

## Values in a World of Many Cultures

*"Open" persons are  
needed today.*

CAN we Americans break out of our own culture shell and achieve cross-cultural understanding? Even though we are committed to the ideal of a common humanity, we will have to struggle to achieve such understanding. Every one is a product of culture. Each of us has grown up in a particular cultural group where he has learned to view events and define the realities of his life in terms of his culture's perceptions, meanings and values.

When an individual steps into another culture, he tends to interpret the events he observes in terms of his own cultural experience. It is only with great effort, usually after some systematic preparation, that some individuals develop an awareness of their own cultural bias and acquire some objectivity in viewing behavior in other cultures. A few, after living in another culture, eventually achieve an empathic identification which enables them actually to view events through the perceptions of that culture.

Historically, every group has looked with suspicion, and usually with rejection, upon people who are different from themselves. Now, the threat of nuclear warfare and the progress of a world-wide

industrial explosion make it necessary for us to understand and accept one another. This is a time that is both awful and wonderful in its threat and its promise. Scientific advances that enabled us to develop nuclear weapons also make available a technology that can raise the level of living of all peoples of the earth from mere survival to adequate and creative dimensions. And this we must do to survive. It is an irony of fate that in order to avert catastrophic world war, we must bend every effort to realizing a truly humane society.

The dynamics of world affairs that have brought neolithic men, medieval men and industrial men into close interaction with one another have left an impact on our own culture in a number of ways. We have been a frontier society of adventurous people, who have used situations and natural resources all over the world to serve our own expanding industrial needs. Now we are suddenly faced with the fact that the emerging "new" nations now industrializing will need their natural resources for their own national purposes and will need technical help. If these new nations are to become open societies, west-

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ern democracies must lend them every possible help. New relationships are demanded of us, new extensions of mutual aid and technical assistance even at the cost to us of personal sacrifice.

### What Values?

What values must operate in such a situation? Certainly not the values of "rugged individualism," nor those of "the white man's burden," nor those that are reflected in the assumption that Americans have *the* superior way of life and *the* solutions to world problems.

Values that have long been a part of the American ideal, but not always operative at the reality level, now become a necessity.

In a world of many cultures, all nations, hopefully, are moving toward the elimination of hunger, disease, human indignity and enslavement. In a nuclear age, moreover, the goals of a humane society have become a necessity of survival as well as an encompassing set of ideals. A high value is expressed in *the longing for individual dignity*. Every man, black, yellow, brown or white, Moslem, Hindu, Christian, Jew, Communist—the categories are many—is determined to achieve self-respect and respect from others. Accompanying this value is a necessary corollary—*a respect for and a valuing of differences*. It is clear that each group usually values to a high degree its own cultural ways and that mutual solutions to world problems can only occur in a climate of respect for differences and for different values. George D. Spindler has commented that:

The basic problem is how to communicate to students the diversity of human cultures, the uniqueness of values, and the integration of patterned behavior around them in each culture, with increased aware-

ness and tolerance as the aim; and at the same time communicate understanding of the fact that all cultures are answers to the same basic problems and conditions of human existence.<sup>1</sup>

Whereas in the past a predominant concern has been with the solution of national problems, we now have to commit ourselves to valuing most highly the solution of *human problems*, wherever they exist. Furthermore, as we participate in their resolution, we must be prepared to permit and support different cultural formulas for the meeting of human needs.

What are the qualities of the human beings who can commit themselves to these deeply humane concerns and can bring to the task real cross-cultural understanding?

Charles Morris,<sup>2</sup> Cora du Bois,<sup>3</sup> and others have emphasized that it is the person who is basically secure in his own personality development, who has a healthy self-concept, or, to use Morris' phrase, is "an open self" who can encounter cultural behavior that is different from his own experience without being threatened by it. In addition, such secure individuals need to have developed an empathic-identity-action<sup>4</sup> pattern which enables them to place themselves in another's shoes with feeling for

<sup>1</sup> George D. Spindler. "New Trends and Applications in Anthropology." *New Viewpoints in the Social Sciences*, 28th Yearbook. Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, a department of the National Education Association, 1958. p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Morris. *The Open Self*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956.

