

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION — One Answer to Discrimination

Actual participation in democratic processes helps high school youths examine their beliefs and act upon genuine conviction.

VOTE FOR Woodward of Weaver High." "No, vote for Suzinsky of Bulkley High." Elections for the Hartford Junior City Council are in full swing! Five candidates will be elected from each of three city high schools to form the Hartford Junior City Council which will work with school officials, the official City Council and the City Manager to improve opportunities for youth in Hartford. The fifteen persons selected will be outstanding individuals, and if the past is any indication there will be no ethnic discrimination in voting. Negroes, Jews, Catholics, Protestants, old Yankee stock, sons and daughters of foreign born parents—all have been elected to this truly important Connecticut group during the past five years.

The Hartford Junior City Council does things. It made a complete survey of recreational opportunities for youth and made recommendations to the City Council and the Commission on Recreation, many of which proposals were adopted. It put driver education into the secondary schools. It has promoted inter-high school cooperation. It annually conducts an extensive program of orientation to vocational

opportunities for high school youth. These fifteen alert youth are among the finest citizens of Hartford. Their training carries over into later years, as follow-up studies reveal. These boys and girls do not discriminate against a person because of race, color or creed. Indeed, at least one of these persons played an important part in breaking the policy of discrimination against Negroes of a national college fraternity.

Basic Policies Are Important

No program of citizenship education, particularly in the field of intercultural education, can be effective unless the administration itself follows certain basic policies. First of all pupils must have the freedom to examine certain limited areas rather completely, and must be able to get the facts and to make recommendations. Secondly, in the area of intercultural policies, there can be no discrimination because of race, religion or nationality group in hiring, assigning and promoting personnel; there can be no discrimination on the part of students in who shall run for office; there can be no discrimination in selection of candidates for sports, orchestra, chorus, plays, panels and other extracurricular activities. The development of policies such as have been enumerated makes

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possible the development of a social atmosphere conducive to democratic living. Without such policies citizenship education operates in an atmosphere in which administrative actions deny the basic premises of the American Creed. Citizenship education in such an atmosphere of discrimination is a sham and pupils soon come to know it.

There are plenty of examples of school systems that have developed these democratic policies. Kalamazoo early developed a policy on hiring personnel. Gary moved from a segregated school system to a nonsegregated school system. One reads with pride the many examples of steps being courageously taken by local school systems to comply with the recent ruling of the Supreme Court on segregation. It is true there are several communities in which desegregation is being opposed. Still, America is moving ahead in its human relations problems, and these are a basic element in any program of citizenship education.

Ingredients of Citizenship Education

Citizenship education is the result of the total pattern of arrangements in the school program. If one is concerned with the development of young citizens competent in the skills and insights of democratic living, then the total atmosphere, the methods of teaching, the extracurricular activities, and each of the various subjects should contribute to this end.

At least four aspects of citizenship education should be stressed:

1. Boys and girls should be made thoroughly aware of the basic premises that underlie the democratic way of

life and how these differ from the authoritarian ways of life. The Citizenship Education Project at Teachers College, Columbia University has identified and made explicit 94 premises, of which the following are illustrative: (a) Every person is of importance as an individual; his well-being is vital in itself; (b) A person is considered innocent until proven guilty in a fair public trial with the right of counsel; (c) Church and state shall be separate; (d) All power belongs to and comes from the people; (e) The individual may own land, personal property and start or stop business at any time.

2. Young people should learn how to identify and define social problems; to collect data bearing on these problems; to decide on what is right and decent in relation to these problems.

3. Youth should learn how to take action to carry out their beliefs. Perhaps we have stressed too much in our schools the talking about problems, and have provided too few experiences in putting one's beliefs into action. Citizenship education is not effective unless there is action.

4. Boys and girls should learn the processes and skills inherent in the democratic way of life. Considerable emphasis has been given already to elementary parliamentary procedure. However, we need to stress far more the understandings and procedures of committees and discussion groups. Much of the real work in American society is conducted through committees, but all committees do not function well automatically. The skills of group process are not inborn. They must be learned.



HARTFORD (CONN.) TIMES PHOTO

A subcommittee of the Hartford Junior City Council in Hartford, Connecticut plans recommendations to take to the Connecticut Public Utilities Commission in regard to student use of public buses. All three of Hartford's high schools are represented on this subcommittee.

The Citizenship Education Project has developed *the idea of the laboratory practice* which seems to be the means by which citizenship education is best developed. Some of these practices are undertaken in social studies, others in English, science, business education, home and family living, guidance or in the extracurricular program. There is considerable evidence to indicate that it is this total pattern of multi-experiences in many different areas of school life that develops real insight and know-how in citizenship education. The isolated single experience in social studies or anywhere else does not seem to be effective.

