

A Program of Cross-Cultural Education

The United States is now conducting an educational program in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. Based upon a "grass roots" approach this program is described as "a mutual learning activity."

FAR OUT in the western Pacific, the United States is engaged in a unique experiment in administration. With the ending of World War II, an agreement was signed between the Security Council of the United Nations and the United States giving the latter administrative rights over the islands of Micronesia for an indefinite period, subject to overview by the United Nations. This administration has now been going on for 12 years—the first four years under the Navy and since July 1, 1951, under the Department of Interior.

The islands of Micronesia stretch over a vast area of the Pacific about the size of the United States. They are inhabited by some 70,000 Micronesians. Because they are so far flung and the problems of communication were in the past so insurmountable, nine different cultures and languages have evolved during past ages. In view of the administrative purposes given to the Administering Authority by the United Nations—to develop the people of these islands economically, politically, socially and educationally—it is obvious that the geographical extent and the multiplicity of languages

and cultures compound the difficulties of the undertaking.

By the very nature of the purposes, it is also evident that the over-all task is an educational one. Every other advance is posited upon education. From the beginning of its administration, the policy of the United States in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands has had as its objective the development of self-government, and fundamental in that policy as a nation-building agency has been education. But this is not the only objective. Micronesia cannot afford to have political and constitutional development unless it is preceded by a sound economy. Education is serving not only political and constitutional government but it is also very much serving economic development. Thirdly, education is the underpinning of the social development of the various peoples of Micronesia, else how can they learn to meet one another on common ground regardless of diverse cultures, languages, creeds, backgrounds, environments, hopes and aspirations.

Along with these goals set forth by the United Nations and accepted by the Administering Authority goes the necessity

of the blending of the cultures so that the Micronesian people will have a proper pride in their identity with their own particular culture. At the same time they will be able to accept valuable elements in each of the other cultures. It is also hoped that education will enable them to choose wisely from Western civilization and, especially from the American, such elements as will be beneficial and adaptable as they endeavor to make the changes necessary to accommodate themselves to the modern world.

Indirectly the task of the 275 Americans who are engaged in the process of administering the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands is that of education. They are concerned with upgrading Micronesians in administration, government, health, education, agriculture and trade. More directly and specifically it is the task of the 27 American educators to help approximately 400 Micronesian teachers build a system of education responsive to the various cultural needs of Micronesians at the same time that it helps them to enter the world current. Since several cultures are involved, including the American, it becomes distinctly a problem of cross-cultural education.

Problems in Cross-Cultural Education

In his monumental work, *America as a Civilization*, Max Lerner has invoked the anthropologists in calling attention to the fact that "every people, no matter how primitive, had an organic culture. What they found was that a primitive people had its literature, even if only a body of folklore; had its science, even if

only a system of magic; had its religions, even if only the worship and propitiation of idols; had its moral and legal system, even if only a set of tribal customs and sanctions."¹ The functional approaches of anthropologists like Malinowski, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead advanced the idea "that cultures are organic patterns to be treated as living wholes."² If this is accepted as true, then an established practice, a law, or a custom cannot be lifted out and displaced or replaced without doing some violence to the rest. Each culture, primitive or modern, is in itself whole. This is a truth we must learn to accept in Micronesia. But since each culture is a living and growing organism, it has within itself the clashes of purpose, the paradoxes and the overlappings which appear in all living organisms.

And so it is in all the cultures of Micronesia. There is the desire among the younger and better educated to be democratized. The "iroijes" and the "nanmarkis" (feudal nobility) resist such changes with all the power at their command. The very idea of universal public education is something new to Micronesia. It was not that they did not have a system of education for inducting their young into the ways of life of the tribal societies. But it was not institutionalized. Micronesian children early learn to perform definite tasks necessary to keep the social life going. They run errands, sweep the house, carry water and take care of the baby. A little later, assisted by their elders, they learn how to plant and harvest and prepare food, how to fish, build houses, fashion and sail canoes, and make mats. These are the necessary activities of life, activities in which every

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¹ Max Lerner. *America as a Civilization*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957. p. 56.

