

Cross-Cultural Perspective

A DECADE ago in the midst of the Korean War, one of the local groups of 200 percent Americans engaged in the practice of sending its representatives to every public meeting at which anyone from the university was talking on any subject even remotely touching on public affairs. These representatives formed a sort of disloyal opposition, always prominently seated on the front right, taking down verbatim notes of everything said. I was never quite sure what was done with all the material collected; I assume it sits in fat dossiers waiting for some fateful day when all such accounts will finally be settled.

At one meeting sponsored by the university branch of the YMCA, a student panel was discussing the general topic of the United Nations and the Korean War. One of the panelists, during his presentation, observed that the United States was indeed fortunate in having the United Nations available to serve as a vehicle through which a collective security defense of South Korea could be made, rather than being forced to "go it

alone." This comment which today seems so mild and innocuous, must have touched a raw nerve. One of the professional defenders of American patriotism jumped up and with real rage shouted at the student: "I doubt if your blood tingles with Americanism."

The student in this episode does not represent a person with any significant degree of cross-cultural perspective; at best he seems to have sensed simply that the United States has need of other peoples in the building of a defense community. On the other hand, however, the representative of the ultra-rightist group personifies the anti-cross-culturalist. His statement of the proper approach to the world is almost a classic, with its test of "blood tingling" as the true means for separating the good in-group from the evil outsiders.

This blunt standard of the mono-cultural position can serve as a starting point for our search for the meaning of cross-cultural perspective. Whatever else it may be, such a perspective will rest on the belief that inter-cultural contacts should not be governed by herd-like instinct, that the shot of adrenalin should at least be delayed until after a look at the condition from someone else's point of view.

From this moderate "second look" form of cultural pluralism there stretches a progression of degrees out to the extreme where a person reacts with such great empathy to the "other's" point of view that he is constantly adopting alien values against his own nation's. Obviously no political community could exist if any significant proportion of its citizenry operated on that end of the continuum. It is interesting, however, how, many years after some national crisis, it is possible for a change of viewpoint to take place markedly altering the pristine

Robert B. Stauffer is Associate Professor, Department of Government, University of Hawaii, Honolulu.

mono-cultural purity of the original crisis reaction with all its moral certainty. With the passage of time, it is possible for a broad section of a nation's people to learn a new cross-cultural perspective on the old crisis.

One such national second look came last December in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of Pearl Harbor. Despite the slight setback from the Zengakuren riots of 1960, Americans were (and are) still in the midst of a national celebration of Japan and everything Japanese. In this setting a number of national news-magazines carried long accounts of the attack on Pearl Harbor, but written from the Japanese point of view. One such retelling relied heavily on statements from Japanese aviators, naval planners of the attack, etc. The impact was stunning: if good and evil were not reversed in the article, at least all Americans exposed to that mass-circulation issue will carry with them a cross-cultural set of images about Pearl Harbor. The old simplicity will have died for them.

Nation and Culture

This belated cross-culturalness suggests a second characteristic about the perspective we seek. Any development of cross-cultural perspective for us will naturally create a high degree of skepticism relative to the total rightness claimed and normally accepted for every American act in foreign relations. It would be pleasant to suggest some softer conclusion, but any move to a cross-cultural point of view demands that the individual become, to a degree, freed from the total control imposed by his national community upon his moral judgments. In this context nation and culture are synonymous, and sufficient counter claims to rightness exist in the world to

suggest that the individual who would achieve a degree of enlightenment will have to consider at least the merits of these claims against those of his own nation. If the individual seeker also remembers instances from the past where a time perspective forced a modification of the moral claims of his nation, he will develop a healthy skepticism towards the pious phrases used to cover the power moves every great nation must make.

There is a dimension other than national to the concept of inter-cultural, however. Some years ago I had the occasion to know a wonderful private school in New Jersey. It has a magnificently creative curriculum; I still envy the youngsters who have a chance to attend. In their earliest grades they learn French, sing Palestrina chorales, work under inspired science teachers, write and produce plays, etc. Unfortunately, however, in all this bountiful development the children are actually being exposed only to one dominant culture. They are being given the very best that has been produced in the West, from Greece through Rome on to the industrialized civilization of the Atlantic Community.

These advantaged New Jersey children will emerge from their school years with a finely developed set of skills and emotional-response patterns, drawn nearly entirely from Western models. As a result, they will be individuals bound by mono-cultural, or at best, by *intra-cultural* perceptions. They will not be equipped, except as tribal members, to deal with those outside the charmed circle.

In building for inter-cultural perspective, then, what cultures should we have in mind if the nations of Europe and their overseas extensions are viewed as making up a single culture?

In answering this I would suggest that

in addition to our own Western culture we need have exposure to each of two others. The three comprise one simple classification for today's world. The two non-Western categories are: (a) the Soviet system; and (b) the emerging nations. Each of these "cultures" is far from unified, with the greatest range of variety found among the emerging nations. But even within this group, exposure to the problems of political and social change brought about by rapid economic development in Latin America, for example, will go far in helping students develop a "sense" for kindred problems faced by the peoples of Africa, S. E. Asia, and the Middle East. Similarly a study of Soviet politics should make the last decade and a half in China more understandable.