Intercultural Practices in Schools

The Hartford Junior City Council is one example of a basic policy of non-discrimination at work. Woodward is a Negro, and Suzinsky is a Polish Jew. Furthermore, Hartford employs and promotes people on basis of merit rather than ethnic background. This has not always been true in Hartford or in other Connecticut communities.

Several schools in Connecticut have found that many boys and girls want to know more about various religious groups. What does it mean to be a Jew, a Protestant or a Catholic? In the elementary schools a unit of work

is frequently built around the little book, *One God*, by Florence Mary Fitch. At the junior or senior high school level pupils have listed their questions about the various religions—and there are many. A rabbi, priest and minister are invited to the class to discuss the questions. Visits are made to local churches or synagogues. Pertinent readings are explored. The net result is to help young people clarify the areas of similarities and the areas of differences about religions. Increased respect for religion and for different religious groups seems to come as a result of such experiences.

Investigating recreation needs of youth in a community is undertaken quite frequently. Teams of pupils make a survey of recreation opportunities. Such a survey in large communities usually reveals blighted areas that provide less favorable facilities. Plans are then developed to improve recreational facilities for these blighted areas. This usually involves taking matters to the highest authorities—the Mayor, City Council, and City Manager. Most boys and girls believe that people who live in blighted areas—regardless of religion, nationality or race—should not be discriminated against—particularly in recreational opportunities.

A number of schools are developing units of work around the idea of understanding themselves, and themselves in relation to their families, their friends, or their neighborhood and their school. Pupils come to understand their own emotions, their own hopes and aspirations, and why they behave as they do. Frequently, the question of choice of friends across religious or ethnic lines arises and is

talked out. This mental hygiene approach to behavior, particularly to discriminating behavior, seems to be helpful to young people in their growth toward a more mature outlook.

Situations that provide for the wholesome contacts of young people of different cultural backgrounds seem to be most helpful in breaking down stereotypes and in building respect. There are three groups of situations in Connecticut that deserve special mention. First, there is the Mock UN Assembly conducted among 19 high schools of the greater Hartford area. In the first place the representatives from each school, when taken collectively, represent a most cosmopolitan gathering of young people. Boys and girls who live in a school where there are no Negro youth will come in contact in this situation with Negro boys and girls. Again, each pupil delegation has visited the United Nations and interviewed at some length a delegation of a country whose customs are quite different from ours. Similarly, there is a state-wide UNESCO conference for young people. Third, there are three groups of student-forums in the state. For example the Housatonic Valley Forum includes eight towns, two of which are industrial and the remainder are rural. Ten pupils are selected from each school to participate in an afternoon and evening session that is entirely planned and run by students. The topics include timely issues, while segregation itself has been the topic of at least one forum.

Increasingly schools are making use of special days to focus on human relations aspects of citizenship.

The incidental approach is often

most productive. Teachers of English report that discussion of books like *Kingsblood Royal* or *Gentleman's Agreement* provides pupils an opportunity to air their views and clarify their thinking. The teacher who says to her class, while discussing *The Merchant of Venice*, "Some people think we should not use this book in schools because it has an unfortunate portrayal of Jewish character in Shylock. What do you think?" is raising a thought provoking question that leads not only to a discussion of stereotyping, but of censorship. Both are important questions in terms of citizenship education.

Sometimes the auditorium programs help provide an emotional tone that results in a greater emotional commitment to democratic values. I recently visited Stamford high school which staged a wonderful production of *Bal-lad for Americans*. Pupils of every ethnic group in that school were in the orchestra and chorus and they not only enjoyed the music, but appreciated the message of this opus.

Fair Treatment for All

Citizenship education begins with the basic administrative policies that create the social climate of the school. When people are hired, assigned and promoted without discrimination; when pupils are allowed to take part in school activities on the basis of ability and educational need; when boys and girls are respected for what they are and can do as individuals; when controversial issues are examined under the guidance of teachers skilled in helping young people to think critically; when these essential ingredients

are provided we have the conditions for an effective program of citizenship education.

One of the difficulties in moving ahead with an educational program is the lack of sensitivity of educators to the fact that intergroup problems exist under their noses. Recently a person wrote to me describing some practices in intergroup education, but concluded with these words, "but we have no problems in our community." Less than a year previous to this, there had been a well publicized incident of an interracial conflict in that community.

Pupils need to understand and have as a part of their living creed the basic premises of our American democracy. Pupils need to understand themselves and their own emotions which are the basis for their own relationships. Youth need to understand how to go about tackling important social problems, gather data about them, define them, and to learn how to take action to deal with them. Boys and girls need to know and have skill in dealing with controversial issues in a spirited but rational way. Pupils need to examine the problems of segregation and discrimination, not only as they exist in American society, but as they exist elsewhere.

Will this end discrimination? Probably not. But it promises to be at least one effective way to help young people clarify for themselves what it is they really do want to believe and live by. I have faith that, when this happens, the verdict will be overwhelmingly on the side of justice and fair treatment for each person and for all people regardless of social status or ethnic background.

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