



When Man Understands Himself

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IDEALLY, all of us might be virtuous, kind, gentle, and rational, but in reality we are:

- Fiery Black Power advocates
- Devout and orthodox Catholics
- Fierce anti-communists
- Dedicated vegetarians
- Righteous Southern Democrats
- Vociferous Northern liberals
- Peace-loving hippies
- Staunch Women's Lib advocates
- Intense teachers
- Poor Chicanos
- Hard-hat Americans.

The WASP derives his loyalties from membership in a Protestant Church, lives in an all-white suburb, votes Republican (sometimes Democrat), believes Western Europe was the cradle of civilization, and accepts the capitalistic system without question. He could be a rural mid-American WASP and he could believe that he is a part of the silent majority.

There are millions of children in our schools whose parents are the model for this simplified description. They need not damn or be damned for being what they are; they must see themselves before they can see others.

The Black Panther derives his loyalties from the writings of Malcolm X, Eldridge Cleaver, and other black militants; he lives in the inner city of a large metropolitan area, votes for blacks or may not vote at all, believes Africa was the real source of civilization, and knows the white establishment has been engaged in a giant conspiracy against the blacks. He believes the white society is racist and the black has to fight for his basic rights.

There are an unknown number of children in schools whose parents are the model for this simplified description. They need not damn or be damned for being what they are; they must see themselves before they can see others.

You cannot make the WASP child a black militant or the Black Muslim child a WASP. You may, however, try to help each understand what the other one is. For our nation to survive as a relatively *free* nation, we must not polarize our subcultures into distinct, exclusive, and antagonistic camps. The basic conditions which create polarization must be paired with the conditions which reduce the intensity of polarization.

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- (-) Job discrimination by reason of race, religion, nationality, politics, sex, and economic status
- (+) Equal job opportunities regardless of race, religion, nationality, politics, sex, and economic status
- (-) Housing discrimination by reason of race, religion, nationality, politics, and sex
- (+) Open housing barring discrimination regardless of race, religion, nationality, politics, and sex
- (-) Legal discrimination by reason of economic status, race, religion, nationality, politics, and sex
- (+) Equal treatment before the law regardless of economic status, race, religion, nationality, politics, and sex
- (-) Educational discrimination by reason of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation
- (+) Equal education opportunities without regard to segregation
- (-) Intellectual discrimination by reason of ignorance, tradition, and snobbery
- (+) Intellectual equality by reason of knowledge, change, and empathy.

The results of intensive polarization are measured in hatred, differential employment rates for whites and blacks, bombings, litigation, urban riots, political power blocs, demoralization of the human spirit, city blight, and intensive conflict within our society. We might not be able to survive as a nation under these conditions and therefore must continue to seek ways of reducing a growing and intense polarization.

With the basic assumption that educators do want to reduce the *negative* effects of polarization, the need to educate for

pluralism would appear to be a requirement for survival. This assumption rules out chauvinistic educational measures, whether spawned by a rural, white school board, the Black Panthers, a Roman Catholic diocese, sectarian Hebrew schools, or exclusive Southern girls' schools. This assumption holds that organized school education has a basic mission to do three things:

1. Assist the individual to know himself and whence he came. Hopefully this will result in pride of self and one's origins, but it could also lead to a critical dissatisfaction with that which was and may still be.
2. Assist the individual to know others and whence they came. Hopefully this will result in understanding of others and lead to greater harmony, but familiarity can also lead to contempt.
3. Assist the individual to work within the framework of a pluralistic society, first as an individual and then as a member of many groups.

From Theory to Practice

If the school does have the responsibility to assist the individual to become aware of self and society, then educators need to look at the school curriculum in terms of positive reinforcers which foster this vision. In Des Moines, Iowa, a Creative Arts Program offers a single illustration of an attempt to provide a positive reinforcement for a self-concept.¹

At the Casady Elementary School, a

¹ Material describing the Creative Arts Program at Casady Elementary School, Des Moines, Iowa, was drawn from an informal report prepared by the teaching team of Vicky Reblsky, Roger A. Gooden, and Jeanette Wright.

Future ASCD Annual Conferences

1972	March 5-8	Philadelphia	<i>Philadelphia Civic Center</i>
1973	March 17-21	Minneapolis	<i>Minneapolis Auditorium</i>
1974	March 9-13	Anaheim	<i>Anaheim Convention Center</i>
1975	March 15-19	New Orleans	<i>Rivergate</i>

team of three teachers worked with 330 children from grades 1 through 6. Fourth, fifth, and sixth graders came once a week for 45 minutes, and first, second, and third graders came once a week for 30 minutes. The class size ranged from 12 to 21 children.

As a result of the experience in the Creative Arts Program, each child had opportunities to:

Identify his feelings and begin to understand them

Realize that his feelings are important and worth sharing

Realize that his feelings are both unique and universal

Realize that an understanding of his feelings will help him become more responsible for his actions

Realize that responsibility for his actions will help solve his problems

Experience satisfaction by expressing his feelings in a creative way

Realize that just as arithmetic and reading have to be learned, so do self-worth and respect for others

Learn that if he hurts someone it is not because he is bad; it is because he does not have enough understanding

Learn how to handle negative feelings in a nonviolent way

Realize that a combination of ideas from within a group can lead to more productive problem solving

Realize that he is part of a changing world and that he can influence the direction of that change

Realize that each person has times when he is right and times when he is wrong

Experience a feeling of cooperation

Gain satisfaction by expressing himself in a creative way

Realize that friends do not just happen; they sometimes have to be made

Realize that freedom begins inside himself

Become more acceptable to himself.

Only two illustrations will be cited to indicate the multiplicity of experiences which were provided to help young people to achieve the feeling of self-identification and group identification.

Illustration 1: To help students realize their feelings are important and worth sharing, the teachers organized the students into small groups and then helped them draft a bill of civil rights for students. It came out this way:

1. I have a right to be happy and to be treated with compassion in this room: This means that no one will laugh at me or hurt my feelings.

2. I have a right to be myself in this room: This means that no one will treat me unfairly because I am black or white, fat or thin, tall or short, boy or girl.

3. I have a right to be safe in this room: This means that no one will hit me, kick me, push me, pinch me, or hurt me.

4. I have a right to hear and be heard in this room: This means that no one will yell, scream, shout, or make loud noises.

5. I have a right to learn about myself in this room: This means that I will be free to express my feelings and opinions without being interrupted or punished.

Illustration 2: To help the young people realize that they are a part of a changing world and they can influence the direction of the change, the teachers used the folk song written by Bob Dylan, "The Times, They Are a-Changin'." New words and phrases were incorporated into the song in order to make it relevant to the needs of the children at Casady School. An atmosphere of warmth, solemnity, and thoughtfulness was created by a darkened room, one candle, a guitar, and the song, as sung by the teachers and later by the children.

The pilot project at Casady Elementary School is only a single illustration of what a group of concerned individuals can do to help bring to a child the meaning of living in the "confluence of world culture." No better ending for a beginning than the reflection of Neil Armstrong upon returning from the moon:

We hope and think that this is the beginning of a new era—the beginning of an era when man understands the universe around him, and the beginning of the era when man understands himself. □

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