<sup>3</sup> Cora du Bois. "Some Notions on Learning Intercultural Understanding." *Anthropology and Education*, George D. Spindler, Editor. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1955.

<sup>4</sup> L. P. Cajoleas. "International Understanding: a Theoretical Analysis of a Goal in Education." *Teachers College Record*, January 1960. p. 188-94.

and sympathetic understanding of his situation.

This empathic person must also have a clear understanding of what it means to live in and be a product of culture. This understanding must be based upon a systematic study of his own culture—how it has shaped his beliefs, values and behavior—and a gradual application of the generalizations learned to the many cultures of his own country and of others in the world.

Having learned to study culture and the ways in which it shapes human behavior, it is hoped that this empathic individual can be helped to develop an attitude of cultural pluralism, a recognition that there are many cultural solutions to common human problems and that one's own solution is not always or necessarily the only good answer.

This increasingly cross-cultural human being can only use his sensitivity well if a final dimension is added to this list—continuous contact, in depth, with the social realities of the world, in terms appropriate to his maturity level at any given time. Children and youth will need to be informed through dramatic and varied media about the different ways of life in selected cultures, about the problems of resources, health, agriculture, industrialization and leadership that face the world; and about the geographic conditions that must be adapted to or modified by technologically ambitious societies.

### Drive to Conformity

The task here delineated is not met by the existing typical culture units or "travels through many lands," nor by United Nations Days, nor by folk festivals, nor by systematic geography studies. The curricular implications are com-

plex and multidimensional. But prior to any discussion of the curricular task, one must ask a most fundamental and disturbing question—"Is the cultural complex in which American children and youth are growing up one which will permit and support the necessary ingredients for developing cross-cultural understanding?"

We are a nation that is a product of many diverse cultures. Until recently, our goal has been "the melting pot." Every immigrant has been urged to lose his subcultural identity in the process of becoming "an American." Our national goal has been to make people more alike, rather than to value or foster differences.

In recent years social scientists have become increasingly concerned about the drives to conformity in our nation. One San Francisco suburb has waged legal war on one of its families because they insist on their right to grow ivy in their front yard when the neighborhood has agreed to a common pattern of lawns. Children and youth are slaves to the conforming modes of their peer cultures. It is a hazard to be "different."

A city planner comments<sup>5</sup> that the suburbs are populated by the most conforming elements of our population who are escaping from the heterogeneity and egalitarianism of the city. And Margaret Mead<sup>6</sup> notes that in such suburbs each family finds five other families with the same values and they form a tight social circle, guaranteeing their children homogeneity of experiences. These children have few contacts with the ethnic subcultures of American life or even with different socioeconomic levels. One child was heard to comment in surprise on a

<sup>5</sup> John Dyckman. "The Changing Uses of the City." *Daedalus. The Future Metropolis*. Winter 1961.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Mead. From a speech at Stanford University, May 1960.

Sunday drive through the city, "I didn't know there were any poor people in the United States!" If we isolate children into homogeneous groups in their own culture, are we preparing them to accept cultural differences on a world-wide basis?

And in large cities, as life becomes more complex and impersonal, with very limited primary contacts, people, suffering the communication overload that comes from too many people, too many interactions, and a deluge of mass media, tend to withdraw into themselves, to retreat from seeking personal interactions. Into this situation are thronging the rural folk, uprooted and rootless. They meet this impersonality and are lost and lonely. Does such a condition support and encourage cross-cultural understanding?

Our young people have been brought up in a culture in which mass media are a main source of communication. Daily, from infancy on, they have been barged, on television especially, with the persuasion that material things are of utmost importance. In her speech at Stanford, Margaret Mead commented that the young woman of today does not want to wait and sacrifice so her young man can find his right vocation and work his way up; rather, she guides him into a choice that will provide them all the material things as soon as possible. Can a people, so oriented to valuing material things, understand and appreciate cultures not so oriented, let alone be willing to sacrifice some of their "things" in order to share them with the "have-nots" of this earth?

