

Integration: An Assessment

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THIS statement attempts a subjective analysis of the present status of integration. The great disparity in the amount of integration from one school system to another strongly characterizes its present status. An attempt has been made here to reflect developments in the South where most of the controversy about integration of schools has been centered, yet the movement has not been confined to the South.

Progress in integration depends upon whose criteria are used. A moderate white who is reasonably satisfied with conditions as they are exclaims, "Look at the progress we've made in just four years since the Civil Rights Act was passed." However, a young militant member of the minority says, "You did nothing from 1954 to 1964. The last four years have brought only tokenism, just enough to get by, and that isn't enough."

Need for Unity

Little doubt remains among the citizenry that racial integration has been permanently declared the policy of the three branches of the federal government. An increasing number of citizens have realized that the future of the nation depends upon unity in its economic, social, political, and spiritual life. Lack of racial harmony with its concomitant problems presents the greatest threat to national unity at this time.

In the South, many school systems have abolished the "dual school" approach, and many more have had crossovers among students and/or faculty; whereas, a few school districts have made no observable progress. Some of the border states initiated integration soon after the 1954 decision by the Supreme Court. Progress in the deep South does not gain its signifi-

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cance from the large numbers involved, but from the fact that most of the progress has occurred since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The guidelines of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare required student integration before placing emphasis on faculty integration. Though the integration of faculties has been limited to date, this procedure holds considerable promise for improving education. More and more administrators recruit, select, and retain teachers with the idea of assigning them to any school in the system.

Integration apparently creates great anxieties within each professional staff member who is involved. For example, a fear of being given a responsibility for which one is not qualified arises in a Negro teacher who is assigned to a class of predominantly white children or a white teacher who is assigned a class of Negro children. Most teachers can make the attitudinal adjustments, but fewer are prepared to make the required changes in teaching strategy. Further anxieties are created in the Negro teacher as he thinks of competing with his white counterpart to gain acceptance in a predominantly white school.

Competent teachers are more readily accepted by pupils of a different race than are less competent ones. Although there have been instances in which white parents have objected strongly to their child's assignment to a Negro teacher, the objection usually has faded away as the teacher has proved himself to be competent.

Generally, teachers have been willing to accept assignment in a school with different racial background when the power structure in the school system and the community is supportive of integration efforts. Conversely, teachers have been reluctant to cross over when the opposite is true. In highly impersonalized urban settings, teachers have not faced the same social pressures that teachers have in rural areas.

Teachers who cross over may sometimes find that they are no longer accepted in the professional associations, the teachers lounge, informal groups, and extracurricular activities. A principal is sometimes reluctant to relate with a teacher of a different race in the same manner as with other teachers. Teachers with different racial backgrounds may find little in common outside the school since they may live in different communities, go to different churches, belong to different social organizations, and otherwise relate to different cultures.

Concern for the Future

The fear that the schools would be filled with Negro teachers when integration occurred was unfounded. The growing number of opportunities in fields outside of education available to Negroes has, in some systems, diminished the number of applicants to the point that these systems must recruit Negro and white applicants in the same manner. The dual school system previously maintained about the same ratio of Negro to white teachers as the ratio of Negro to white students in the schools. There will likely not be enough Negro teachers to maintain this ratio as the integration process continues.

An important by-product of integration efforts has been the development of sound school policies and procedures. This was needed to prevent continued employment of incompetent teachers, when staff members were

sorely needed prior to integration. The present personnel policies and procedures will accrue to the betterment of the school system.

The concern of many Negro school administrators about their future appears to be justified. When white and Negro schools are consolidated, the white principal often gets the job. Some Negro principals have been assigned to predominantly white schools; a greater number have been assigned to central office positions.

The limited number of Negro students in predominantly white colleges, the negligible number of white students in predominantly Negro colleges, and the few adjustments in curricula indicate that in-service faculty members will play the dominant role in faculty integration. While the average student teacher is ill-prepared to cross racial lines, the Teacher Corps and various cooperative programs offer promise in teacher preparation.

Often the achievement gap between Negro students and white students in a school is real. However, it is difficult to attribute the major difference to the school. It seems to be related to the broader, socioeconomic environment of the child. An analysis of individuals with a semblance of similarity dispels notions of differences based on race only. The school may be called upon in the future to close the achievement gap by increasing the influence it has on the learners even though the difference is caused by the socioeconomic environment of the children.

Integration of schools cannot be viewed separately from federal aid to education, increased state and local support, and the general reorganizing and upgrading of schools. Since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and ESEA of 1965, the educational level has been improved, as indicated by standardized tests. School systems which previously reached the national norm for their white schools but found their Negro schools considerably below this level are now approaching the national norms as a unified school district. This achievement reflects the additional resources which have been put into education and, with the limited amount of integration, dispels the notion that education cannot be improved without complete integration.

The integration observed on television and throughout the culture has overshadowed the limited integration in instructional materials. Some school systems are making a determined effort to secure balanced materials of racial and ethnic groups. The number of school systems that methodically avoid a book that even has a picture or story of an integrated group is diminishing rapidly.

Perhaps the biggest change in curriculum has come in the traditional extracurricular activities. These, with the exception of athletics, have been curtailed in many communities. The curtailment of dances, beauty pageants, and other social activities in the schools is usually temporary. The students often bring pressure for their return.

People Can Change

The adaptability of the human being has been demonstrated well through integration. The forecast of prophets of segregation that blood would run in the streets if integration occurred in their local school simply has not come to pass. People can change, and herein lies the hope for the

future. Difficulty with integration appears to be positively related to resistance by other institutions such as law enforcement and the churches. There is evidence of a shift on the part of elected officials and also considerable change in the outlook of certain church groups.

Local school officials who are accustomed to working through their state departments of education have found working directly with federal officials on desegregation both awkward and time-consuming. Some state departments have been reluctant to become involved in desegregation unless ordered to do so by the courts, as was the case in Alabama. Integration of schools has moved to the point that the responsibility should, at an early date, be placed with the state departments of education.

Integration has required a hodgepodge of procedures. Freedom of choice plans have been declared invalid and many communities have moved to a strict zoning which requires a child to attend the school nearest his home. Bussing for integration has been tried but has met strong opposition. The abolition of the dual school system will be accomplished during the next three or four years. Attention will then be turned toward large urban school districts where housing patterns have dictated segregation over the years. It is impossible to tell whether the nation will soon move to reorganized districts to bring about integration in these areas.

The rising pride of the Negroes as expressed through Black Power, the provision of better educational opportunities in disadvantaged areas, and the magnitude of the problem may cause a slowdown in integration once the dual school system is abolished. □

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