

Human Relations Education

In St. Louis

Transition from a segregated to a nonsegregated basis is being aided in the St. Louis schools by the intergroup efforts of community organizations. Also beneficial, over a number of years, has been the emphasis on good human relations teaching.

THIRTY-SIX days after the Supreme Court decision declaring segregation in public schools unconstitutional, the St. Louis Board of Education announced a complete schedule for desegregation and a set of fundamental principles to guide the process of desegregation. The schedule called for desegregation of the teachers colleges, junior colleges, and special schools for the physically handicapped to occur in September 1954. All high schools except the two technical high schools were to be desegregated in January 1955, and all elementary schools were to follow the desegregation program in September 1955. As soon as a new technical high school is finished these schools will complete the program.

Among the principles adopted by the Board of Education were (a) assigning all entering pupils to the nearest school; (b) giving children already attending a school the privilege of remaining there provided this did not lead to overcrowding; (c) abolishing any indication of race or religion on teacher application forms; (d) assigning teachers to schools on the basis of need and the teacher's aptitudes;

and (e) drawing school boundary lines on as nearly regular a basis as possible, taking due consideration of natural boundaries, traffic hazards, etc.

The speed with which the board acted and the fairness and firmness of its policy led to immediate public approval. Civic, business, religious and social groups publicly announced their approval of the board action. No organized opposition developed even though St. Louis had been for a number of years the national headquarters of a "hate" group.

When Stowe Junior and Teachers College (Negro) was combined with the Harris Junior and Teachers College (white) the transition was extremely smooth. Students sat in classrooms with no perceptible pattern of segregation, the lunchroom services and eating were well integrated, and sports and athletics were participated in freely by both white and Negro students. The faculty, custodial force, and lunchroom workers were of both races. No pupils are known to have left the college because of having instructors of a different race. The enrollment of the enlarged Harris Junior

and Teachers College was greater than the total of the separate colleges the year before, with increases in the number of both white and Negro students.

Groundwork in Better Relations

Similar success followed the integration of the high schools in January. Only one incident, largely caused by some former students in one of the high schools, resulted. This incident was promptly handled and the matter subsided within two days. Integration of faculty and building department employees was followed in the high schools also. Similarly, no difficulties are expected this autumn in the desegregation of elementary schools.

The successful transition from segregated to nonsegregated schools was greatly aided by an emphasis on good human relations teaching over a number of years. As early as 1931 Negro and white teachers were serving together on committees to write courses of study or to select textbooks. A single salary schedule for all teachers has been in effect for a long time. The state teachers association was desegregated in 1947, and the state athletic association in 1949. Quite a few administrators and teachers began to show an interest in problems of intergroup relationships during the 1930's. Some interschool visits were held at scattered points and widely separated times.

The organizing of these scattered efforts occurred during the years 1945 to 1948 when the St. Louis public schools became a part of the Intergroup Education in Public Schools project of the American Council on Education, sometimes called the Taba project.

Under the leadership of Hilda Taba and her staff the local program was channeled into the lines of curriculum study, community relations, interschool activities, and child study. Workshops and institutes were organized for the training of teachers, and by the end of the three-year period more than two hundred and fifty teachers had been involved in the program.

Several things have grown out of the original Taba project in St. Louis. An organization of high school youth is now in its tenth year. This organization has a membership drawn from about forty of the high schools in the St. Louis area, and its members come from all religious, racial and socioeconomic groups in the community. Its purpose is to promote friendly relationships between all groups of high school students. It is called the Intergroup Youth Association, and each spring holds a mass meeting on school time attended by from 1200 to 1600 students. A smaller group of about two hundred students constitutes the steering committee for this organization. Under the committee's leadership various work and activity clubs have been formed. The teen-agers have gone into hospitals and community centers to spread cheer and help in the physical tasks of cleaning up and decorating rooms.

Another outgrowth of the Taba project has been the organization of Human Relations Clubs in a number of the high schools. These clubs arrange

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for inter-school visitation and have cooperated in sponsoring public programs during Brotherhood Week and at other times, using students from several schools on the same programs.

