

Curriculum Research

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Research Related to Discrimination

DURING recent years, there has been a considerable amount of concern among educators, psychologists, sociologists and, to a lesser degree, among the general public, regarding segregation and discrimination against Negroes in the United States. In the past two decades, a wealth of literature has been available which deals with the effects of discrimination upon the life and personality of the Negro in America. A considerable portion of these writings have been philosophical discussions, dealing with the human values involved. Some have been fictional works; several novels dealing with the personality development of Negro adolescents have had wide, popular appeal. These works have undoubtedly done much to call the attention of the American people to the adverse effects of discrimination upon the personality of Negroes, but a relatively small portion of the available literature deals with factual information obtained from scientific research procedures.

In very recent years, interest and concern regarding this problem have been heightened by at least two factors. In the first place, in 1952, five cases reached the United States Supreme Court which attacked the constitutionality of segregation in the public

schools and, for the first time, the "separate but equal" theory of public education met a substantial challenge. The preliminary decision of the Supreme Court was handed down in May 1954, supporting the plaintiffs' claim that segregation, *per se*, was discriminatory. This has pointed up the fact that the problem has passed beyond the discussion stage and that educators are to be faced, in the near future, with the necessity of an action program to deal with the situation which, if it is to be effective, must be based on facts, scientifically obtained.

A second factor which has accentuated the acuteness and immediacy of the problem stems from the crisis in international relations. Those concerned with our foreign policy have been alarmed over our loss of prestige and leadership among the nonwhite two-thirds of the world's population. Communistic propaganda has capitalized on our relegation of Negroes to a status of inferior citizenship, and on its own claims, invalid though they may be, to equal treatment of all races.

The first comprehensive study of the personality of Negro youth was made in 1940-41, under the sponsorship of the American Youth Commission. The commission was established in 1935 by the American Council on Education and was given specific instructions to study the needs of American

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youth and suggest ways and means of meeting these needs. Four studies in this research project dealt with the problems of Negro youth in four different sections of the nation. Relying, in general, upon a case-study technique, the four studies pointed up the fact that discrimination did, in fact, have an adverse effect upon the personality development of Negro youth. The results of these studies were published in volumes by Davis and Dollard (3), Frazier (4), Johnson (8), and Warner, Junker, and Adams (10).

An American Dilemma, by Myrdal (9), has become a classic of sociological research. The author, a Swedish sociologist, was brought to this country to make an impartial, unbiased investigation of the conditions of life for American Negroes. The result was an extensive and intensive survey of every phase of the social and economic life of Negroes in the United States.

In 1949, Goff (5) made a study of the problems and emotional difficulties of Negro elementary school children in New York City and St. Louis, Missouri. Using interviews with children and their parents, she obtained important factual information as to the types of discriminatory experiences which the children had had and their emotional reactions to these experiences. She found that, even at this early age, many of these children had undergone traumatic experiences because of their identification as members of a minority group, that they were quite conscious of the status of inferiority which society had imposed upon them and that they were already emotionally disturbed by these experiences.

The writer's study (6, 7) was closely

related to the Goff study. It sought the same kinds of information from Negro high school youth. Using an open-end questionnaire technique, somewhat projective in nature, it identified the kinds of discriminatory experiences which were most common to the youth and obtained some significant information regarding their resultant feelings. The subjects utilized for this study were the 497 Negro youth enrolled in the eleventh grade of the Dade County (Miami) high schools. Perhaps the most significant finding of this research, in terms of pertinence to current problems, was that the Negro youth possess quite strong feelings of resentment toward the pattern of segregation and discrimination in which they are forced to live. A substantial majority of them indicated that racial segregation and discrimination were, in their opinions, crucial social problems. Many of them expressed themselves in extremely hostile, and even unprintable terms regarding the laws and mores which support the segregated system.

This finding refutes the popular stereotype, frequently found, especially in the South, of the Negro as a happy carefree individual who is happy and contented with his lot and who would be really unhappy if segregation were abolished and he were thrown into contact and competition with "superior" white persons. It also refutes the statement, recently made by some of the political leaders in the South, that Negroes themselves prefer segregated, but equal, schools. It is possible, of course, and perhaps even probable, that, while Negroes object to segregation in principle, when they are actual-

ly confronted with integrated, or desegregated, schools, they may actually prefer to stay in the present segregated schools. This hypothesis finds some credence in one of the findings of the study, viz., that many of the Negro youth evinced feelings of insecurity or rejection when they entered any kind of an interracial situation. Obviously, more research is needed to discover what Negro youth would actually do if confronted with a choice between a segregated and a nonsegregated school.

A recent study by Clark (2) deserves careful attention by school administrators who are faced with the problems of abolishing segregation in their schools. Many questions are arising as to the best procedure to follow in working out such a program. Should desegregation be immediate or gradual? Should it comprise the entire school system or one grade at a time? Should it be effected through authoritarian or persuasive measures, etc? Clark's study consists of a survey of the procedures which have been followed in integrating the schools in many sections of the country and indicates the steps which were taken to insure their success.

One other instance of research, dealing with segregation in the schools, is deserving of special attention. This research, largely historical in nature, was sponsored by the Ford Foundation and is popularly known as the Ashmore Project (1). It shows, irrefutably, that the wall of segregation has been crumbling for several years and that much progress has been made in modifying, if not eliminating, the nation's discriminatory laws and mores, before the recent cases even reached the Supreme Court.

Much more research is needed, and it is needed urgently; time is "running out." We need more knowledge regarding the actual attitudes of Negroes toward segregation or integration. Many statements have appeared in the newspapers concerning this question. None of these statements has been based upon knowledge of the facts; there is reason to suspect that some of them have been based upon nothing more substantial than wishful thinking. The writer knows of one study, now under way, which is investigating the attitudes of Negro teachers toward the total problem of desegregation. This, too, should provide some significant information.

More knowledge is also needed regarding the attitudes of white youth and adults regarding segregation and discrimination. There is evidence (in the writer's own study as well as in others) that many white persons, even in the deep South, are not willing to support the segregation system. How numerous are these people? A question was raised in the writer's study: Are the unpleasant experiences, reported by the Negro youth, actually examples of racial discrimination or could the discrimination have some other basis, such as the youth of the subjects, their appearance, or their manners? An investigation of the experiences of white youth might shed some light on this question. Do they, too, encounter discrimination? Is it true, as has been stated, that many Southern white parents will send their children to private schools when segregation is abolished?

Answers to these and many other questions are needed soon. The more

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factual knowledge we possess regarding the total problem of discrimination, the more intelligent attack we can make on the problems facing us in the immediate future.

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