

liefs or cognitive aspects of their attitudes may have changed without any alteration in feelings toward these groups.

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Social Acceptance of Navajo Students

Reported here is a study which found that there is a positive relationship between an improving classroom climate for social acceptance of a minority group and teacher attitudes that are not rigidly authoritarian.

AT ONE TIME it was assumed that the American Indian was a vanishing race, but the Indian and his problems refused to disappear. Nearly everyone had misjudged the vitality and tenacity of his culture and subsequent events have demonstrated that he is here to stay for some time yet.

In the beginning, faced with the difficult problem of providing educational facilities where Indians lived and work-

ing under the assumption that the Indian culture must certainly soon be absorbed by the dominant, white culture, both federal and private educational programs for Indians frequently set up off-reservation boarding schools as answers to the "Indian Problem." Often established at great distances from the students' homes to discourage running away, these institutions were typically administered under military-type discipline with a

strong emphasis placed upon vocational training.

A New Emphasis

Later, John Collier, Commissioner of Indian Affairs from 1933 to 1944, placed a much higher value on the preservation of the Indian community than had his predecessors in his support of the day-school movement. Education of the individual in his own environment with the idea that there might be something about that environment worthy of perpetuation was a revolutionary concept.

Since World War II, Indian Education has undergone a third major reorientation. Widespread public interest coupled with changing value patterns among the Indians have produced tremendous growth in programs providing for the education of Indians on all levels. The most dramatic demonstration of this has taken place on the Navajo Indian Reservation which occupies, primarily, the northeastern corner of Arizona and small parts of Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico. A census for 1945 reports that of 20,435 children of school age, only 6,543 were in school. Ten years later 24,560 of a potential school population of 26,800 were reported as actually attending.

Also typical of the new emphasis was a return to the earlier philosophy that Indians would have to be educated to compete in the non-Indian society, but with recognition of the desirability of tribal life for some. The Navajo Tribe has increased in population from approximately 12,000 in 1868 to over 80,000 at the present time. While the population continues to increase at the rate of nearly 2,000 per year, the land available to them for use has remained virtually constant since 1938. Government officials and tribal leaders have responded by emphasizing the need for the preparation

of young people to compete in the non-Indian society off the reservation.

Out of necessity, the Navajos are extending themselves farther and farther into the white society surrounding them, while the relocation program sponsored by the Bureau of Indian Affairs is establishing groups of Navajo families in major industrial centers, thus adding to the racial minority complexes already existing there.

An educational development following this pattern is the Bordertown Boarding School Program in which public school systems near the Navajo Reservation contract with the federal government to include Indian children (who live in a federally constructed and maintained dormitory) in their classrooms. In addition, Indians who have access to public schools are now encouraged to attend them. It is obvious that public school teachers can expect more and more Indian children in their classrooms.

In addition to federal programs, at least two church groups have inaugurated programs in which young Indians are placed in public schools. The American Friends Service Committee and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints both arrange foster homes off the reservation for boys and girls who would not otherwise be able to attend public school.

Certainly in the American Southwest, Indians are an important segment of the minority group structure and educators have assumed an added responsibility in attempting to meet the needs of this group in their schools. How best to meet this challenge constituted the general

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problematical framework of a study conducted in a school district in south central Utah which has felt the impact of the introduction of a number of Navajo youngsters into its system under the sponsorship of the Bordertown Dormitory Program.

Just prior to the school year 1953-1954, the Bureau of Indian Affairs contracted with the Sevier School District in Utah to place in its elementary and junior high schools 120 Navajo pupils. It was acquaintance with the problems that this situation presented that prompted a study designed to determine some of the factors influencing the social acceptance of this minority group.

The district was to place the children so that no more than one-third of any one classroom would be composed of Navajo students. In the school year 1956-1957 when this study was conducted, the dormitory students had been placed in 25 classrooms in the district, ranging from grades four to nine. These were in three elementary schools, two junior high schools and in one elementary-junior high school combined. There were a total of 11 elementary classrooms and 12 junior high school homerooms involved in the study, with the junior high school homerooms operating on a modified platoon system.

Classroom Climate and Teacher Attitudes

Within this setting it was determined that the study should center about two main concerns. These were: (a) classroom climate for social acceptance, and (b) teacher attitudes on the dominative-supportive dimension.