How to bring about an inclusion of the two non-Western cultures in a more equal balance with the Western in our educational programs is of course a massive problem. The insatiable demands for more practical courses, for more on American civilization, etc., are almost impossible to resist; and with college and university entrance requirements relatively rigidly set, an intractable quality is conferred on any public school curriculum.

We should begin by recognizing that subtle content changes have been going on for years in existing history and social studies courses, so that the two non-Western cultures are being given more attention each year. And it is a happy fact that relatively large numbers of teachers have been given the opportunity to study a "region"—such as Asia—within one of the two non-Western cultures as a way to increase their effectiveness in presenting a more balanced picture of the world to their students. I know, however, from studies I have conducted of the treatment of Asia in the

world civilization textbooks used in the states of Oregon and Hawaii that the materials available range widely in quantity of space given to that portion of the non-Western world, and in the quality of the emotional impact likely to be produced. A poor choice of texts, a weakly trained teacher, and a pathetic handful of supplementary materials in the school library add up to a situation so common as to be almost typical for the average American high school's "handling" of Asia.

There is obviously no single panacea for these interlocked problems. All that can be suggested is to increase the pressure on as many fronts as possible. We need teachers with more skills than are now possessed in quantity in our schools. We need them to help their administrations experiment with new courses based on the creative work being turned out on the two non-Western cultures by our social scientists. In all probability larger numbers now teaching world civilization and world history courses need to have come out of a training experience heavily larded with courses dealing with the non-Western cultures. This is to say that we need an adjustment in backgrounds at the expense of the Europe-centered focus of the past. With such a shift would come to the school systems persons capable of offering specialized history courses on Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, Africa, the Soviet bloc, etc. And others would be able to build new courses around such concepts as national development; social, political and economic change in the emerging nations; and the passing of traditional societies.

If anything, the problem of how to deal with the Soviet system in our public schools is even more difficult than handling the emerging nations even though

we have had a much greater span of time in which to adjust to the impact of that system in the world than we have to the newer nations. The difficulty, of course, traces from the internal and international politics of Soviet-American relations. American super-patriots badger our schools to approach the Soviet system either with head-in-sand, or bomb-in-hand. The brutal realities of the Cold War, plus the little personal insults we feel as individuals from the boorish representatives of that system, make a hollow mockery of any attempt to create conditions for the emergence of cross-cultural perspective between the two.

Obviously, however, some attempt must be made to break out of what some have called self-fulfilling prophecies. If we keep our eyes only on the evil aspects of the Soviet system, our behavior will take on a more rigidly belligerent posture towards the Soviets, thereby convincing them that their image of the United States as a war-mongering capitalist nation is a true approximation of reality. There is no easy way out. But any attempt to present a rich fare of factual data accompanied by a moderately wide range of interpretative analysis would be a welcomed antidote to the all too common hate sessions that develop when discussion centers on the Soviet system.

Fostering Perspective

There are many attendant dangers to those engaged in working in the field of promoting cross-cultural perspective. Students and teachers working on broad survey courses in world civilization, for example, must of necessity operate at a fairly high level of generalization. With the anti-colonial correctives that are now common in text materials it might be all too easy to leave an impression that all

good resided in Asia and Africa during the first era of East-West contacts, and that the West contained the dominant share of villains. Or the dialectic that eternally evolves between a class and teacher might push the latter, in his search for "the other side," to positions that would be unfair to the West.

A danger of a different type is the one of forgetting humility. All too often knowledge of a non-Western culture causes us to assume that we can anticipate the human behavior of individuals representative of that culture. Recently on the University of Hawaii campus an Indian student demanded that I aid him in overturning what he considered to have been an unjust administrative ruling. He strengthened his demand with these solemn words: "If the decision is not reversed, I will have to fast unto death." This use of an impersonal national Indian weapon for personal ends came as a surprise to me, especially since it carried with it the overtones of political blackmail. Partial cross-cultural enlightenment must be prepared for rude, unexpected shocks as conceptualized reality is constantly tested by meeting an infinite variety of human forms. The decision, incidentally, was reversed.

The most serious danger, however, in any pursuit of cross-cultural perspective based on the three cultures extant in the world today, is that the inhabitants of the other two are not simultaneously developing similar viewpoints. Actually, however, the emerging nations even with their strident nationalisms are heavily drawing on the West for ideas and skills in their processes of modernization. If they meet Westerners who have developed cross-cultural perspective they in turn will be encouraged to venture into this area. The real problem is the closed

(Continued on page 531)

Community economics is discussed within the framework of people, land use, basic industry, and the balance between these factors. Applications are made to contemporary problems in such a way that the individual secondary school student may be able to have deeper insight into the economic workings of his community.

A very informative glossary and bibliography are included to guide the student to additional levels of study and understanding.

