

Cross-Cultural Education of Teachers

ONE would have difficulty, no doubt, in determining for any school system a specific date upon which the cross-cultural education of its teachers began. The Denver Public Schools, in 1945, however, were offered an opportunity to participate in the Study for Intergroup Education, and present activities in this area are in a measure related to participation in that study.

An Intercultural Study

Like most large metropolitan school systems, Denver has a group of schools in which the pupils come from backgrounds of unusual diversity. Accordingly, professional personnel from that group of schools, along with a number from the central administrative offices, were those particularly interested in the Study for Intergroup Education. Participants in the project very soon arrived at the point of view that teacher education in this area must differ from that in some other areas. Arousing in teachers a concern for every human being and the nurture and defense of his rights and privileges does not call for the production of an instructional guide. Adoption of new textbooks is not required, and results may not be measured by the administration of standardized tests.

Rather, the participants in the study proposed to maintain a quiet, constant effort to achieve worthy objectives in unobtrusive ways which would nevertheless be effective. The study continued in the Denver Public Schools until 1951 under the leadership of such consultants as Hilda Taba, Gertrude Noar and John Robinson. Some 90 persons from the Denver Public Schools participated, gaining important insights into and understandings of the attitudes, habits and difficulties of persons of cultural backgrounds other than their own. They came to recognize that cultural differences are sometimes due to race, sometimes to religion, sometimes to education, sometimes to economics, sometimes to social customs, and quite often to a combination of these factors.

As an outgrowth of the Study, two publications were produced, one of which, *Human Relations in the Classroom*, having served its purpose, is now out of print. The other publication, *December Festivals*, will be mentioned later. Most important, the participants found various ways in which they could help their associates gain the broader insights and deeper appreciation for all

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individuals which are the essence of intercultural understanding.

Many of the 90 persons who participated in the study between 1945 and 1951 are still on the professional staff of the Denver Public Schools. In the course of events in a rapidly growing school system, many of them have moved to assignments of greater responsibility or are working in other parts of the city. Their influence, then, has come to permeate the teaching corps throughout the school system. They remain constantly alert to the significance of good human relationships and frequently afford leadership within the staff as particular projects are undertaken.

In short, recognition of the importance of cross-cultural education for teachers has become an integral part of the operation of the Denver Public Schools. Three specific types of activity are identifiable.

Within individual school faculties may always be found one or more projects in which a group of teachers or the entire staff are studying some matter of human relations. These studies rise out of the local situation and are directed toward the improvement of school practice. One of their major values is that they are of immediate concern to teachers in the conduct of their daily work.

A second manifestation of this spirit is found in the custom, now firmly established, of providing some special observance in every school during Brotherhood Week. Each year the Division of Instructional Services at the central administrative offices distributes a bulletin of suggestions and available resources for such observances in the schools. A great variety of activities may be found within the observances of Brotherhood Week.

A third type of activity takes place during the summer. Each summer since 1945 there has been included in the Uni-

versity of Denver-Denver Public Schools Summer Workshop a section on intergroup education. Teachers are invited to participate in the Workshop on either a credit or non-credit basis.

A Resource Unit

One special project of the past year may be described in more detail. As has been mentioned, a resource unit called *December Festivals* was produced some years ago for use in the schools. The unit provides teachers with background information, procedures and materials which they may use to extend the appreciation of pupils not only for the Christian Christmas but also the Jewish Hanukkah, both of which occur during the month of December. The unit has been used with considerable success and has come to be standard resource material for teachers in all schools.

In the spring of 1961, the citywide instruction committees, through their Executive Board, recommended that *December Festivals* be reviewed, reappraised and if necessary revised. This is standard operating procedure with all instructional materials of the Denver Public Schools at intervals of five or six years.

A special committee was selected to undertake this task during the summer of 1961, and the committee associated itself with the intergroup section of the University of Denver-Denver Public Schools Summer Workshop. The content, methods and materials of instruction contained in the unit were carefully reviewed and evaluated. Fifteen consultants representative of various identifiable cultural groups within the community were asked to assist the committee. The consultants included ministers of several

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studied one block: namely, anxiety.¹⁰ Since anxiety was studied in test situations, the fact that high anxiety children were immobilized could be ascertained. The teacher's judgment of children who were anxious decreased as the children progressed through the grades; at the same time, the children's own assessment of their anxiety increased as they grew older. Sarason's research group present, as a basic issue in education, the problem of "how to maximize a child's productive utilization of his potential in classroom learning."¹¹ They suggest that the positive influence of the teacher must be increased. For example, in how many classrooms is it easy for the child to say, "I don't understand," or "I don't know" without a feeling of loss of adequacy? Can the factors contributing to anxiety be lessened? Is it possible for teachers to come to know the meaning certain materials of instruction have for specific children?

The evidence appears clear that the human beings who mediate between the child and the world into which he is born determine to a large degree the kind of man he becomes.

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Teachers

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Protestant churches, a rabbi, a Catholic priest, ministers of the Buddhist Church, and representatives from such groups as Jehovah's Witnesses, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and so forth.

As a result of the committee's study

¹⁰ Seymour B. Sarason, *et al. Anxiety in Elementary School Children*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1960.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

and consultation, the members recommended that *December Festivals* continue to be used as a valuable resource for school personnel. The committee also prepared a guiding statement, "Holiday Observances in the Schools," containing an analysis of purposes, basic principles, and evaluation procedures applicable not only to Hanukkah and Christmas programs, but school observances of other holidays throughout the year. Two types of teacher education in cross-cultural understanding occurred as a result of this project.

Those teachers who served on the special committee to reappraise *December Festivals* grew immeasurably in their understanding of one phase of the whole area. Their work required that they weigh critically the content of the unit, exchange ideas with outstanding persons and organizations from the community, and find support for the recommendations which they made.

The second level of teacher education occurred as the bulletin, "Holiday Observances," was received in the schools and discussed in faculties. The bulletin also received a rather wide notice in the press and, in many schools, was discussed with the Parent-Teacher Association. Many unsolicited expressions of approval came to the schools from the community.

These, then, are some measures which one public school system has taken to further the cross-cultural education of its teachers. If anyone doubts that it is important for school systems to make provision for teacher education in this area, let him ponder the following comment by Oliver Caldwell:

More and more people must learn to recognize their brothers as brothers whether they live twelve jet-hours away or just across the tracks. This has to be learned. It has to be taught, also.

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