The very impact of our advancing technology, automation, for example, makes for further dislocations and insecurities in our culture. Add to that the increasing pressure we are exerting on

children to achieve in the new meritocracy and we compound a climate of anxiety for children. Does such a climate of anxiety help to develop "the open self"?

### A Healthy Climate

What, then, is our task? It would seem in a world of many cultures that the values needed must be rooted in a healthy climate for self-realization for children and youth in our own culture.

As we seek to rid American education of many of its anachronistic practices and attempt to retool our schools to meet the transformations attendant upon the scientific, world technology that is emerging, *we must keep our eyes on the children*. We must see them as persons who need warm support and understanding and emotional development as well as intellectual challenge.

The curriculum of American schools must concern itself with the study of culture—a systematic, thoughtful exploration of American culture and its subcultures as a base from which to explore the cultures of the world. Such a study must, to be successful, help children to understand family culture, ethnic cultures, social class differences and the many values inherent in each. Its objective should be clear: to help young people develop both sensitivity and objectivity in viewing human behavior and an acceptance of variability in the solution of human problems. We will need the help of anthropologists and social psychologists to develop the framework within which to achieve this goal.

Perhaps the most crucial curricular task is that of focusing upon and working with the value structures in which children and youth are caught up in our

*(Continued on page 520)*

his dad's curious activity. Finally the youngster said,

"Daddy, where do potatoes come from?"

"The professor, of course, knew the answer and he proceeded with glib relish to point out the eyes of the potato and to explain their function. But he was interrupted by the boy who shook his head vigorously.

"No, no, Daddy. No, that's not what I mean. I mean where did the *first* potato come from?"

"The father did not answer. He stared at the child as in a trance, the elation

of great discovery flooding his chest. There *were* people left who knew the questions—the *children* who had not yet been exposed to the Teaching Machine. The educator had found his answer in the question of a child.

"The professor enlarged upon his amazing discovery in a series of lectures and publications. This was the origin of the Great Revolution in education with which you are all familiar.

"Any questions, class?"

—EDWARD C. WEIR, *Associate Professor in Secondary Education, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.*

### World of Many Cultures

(Continued from page 492)

society. It is as young people are helped to face their own life situations, examine their predispositions to action and consider the varied solutions (alternatives) in the light of their consequences, that they make their own values explicit and can, with guidance, reconstruct them in the light of increasing awareness and sensitivity to human welfare.

Children can be helped to look at the demands they place upon each other for conformity and can be helped to value variability in group life. Role-playing of problem situations, reading literature for human understanding, discussing the human dilemmas involved in community policies, are all known methods for sensitizing young people to human welfare and teaching them to criticize their own values.

If we are to help children to escape what Vance Packard calls "a revolution of self-indulgence,"<sup>7</sup> and guide them to a commitment to the solution of world-

wide human problems, we shall have to design programs to help children analyze the values presented to them in the mass media. We must help them to build values that are a product of increased sensitivity to human feelings, not to brutality; to advertising that informs, not that misinforms; and to information and entertainment that cultivate imagination, idealism, human warmth and an interest in diversity rather than centering on materialism and a happiness cult.

Such values are not achieved in a curriculum that is focused primarily on cognitive, intellectual learning. Cross-cultural understanding for example can only be achieved by individuals who have experienced emotional as well as factual learning, whose study of culture has been internalized so that they truly understand and accept human variability.

There is an urgent need to place high on the priority list of tasks for public education the creation of a climate and a program that develop "open" persons. If we ignore this task, we shall, by default, contribute to the creation of technological robots rather than citizens of a humane society.

<sup>7</sup> Vance Packard. *Stanford Daily*, February 9, 1961.

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