Supplementary resources of this sort, attractively illustrated, interestingly written, and inexpensive in price, are welcome additions to the resources for learning of secondary school students.

—CURTIS P. RAMSEY, *Director, Learning Resources Center, George Peabody College for Teachers, Nashville, Tennessee.*

Perspective

(Continued from page 513)

Soviet system. We can only hope that the demands of realism will ultimately lead to a more honest representation of our culture to members of the Soviet communities, and that by then we will have gone at least half way to establish cross-cultural relations on a more viable base than the present one of mutual terror.

As a way to pull loose ends together, I would like to summarize. There are three broad cultures in the world today. Our training has largely been confined to but one of these—the West. It is time to recognize that our concentration on the data from Europe and the United States is not going to produce cross-cultural perspective. At best, our existing *intra*-cultural education will speed the process of building a social and political community to parallel the existing Atlantic defense

4 new education texts

THE FEDERAL INTEREST IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By HOMER D. BABBIDGE, Jr., Vice President of the American Council on Education; and ROBERT M. ROSENZWEIG, Assistant to U.S. Commissioner of Education, U.S. Office of Education. 224 pages, \$5.95

Presents a realistic and authoritative discussion of the background and development of relations between the Federal Government and the higher education community. This book is a candid assessment of limitations of colleges and universities in dealing with the Federal Government, and of the Federal Government in dealing with colleges and universities.

EDUCATION AND NATIONALISM An Historical Interpretation of American Education

By GLADYS A. WIGGIN, University of Maryland. *Foundations in Education*. Just published

The first textbook to discuss comprehensively the relationship of American education to nationalism. The book presents American education on an historical basis in terms of its continuing task of supporting a political republic, and systematically describes the role of legislators and textbook writers in shaping education as a nationalist instrument. The role of imported minorities is also discussed in great detail.

THE ACADEMIC PRESIDENT— EDUCATOR OR CARETAKER?

By HAROLD W. DODDS, President Emeritus, Princeton University; with the assistance of FELIX C. ROBB and R. ROBB TAYLOR. *The Carnegie Series in American Education*. 320 pages, \$5.95

This book describes the office of the college and university president today, the managerial, fund-raising, and public relations duties involved, how its nature has altered in the 20th century; and suggests methods trustees, faculties, and administrators may use to improve the educational effectiveness of their institutions. The author stresses the importance of restoring the president's office to one of educational leadership.

THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY: An Essay on Organization

By JOHN D. MILLET, President, Miami University, Ohio. Available July. Realistically portrays the internal organization of a college or university. The author asserts that the principle of hierarchy, the prevailing concept of organization, is not applicable to a college or university. He states the organization of the academic community is based upon a distribution of power and the operation of a college or university depends upon consensus among basic power groups.

Send for approval copies

MH McGRAW-HILL
BOOK
COMPANY

330 W. 42nd St., N.Y. 36, N.Y.

community. This in itself would be welcomed. But such a mono-cultural approach will be of only marginal value in servicing the demands of our inter-cultural world. We urgently need deep educational contacts with each of the other two cultures.

To develop a high degree of realism, empathy, respect, and sympathy for the people living in the other two major cultures of the world will place massive demands upon our educators. We need more social scientists; fewer European-oriented historians but more who are capable of teaching about the emerging nations; more language teachers for Asian and African languages; more administrators and curriculum builders who will be willing to experiment even at the cost of cutting out a local history course; and lastly, textbooks and materials created by writers who recognize that we all share the same human condition.

Role of Government

(Continued from page 516)

There would have to be administrative and clerical help and money for consultants from universities, national curriculum groups, and other school systems. Total educational costs might increase 5 percent or even 10 percent. For rural schools, special arrangements would have to be made.

At intervals of two to five years, each course of study in public education ought to be completely reexamined in detail by its teachers. They should work together for several weeks, without interruption except to receive advice from consultants and to hear descriptions of new ideas. To illustrate, the twenty high

school biology teachers in a small city should review and revise all the public high school biology subject matter taught in that city, along with their methods of teaching it. They could well spend four or six weeks each second or third summer, with some interim study between workshops.

In such a program, the state department of education could properly perform all administrative chores broader than those feasible for the local district, and in general it should facilitate the movement throughout the state. All prospective innovators should be heard on a consultant basis, with assurance of prompt consideration of their recommendations. Modernization of the curriculum and the in-service training of teachers within such traditional American patterns of control could improve education without the present delays and misunderstandings.

The Time Is Opportune

The present educational climate is favorable for reform. Teachers and specialists in subject matter and methods work together more easily than ever before. The legal authorities are also increasingly involved, so problems of content, methods and administration are more and more being considered together.

The tempo of curriculum research and experimentation has increased, and so has acceptance of change. More teachers and educational authorities have attitudes of open-mindedness and willingness to try new content and new methods. Local and state leadership is in a position to pave the way, with primary responsibility to preserve the integrity of the pupil-teacher relationship that current conditions endanger.

Copyright © 1962 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.