² *Ibid.*, p. 57.

member of the community, down to the small child, has a part. When children are old enough, the wise men of the clan, the teachers, introduce them to their folkways, customs and traditions. This sufficed in a primitive culture.

The School Is New

Now a new educational institution, the public school, has been introduced. It is true that the Japanese had some public schools scattered around on a few of the islands. But the idea of universal education for all children between the ages of 8 and 14 was for the first time instituted by the Navy Administration in 1947. It is small wonder that the inhabitants of those islands and atolls far away from the more acculturated areas around the District Administration centers take the public schools with a "grain of salt." Attendance is spotty and schools are in session when the teacher feels like it.

Americans here may feel a sense of frustration over the lackadaisical and casual attitude of people who have not long emerged from a stone age culture toward the idea of universal, compulsory, public education. They had best remember that the cultural system shapes the school no less than it shapes the individual. All that comprises the culture—the controlling sentiments, ideas, and social practices—will have its influence on who attends the school, what and how they are taught, and how it is operated and controlled.

Lest Americans be appalled at the seeming lack of progress in the acceptance of American ideas about universal public education, let me allay their fears by reminding them that many important changes are rapidly taking place in the various cultural systems of Micronesia. These changes will be reflected in the schools and in the prevailing attitudes

about public education and its purposes. They will not occur immediately. The time lag will vary with the nature and extent of the cultural changes.

The more those things comprising the curriculum of the schools—the set of educational objectives, the body of subject matter, the activities to be carried out, the ways of evaluating whether or not the objectives have been reached by the pupils, and the kind of control which the teacher exercises over the learners—are derived from the Micronesian cultures, the sooner will the schools become responsive to Micronesian needs. Obviously the way to bring this about is to bring Micronesians more into the planning of every phase of their life under American administration. They must be encouraged and helped to participate in the development of their educational system.

Imposition Versus Education

This requires from us (Americans) a truly educational outlook, a considerable belief in other human beings, in their capacity for growth, and a belief that human growth and development are best encouraged in any given environment as the people concerned participate both in purpose and activity in their own progress.

Here it seems to me is the crux of the conflict between two ways of life seeking ascendancy today. One would impose its way from above following the leadership principle, as exemplified by its titular heads. The other, if it is to be successful in capturing the imaginations of men, must capitalize on the sum total of the creative activities of its active members. Where can this be better accomplished than in the community itself? For what a culture is depends upon what people think, believe and do in the various com-

munities which make up that culture. It would seem, then, that the best hope for the democratic world lies in these "grass roots" movements; that it is the part of wisdom to start with current problems found in local communities if the free world is to move effectively into action on the many and varied problems in the many and varied cultures that compose it. This approach is even more important in those other cultures which lie today in that "no man's land" waiting to join that camp which can attract them most.

The fundamental education or community development movement is such a "grass roots" approach. It starts with the thesis that improving a culture means improving local communities and that education, broadly conceived, has a part in such improvement.

Here then is a new concept of education—one that is not synonymous with formal schooling; nor is it equated with teaching and learning as primarily processes of memorizing subject matter. Rather it is one that accepts that there can be no higher educational act than that of a people of a community participating and cooperating to solve problems in community life. In this kind of education, educators are needed, first, with vision; second, with ability to further vision; and third, with courage to follow through—to see that the application of vision makes a difference in community living.

This is the philosophy which activates American educators in Trust Territory as they strive to help Micronesians to see the school and its program as important to their own self-improvement and to take responsibility for its upbuilding.

Description of Teacher Education

In order to implement such a program, there are employed in each of the five

districts comprising Trust Territory four supervisors of teacher education and an educational administrator.

This position of supervisor of teacher education and its attendant duties and responsibilities is almost as complex and difficult as any position imaginable. To the sincere educator, however, it is equally challenging and rewarding.

The many and varied duties center primarily around the inservice training, assisting and supervising of Micronesian teachers; improving their general and professional backgrounds of education and experience; assisting them in developing better programs of education; helping to develop better teaching materials and aids; demonstrating methods and techniques.

Much of the time of these supervisors is spent working with Micronesian teachers in their home community elementary schools—most of these on islands and atolls at distances up to 600 miles from the district center.