The city-wide student council is now in its eighth year. Two representatives from all of the public, parochial and private high schools in the city meet monthly to consider problems of interest to them. This council was directly responsible for arranging the first inter-racial athletic contest between public high schools in 1951. The members have considered such problems as sportsmanship, forms of organization of student councils, safety in and around the schools, etc.

An intergroup education association of more than five hundred members has been formed among teachers and administrators. This organization has provided short institutes for in-service training of teachers, has encouraged attendance at summer workshops, and has provided leadership to educational groups not directly affiliated with it, for example, the National Art Teachers Association, the city-county guidance organization, and the regional convention of Catholic secondary school teachers.

At the conclusion of the Taba project the Board of Education authorized the appointment of a consultant in human relations to extend the gains made during the 1945-48 period. The consultant has had the responsibility of contacting every school in the city system and trying to interest all teachers in including better human relations education in their everyday teaching. His work has led him into all of the fields started by the Taba project. He

has encouraged teachers to plan curriculum units that would stress better human understanding and has helped them introduce methods for better understanding of pupils so that they might help to avoid future human relations problems. He has helped teachers use bibliotherapy for producing an understanding of the other people's feelings and attitudes.

A large number of principals and program chairmen for parent groups have called on the consultant or on members of the intergroup education association for public talks with faculty and citizen groups. Some community organizations have been set up on a neighborhood basis to help prepare a specific community for desegregation. Four of these community meetings were held last year.

An Emerging Program

During the same time this work was progressing in the schools a city-wide program of changing public attitudes was being quietly carried on by several community organizations. These organizations, under the skillful direction of capable leaders, have effected remarkable changes in the community. The opening of hotels to all races, the desegregation of public entertainment in many privately owned concerns, the increasing desegregation of churches, increased employment opportunities for Negroes, and subtle changes in the attitude of the press are the result of the efforts of these leaders. Some of the organizations dealing more or less directly with the problem of improving human relationships are the National Conference of Christians and Jews, The Jewish Com-

munity Relations Council, The Metropolitan Church Federation, The Catholic Inter-Racial Council, The Mayor's Council on Human Relations, The League of Women Voters, The Urban League, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, and many others including labor groups, business groups, service clubs, neighborhood associations, and local church groups. The net result has been a constant growth throughout the community in better human understanding and in readiness to grant equal rights and opportunities to all groups of citizens.

These organizations have also been of service to the schools in aiding the program of better human relations education. Speakers have been provided, counsel given to school officials, scholarship aid has been made available to teachers interested in doing advanced study in intergroup education, and audio-visual aids and other materials have been furnished for use by teachers.

We in St. Louis do not lay claim to having a perfect program. However, the general trend has been to go forward at an ever-increasing pace in making democratic living a reality in this city. We feel that what we have accomplished over a ten-year period might be accomplished in another community in a much shorter time, for the general tenor of national thought has been liberalized during the past ten years.

Certain principles have been developed for our guidance in St. Louis. Perhaps these will be of some service to educators elsewhere. They are given

here without comment, but we will be happy to explain them more in detail to any correspondents.

A general attack on all prejudices will be more rewarding, in the end, than an attack on a specific prejudice.

Use only those practices which are educationally justifiable.

Bring people of differing groups together because of a common interest rather than simply to satisfy curiosity.

Young people can be trusted to solve many intergroup problems if given an opportunity under proper adult guidance.

Cooperation with all groups in the community having an interest in good human relations should be encouraged.

Teachers need greater preparation than do pupils.

Use experienced teachers to help others.

Use the contributions of all groups to our common culture in the curriculum.

Educate the community through public programs.

Use the curriculum for the development of the whole child, for this will tend to eliminate many unnecessary tensions.

Use emotional and imaginative appeals, through such media as music and art, intelligently and with considerable preparation for those who are to have the human relations experiences.

It is best to start any program for the betterment of human relations at the point where participants are willing to start.

Give administrative support to those who are trying to carry on a program of bettering human relations.

Approach the "touchy" aspects of human relationships cautiously and allow plenty of time for advance thinking and planning of activities.

Counter misinformation with scientific facts.

Use the modern techniques of sociometry, sociodrama and guidance for diagnosis of individuals and the remedial techniques of guidance, role playing and bibliotherapy to improve attitudes.

Prepare teachers first and depend on them to carry on further projects.

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