

## Let's Face Issues of Discrimination

**I**N SPITE OF THE FACT that ours is a century of wars and threats of wars with nuclear weapons, it may yet be known as the century when there was most remarkable growth in understanding the behavior of men and in knowledge of the ways whereby men may reconstruct and redirect their behavior to bring about more adequate development, both of themselves as individual personalities and of the group or groups to which they belong.

There are many forces at work today to support this prophecy. Expanding constantly is the frontier of knowledge about the physiological processes which influence the growth and development of man. In such a clarifying and readable book as Sir Charles Sherrington's *Man on His Nature*, we can learn of the processes involved in the making of man, the miracle of natural forces at work providing both his limitations and his promise. Growing, too, are insights into the complexities of human behavior, its motivation and its expression as revealed in the studies of psychologists, social psychologists and psychiatrists. Evolutionary processes are seen, not only in man's physical make-up, but also in his intellectual and moral nature.

Increasingly evident is the close interaction between environment and the developing personality. Human nature is at one with all nature, but with a difference—since man has the capacity to be critical of himself and to develop that most uniquely human

of all traits, altruism.<sup>1</sup> In science we see the processes and consequences of nature. But we may not find there the values which help us in the decisions which test our moral quality. Appraisal of good and evil, kindness and cruelty is left to philosophical and religious thought which deal with the significance of consequences. It is for appraisal of behavior that we develop value systems. Those of us who are eager to extend the democratic way of life hold as our central value the growth of each human being to his full potential. Such growth is a process achievable in varying degrees through human association in which individual personality is respected, problems are solved through the method of intelligence, and common concerns are increasingly widened through participation and sharing.

We have in this country a faith that every person must have equal opportunity to develop as an individual, that he must have equal rights under the law, that he must be respected as a partner in the development of the community. There is no room in this philosophy for religious prejudice, caste and class distinctions, preference for the rich over the poor, consideration of the young at the expense of the old or of the old at the expense of the young. Gifted children and young

<sup>1</sup>For an extensive discussion of the rise of altruism in man see Charles Sherrington, *Man on His Nature*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc. 1953, Chapter XII.

people may not be set apart to be educated away from the stream of common life except at their own peril and the peril of the group which they should serve. Neither Caucasian, nor Negro, nor Mongolian may seek to grow at the expense of the other. Men, women and children everywhere must experience consideration, responsibility and opportunity.

The temptation is to assume that people will accept and live by democratic values as the result of hearing about them. For many years the use of hortatory methods by preachers and teachers, followed by threats to transgressors from either earthly or supernatural powers has been considered one of the best ways of inculcating values. As a result homes, schools and churches have tended to provide children with appropriate maxims, quotations and threats instead of giving them experience in democratic living. Advice has been freely given; but the example of our behavior, with its gap between ideals and conduct, has been accepted by our children and uncritically imitated.

New ideas about the causes and consequences of behavior have brought about some important changes in our thinking and practice as educators. Of growing influence in education is the needs theory. Aggressive and hostile behavior, as well as that which is withdrawn and self-abusive, is seen as response to unmet or frustrated emotional needs. The study of "authoritarian personalities" recorded in the "Studies in Prejudice" series reveals these individuals to be characterized by conventionality, repression, rigidity, fear and dependency. People who be-

little others, strike out against groups, and indulge in hate mongering are psychologically ill, deprived in some degree of the basic emotional satisfactions which nourish human personality: love, belonging, recognition, joy, a sense of personal worth, an integrating value system, a fair balance between success and failure, self direction, and ability to deal appropriately with life experiences, keeping close to reality.<sup>2</sup>

When growing personalities are segregated from the main stream of community life because of some circumstance over which they have no control, such as sex, race, religious inheritance, degree of intelligence, or national origin, the effect is to reduce their chances for full development and maturity. These findings about human development influenced the decision of the Supreme Court regarding the segregation of Negro children and youth in the public schools of this country. One of the important questions at issue is the extent to which segregation limits the opportunity of Negro children to have the same chance for education as their white contemporaries.<sup>3</sup> The conclusion reached by the Court indicates a belief that separate facilities, even if they are equally good from the standpoints of physical equipment and qualifications of teaching personnel,

<sup>2</sup> For an extensive discussion of the nature of these emotional needs and others see Chapter VI of Daniel Prescott's *Emotion and the Educative Process*. Washington, D. C.: The American Council on Education, 1938.

<sup>3</sup> An account of the reports of social scientists submitted to the Supreme Court may be found in the December 1953, *Journal of Social Issues*, Association Press, 291 Broadway, New York 7, New York.

still deprive those who are segregated from experiencing a wholesome environment for growing.

### Creating Better Environments

Studies of desegregation reported to the Supreme Court indicate that there is a readiness in many parts of the country, North, South, and in the border states, to change the old habits of segregated life. This is true, not only of communities where Negroes and Caucasians make up the main stream of population, but also of communities where other racial and national groups come together, as, for example, the Anglo- and Spanish-speaking peoples of the Southwest and the Rocky Mountain Region. The American conscience is at work in widely separated geographical areas. Such readiness provides the support which public schools must increasingly have if they are to implement the decision of the Supreme Court.

We cannot assume, however, that physical desegregation under the law will solve the problems of human relationships which are so deeply involved in processes of isolation. Individuals and groups can be ostracized by gestures and language, by feelings and attitudes. Many Negro and Spanish-speaking children, for example, enrolling freely in the schools of the North, find that they are not an accepted part of the on-going life of the school community. Wherever this condition exists, whether through the prejudice of children, parents, teachers, or lay community members, the spirit of the Supreme Court ruling is violated. It is important, therefore, that all public schools, North, South,

East and West, and their communities give increasing attention to the development of environments which meet more adequately the emotional needs of children and youth.

We cannot assume that adults themselves are capable of creating such environments without constantly increasing and improving their knowledges and skills. Research and study in the realm of human relations is going forward. Laboratories concerned with the study of human behavior in groups are developing in colleges and universities, as, for example, the Human Dynamics Laboratory at the University of Chicago and the National Training Laboratory for Group Development at Bethel, Maine.

Action research in classrooms encourages study of the social relations among children and youth through sociometric techniques and through the analysis of individual and group behavior. Workshops in human relations and in intergroup education help teachers and others to become increasingly sensitive to human values and to ways of organizing school and curriculum to serve the emotional needs of children and youth.

We in ASCD are especially responsible for encouraging the readiness of this country to rid itself of the outward and visible signs of segregation and discrimination. We are equally responsible to work for the growth among us all of the inward and spiritual grace out of which grows acceptance of all personalities as of great worth.

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