There are from 23 to 48 elementary schools in each of the five districts. Given the very limited background of Micronesian personnel, the supervisor must be flexible and able to work at all levels in programs of total community education. He works closely with community leaders, drawing upon and developing local skills and talents as he strives to assist in developing an educational program which best fits the living pattern of the community.

The supervisor should become conversant with the local language in order to communicate effectively with the people, most of whom know no English. He must be able to help plan and develop improved programs in such communities, not along patterns developed and geared to the United States or "western" communities and cultures, but

to meet the needs of the different island cultures with respect to their political, economic, social and educational advancement, without destroying the persisting and inherently good aspects of local cultures.

At the present time, most Micronesian teachers have had less than what could be considered junior high school education. Most of them have attended a number of teacher training sessions at the district center. Occasionally, a somewhat experienced teacher is replaced by a complete neophyte at the order of a local chief and officialdom. A few teachers are graduates of the Pacific Islands Central School, the only senior high school in all of Trust Territory.

Suitable texts, teaching aids and materials are sadly lacking and need to be developed. Curriculum and course of study development are at a low level. Most buildings and facilities would seem shockingly inadequate to the U. S. educator.

These are, in brief, some of the problems to be overcome. In working toward this, the supervisor of teacher education is faced not only with the language barrier (three different languages in one district, nine in all), but with the many cultural differences even between islands of a district. In all communities much good education in traditional community living takes place.

In few communities have the benefits of better planned education to cope with changing cultural and environmental factors been demonstrated and accepted.

Developing Local Responsibility

It is obvious that the position of the educator in Micronesia is no ordinary one. It is the task of building from the bottom up a public school system from

community to community through the participation of the people of the community. It is also helping teachers to carry out the program effectively with community backing once it has been established.

It is important to note here that any program and planning should be adjusted to one overriding authority—the authority of the situation itself. While the people of the many islands are always ready to welcome the supervisor and to accept his advice, they have the right of final judgment and any outside expert in education should defer to this final judgment of the people to be educated. At least he should give to their knowledge and judgment equal status with his own.

This viewpoint presupposes that the supervisor of teacher education has the ability to learn from the people and does not seek to impose his judgment upon them. It also rules out detailed planning in advance for any given community for the very good reason that preconceived plans make the supervisor too committed to his own ideas of what the community needs and of ways to meet those needs. It could be that the pre-planners define for themselves what the community's problems are and then take the next logical step which is to provide the solutions and finally to manipulate the community into accepting both the problems and the solutions.

This is not the development of community education as we envisage it in Micronesia. What we want ultimately to do is to make the community less dependent on the administering agent. We want to stimulate people to the point where they are willing and able to identify and solve their own problems. Externally conceived goals are liable to defeat such ends.

The anthropologists have been a definite asset in helping the educators in Trust Territory establish the program. One of the requirements in developing community education is that attitudes, institutions, and organizations that set up obstacles to change need to be modified; and that those attitudes, institutions and organizations which facilitate the fullest expression of individual capacities need to be developed. In this connection, the anthropologists have indeed helped.

The Process Is Important

In community education, we are as interested in the process as in the product. And the process is intimately concerned with whether an increasing number of people are becoming aware of their common needs in education, of the common resources available to meet them and are learning to participate as a group in meeting them. It is only as this happens that community education is taking place.

Community education projects should provide a means for carrying leadership right through to the people who do the work. It is not only a question of lead-

ership at the top and leadership to stimulate action by the people through workers at the village level. It is even more the stimulation of leadership among the people themselves and the establishment of organizations so that this leadership can function.

So the United States proceeds in this unique experiment in cross-cultural education, beset by many problems for which there are no ready-made solutions, handicapped at times by those who think that the American answer is the best answer and that, because it has succeeded in America, there is no question of its applicability to the Micronesian.

Generally, however, the more democratic and less culturally-exclusive ways have prevailed. We do have respect for their cultures and try to provide them with the kind of education that will enable them to make the final choice of what they shall accept and adopt of our culture.

As in all educational endeavors, the end is not in sight. Some historian in the future will have to tell us how well we have achieved. For the time, we are engaged in a mutual learning activity.

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