practice; sometimes practice leads to generalizations which are useful in modifying or continuing practice.

Appraisal and evaluation are integral parts of every study and project. What effect does this or that practice or condition have upon human behavior? This is a central question which project leaders and participants ask themselves again and again. All too frequently adequate instruments of measurement are not to be had and here, again, findings of research and practical field knowledge are pooled in efforts to develop better evaluative means.

Wide Area Benefits

The project fills a need. Few other geographic areas in the United States include so great a diversity of cultural groups, so large a percentage of some minority groups, or so wide a range of community problems arising from housing, employment, adjustment to new places and situations as are represented in the "human relations laboratory" of Los Angeles County. The pupil population represents 38% of the total for the State of California. Pupils of all ages, teachers, parents, citizens and affiliated organizations in a few unincorporated districts and most of the chartered cities of the county participate.

All activities of the project are directed toward helping teachers, toward improving the learning process for students, and toward improving the quality of democratic living in school and community. Staff and visiting consultants are available to assist teachers and administrators, to serve study groups and district projects; to help orient professional and lay groups; to cooperate

in locating and developing teacher materials; and to demonstrate promising educational practices with students.

Fifty-five teachers and administrators from participating districts spent six weeks at a summer workshop. During this time they increased their knowledge and understanding of the scientific bases of human development, attitudes and behavior. They took a variety of field trips, examined and appraised audio-visual aids and other teaching materials, and used the services of an imposing list of twenty-five consultants in addition to those of the regular staff. They organized themselves into several work committees—steering, social, library, bulletin, etc. Indicated in their appraisal of the total workshop as most valuable were the study groups which attacked problems in Human Relations Skills, Human Development, Curriculum Materials, and Community Influences upon Child Behavior.

PARTICIPANTS EVALUATE PROJECT

One feature of the workshop was an open house attended by administrators, parent-teacher leaders and other interested persons. Time was scheduled for general discussion of the human relations program being carried on within the project. This discussion soon took on the nature of a testimonial meeting, with both visitors and workshopers participating.

Teachers said:

"I like the idea of letting leadership pass from person to person. We work hard because we plan and then we want to carry out our plans. That is something to take back to our classrooms."

"This is the first time I've had happen to me what I've tried to have happen to kids."

Assistant superintendents said:

"We are receiving reports of enthusiasm. We stumbled and fumbled some last year, but we learned, among other things, that you can't sit down and plan ahead of time for a human relations program, nor accept one in a package. You have to plan your own program, be flexible. You must start with the real needs of your staff, and you have to spend personnel time and money if you want a worth-while program."

"We must see how leadership can 'bubble up all over the place' so positive forces, rather than negative ones, can prevail. We've spent too much time *explaining* our educational program and not enough time *evolving* it with parents."

A consultant said:

"We have learned how to 'look at a community and, particularly, to think about what's happening to children. We are helped in the discussions that teachers have about discipline, drop-outs and so forth."

Parent-teacher leaders said:

"The Cooperative Project has the same emphasis as PTA—the child at home, in school, in the church, in the world. We need to get our own human relations working."

A principal said:

"I understand better the importance of relieving tensions in the classroom."

SECOND YEAR OF PROJECT

Now, as the project enters its second year, staff coordinators from the participating districts are receiving the assistance of staff consultants from the Project Office in organizing activities in the following major fields of study:

Human Development

"Growing up" is the most important task of childhood, yet attitudes toward, and programs provided for, children in home, school and community are often in direct conflict with basic growth needs. What are some of the understandings in this field which are needed by teachers and others and how can they be obtained?

Community Living

To understand children and guide their learning, teachers must recognize that the child is born into a group and knows only those experiences which he has had as a member of the group. Status and freedom of movement often come with membership in certain economic groups, and knowledge of this is a vital part of teacher education. It involves an understanding on the part of school people and others concerning the nature of the local neighborhood as a part of the larger community, and the relationships of individuals and groups within it. This means studying and participating with members of either neighborhood or community-wide groups.

It means understanding that unrest, antipathy, and some opposition is to be expected in any program that seeks to re-think values, and to identify changed attitudes in human relations. It

means recognizing that people have to meet problems in areas of employment, housing, health, etc., and that a vital program must focus on these real problems. School people must be sensitive to all types of social problems wherever they exist and seriously affect the lives of children. Questions such as the following must be faced:

How can we help teachers see children as products of family and community conditions?

What community factors and/or resources should be taken into account in setting up a program in a given school?

How does the presence or absence of certain ethnic groups in a school situation affect the nature of the human relations program?

Intergroup Education and Learning Experiences

Human relations factors are inescapable and are the very core of individual and group life. They exist all the time as cooperators or resisters to all learning. When this is understood a re-examination of the curriculum becomes necessary:

Does our curriculum take into consideration the natural drives of children at different stages of their development?

Does it recognize community resources and hazards?

Does it allow for individual and cultural differences?

Does it encourage use of local resources—people, materials and places—to provide learning experiences?

Is the social studies program really one of *social* studies? Does it really help children understand why people live the way they do; why American

democracy offers the best way of life we know?

Group Relations and Skills

As humans we waste far too much of our life energy in feelings of frustration. Too often we feel inadequate, unsure of ourselves and of our status with others. How to deal with the causes of such feelings, and how to release ourselves and others for more satisfying, productive living *can be learned*. Questions such as the following need to be considered:

What are the skills we need to know in order to feel "comfortable" with ourselves and with our groups?

What are some techniques which can be used in classrooms to help get at frustrations?

What are some effective ways of rearranging classroom environment and pupil grouping which will relieve tensions and permit growth and development?

How can leadership pass from one person to another in a group?

In-Service Education and Leadership Orientation

A group of thirteen-year-olds wrote recently, "You've got to keep growing or you die." In education as well as in industry, new developments in science are causing change in procedures. Not only does the individual have a responsibility to keep growing on the job, but the employing agency—the factory, the business organization, the school district—has an obligation to provide opportunity for such growth.

Educators need to be up to date in their understanding of psychology and

of the contributions that cultural anthropology, sociology and other social sciences can make to any program concerned with human development. They need to know the centers where carefully conceived studies are being carried out. They need to know sources of good materials and to know who are the most helpful leaders in the field. The Los Angeles County Cooperative Project in Human Relations provides for participating districts an economical, effective and continuing way of doing this. The following are typical of activities now under way:

- Fifth grade teachers of a city hold a series of observation-discussion meetings growing out of demonstrations of reaction story techniques in connection with life crisis situations.
- The total high school faculty of 200 teachers has organized to use consultants in a series of twelve meetings on problems of reporting pupil progress to parents.
- Eight schools in a community which has had mushroom growth are joining in a study group on community influences on children.
- A high school curriculum coordinator in a newly created position is using consultant service to organize machinery for evaluating instructional materials.
- A Human Relations Council, composed of teacher representatives from every building, has been formed in one city to act as a leadership group in disseminating promising practices and in identifying human relations problems needing study.

Copyright © 1950 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.