Classroom, or group climate, was considered as the characteristic tone or quality of interpersonal feelings within the group, with the implication that we

would be dealing, not with a discrete entity, but with a syndrome composed of many elements. It was further assumed that some of the elements of such a syndrome are measurable and that the more of such elements we were able to measure, the more accurately we would describe the total condition.

Two of these elements that might appear at first glance to be on a continuum are acceptance and rejection. But when an ethnic minority is involved, another factor becomes apparent on the rejection end of the scale. A member of a minority group may be chosen as a friend by a person in the dominant group solely on the basis of compatibility, whereas rejection of such a person will frequently involve elements of prejudice that operate quite independently of his personal characteristics. Without the presence of prejudice, the child in the minority group who does not possess qualities that render him desirable as a friend might be ignored but he would not necessarily be actively rejected. When the conditions allowing for prejudice exist, any attempt to measure the group climate of acceptance must take this element into consideration.

Attention was next directed toward the effect of teacher attitudes upon this climate. Foshay and Green had indicated that:

Virtually all the recent studies of socialization in the classroom agree on two main ideas: (a) that the group climate in the classroom is the most important factor in the child's socialization at school, and (b) that the teacher is the principal agent in establishing this climate.¹

If this be true and if we give credence to the effects noticed by Lewin, Lippitt

¹ Arthur W. Foshay and John Hawkes Green, "The Development of Social Processes," *Review of Educational Research*, XXIII (April 1953), p. 146.

and White² in their experimental groups where autocratic leadership was purposely established, then we would expect to find in classrooms of autocratic teachers an atmosphere conducive to the presence of prejudice and a resultant condition of poor socialization.

Whether these effects were pronounced enough to be available to measurement was the focal point about which the study evolved. In order to measure the classroom climate, two instruments were employed. They were a simple friendship choices questionnaire, which would indicate the extent to which Navajo children in the classroom were being chosen as friends by the non-Indians, and the Bogardus Social Distance Scale, which would indicate the presence of the prejudicial elements in children's attitudes toward Navajos as a group. Indices were devised which would allow for the comparison of the various classrooms with respect to each element separately and a composite index designed as a reflection of the climate as a whole in each group.

Teacher attitudes on the dominative-supportive dimension were measured with the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory, an instrument purported to have considerable validity in measuring particularly the dominative, or authoritarian type of teacher personality. Individual results on this instrument were then equated for comparison with gains made in these teachers' classrooms on two successive administrations of the sociometric devices at an interval of approximately six months. A positive correlation of 0.419 was found between those classrooms in which desirable gains in class-

room climate for social acceptance of the Navajo minority had been made and those teachers who scored high on the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory. Since a high score on this instrument indicates the absence of authoritarian attitudes, then the thesis was supported that there is a positive relationship between an improving classroom climate for social acceptance of a minority group such as this one and teacher attitudes that are not rigidly authoritarian.

Although in the literature some use of the term "supportive" was used to characterize teacher attitudes on the end of the continuum opposite those characterized as "dominative," its use was limited here because of a feeling that it is yet inadequately defined. The terms "dominative," "authoritative," and "rigid" seem to have cohesive meaning and can be used almost interchangeably. What constitutes the "supportive" teacher, however, is not entirely clear. From observations made during the course of the study, it could be said that some teachers who would, according to subjective judgment, appear to present some of the aspects of the authoritarian individual, could be found upon more careful inspection to be supportive in many of their relationships with pupils. Certainly, this constitutes an area for much fruitful study. Personal warmth and understanding, the emotional support so vital to the security and mental well-being of all individuals, can apparently exist in an endless variety of settings.

Perhaps instruments such as those employed in the study described could best be used in cooperative study projects designed primarily for in-service training. The situation would have to be one in which staff members are willing and even anxious to have a look at them-

² Ronald Lippitt and Ralph K. White, "The 'Social Climate' of Children's Groups," in Barker, Kounin, and Wright's *Child Behavior and Development*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1943, p. 501.

selves. These are threatening things and must be used with accompanying support or they could conceivably do more harm than good. There would be no reason, however, why they could not be used where minorities other than the one mentioned here are involved.

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