

# Human Relations: A Response to Racism Through Curriculum

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*Human relations with a curriculum focus can help to define goals, objectives, and desired outcomes as we move to eradicate racism through curriculum.*

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"HUMAN relations" is a concept used to describe the climate of interactions among and between individuals in our educational environments. The range of those relationships moves from the representatives of the people on boards of education to the primary clients in the classroom.

Positive human relations is best described when the individual can feel a sense of self worth and respect, understand differences of others, is in touch with his/her own values and knows that others might differ, and in communicating with others keeps all of these in mind. Only so can an atmosphere exist where people can work together more productively and learn together more effectively.

Those climates are influenced by the individual feelings of identity, essentiality, values, and skills. One can readily see the problem in a pluralistic society which is pri-

marily ethnocentric in character. Those who differ from the mainstream of the social system run risks of being in contact with alien environments in the sense of not being provided with the necessary psychological benefits to sustain one's identity.

What education does, therefore, becomes a critical factor in the careers of its clients. If the benefits of education are positive, then more individuals in the system ought to have a good feeling of essentiality in the society. Access to the mainstream of societal machinations should become simply matter-of-fact. The individual's potential in achievement would become the only criteria which determine his/her various choices in the social system.

On the other hand, if the educational process is laden with lack of success, the benefits will most likely be nonproductive, hence limiting the choices and options of individuals in the system.

The writings in educational literature would indicate clear trends of unequal outcomes for service to the masses. This condi-

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tion of unequal service is not limited to education, rather it is a societal practice pervading all institutions with generally the same classification of people benefiting from the services and consequently the same groups tending to receive inferior benefits.

This discussion seeks only to suggest philosophical foundations which can combat and eradicate one of man's most deadly social and mental illnesses—racism—in the hope that a healthy, potentially fertile climate can be created to bring the basic rudiments of a democratic social system to its potential fruition.

## **Institutional Racism in Action**

Institutional racism is the use of institutional arrangements which enforce and enhance values, policies, and practices which serve to support (intentionally or unintentionally) the superiority/inferiority formula of privilege based on color. Institutional racism is characterized by actions which perpetuate racial and cultural aggrandizement for one group at the expense of denying and oppressing the racial and cultural identity of another group.<sup>1</sup>

A basic premise is that we are all victims of racism, but only whites are racists. If you are white and American, you are probably a racist—not so much by design and deliberate choice as by inheritance. Racism is yours by birthright and early socialization and enculturation. Racism per-

<sup>1</sup> Richard R. Green. *Educational Renewal for the Seventies: A Report on Racism in Education*. Minneapolis: Minneapolis Public Schools, July 1974.

meates all aspects of American society—its institutions and culture—so you had no choice in the matter. If there are any of you who claim to be non-racist, and are, it is because you at some point in your life, have made a deliberate choice to desocialize yourself and become nonconformist in the sense of not giving in to the dictates of that American norm called racism.<sup>2</sup>

It is essential for whites to recognize that they receive most of these racist benefits automatically, unconsciously, and unintentionally. They do not have to decide consciously to oppress blacks and other Third World people in order to be racists. The societal arrangement of our culture, based on "assumed" white superiority, made it impossible for whites not to receive benefits. Many of these benefits are so deeply imbedded in the matrix of our white being, individually and collectively, that it is very difficult to become aware of them. Whites must simply accept the fact that in our society they are racists.<sup>3</sup>

When we expand the concept of institutional racism further to education, we see policies openly designed to provide privilege or credit to a single group at the expense of others. Examples of racism in schools can be manifested by the allocation of resources, placement of teachers, facilities, grading, placing burden unequally on groups or educational services which by the very nature of their application can spell unequal outcomes for one group over another.

Pettigrew<sup>4</sup> reminds us of the additional notion of *procedural* institutional racism:

For institutional racism to exist, the institutional arrangements need not have been set up to be racist, but the systematic procedures

<sup>2</sup> Geneva Gay. "Attacking Racism Through Ethnic Education." Presentation to Task Force on Racism in Education, Minneapolis Public Schools, February 1974.

<sup>3</sup> *Education and Racism: An Action Manual*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1973.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Pettigrew. "Racism and Desegregation/Integration." Presentation to Task Force on Racism in Education, Minneapolis Public Schools, October 1973.

and processes in the institution support it. Institutional racism of this form operates through sanction or conditioning.

To conclude, Howe, Clark, Allen, and associates said:

It is a function of education to help to free human beings from the constrictions of superstitions, irrational fears, and hatred, and it is a prime function of education, we believe, to attempt to liberate the human mind and the human spirit.<sup>5</sup>

### Curriculum: The Connecting Thread to Racism

Curriculum is a word that is defined in many ways. For our purposes it will be used in reference to the school and all parts of schooling that function together to form the school environment. Elements of curriculum

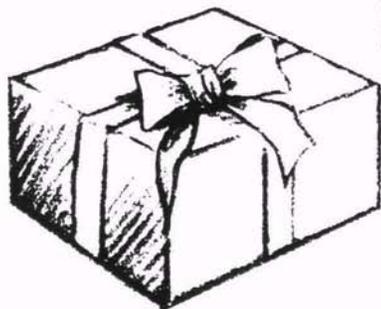
<sup>5</sup> Harold Howe, Kenneth B. Clark, James E. Allen, et al. *Racism and American Education: A Dialogue and Agenda for Action*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1970.

are specific content of courses themselves, the materials utilized in schools, the "extra-curricular" activities and, most important, the people who operate the schools.

Less evident is the hidden curriculum—reflecting the attitudes, expectations, and values which have great influence in the educational environment. *Therein lies the existence and presence of racism. The challenge of human relations is to affect these behaviors which are a result of racists' attitudes.*

Curriculum, then, is one of the critical areas in the educational process. It represents the major information dissemination mechanism, while at the same time perpetuating the culture, norms, and values of the individual, institution, and society. Course content, teaching materials, extracurricular activities, and methodology are all interwoven to provide the substance for the teaching/learning process.

Given the nature of racism, one can readily see the connection to the ethnocentric movement. By promoting a monocurriculum



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in a diverse society which defines success by color, we create conditions for human oppressions through institutional arrangements. If diversity is suppressed, then obviously racial distinctiveness is enhanced. One's race becomes paramount, at the expense of one's ethnicity. Accordingly, when the curriculum is designed by and supportive of the "centrism," outsiders (non-white racial groups) will be ignored or lost.

## Human Relations Programming

The use of curriculum as a vehicle for creating a healthy environment is a sound human relations strategy. *Curriculum creation, innovation, change, or examination can all serve the purpose of creating a common focus for the human relations experience in the case of racism.*

Curriculum can, as the central content in human relations programming, provide a viable goal for all elements of the educational enterprise. In fact, it will serve purposes which should prove valuable to the foundations of education. Examinations which allow for analysis of curriculum should strengthen the delivery of educational services.

More important, the process of analysis which involves values, goals, and beliefs should be shared to gain greater understanding of the individual perspectives regardless of roles in or relationships to the institution. *It is this process for which human relations programs must be designed.*

The human relations program should have a cognitive focus which encourages new levels of awareness on the part of the individuals. Often cited sensitivity training, while raising one's awareness, has no formal means of being institutionalized as a valued on-going process which should be nurtured to its fullest fruition. It is primarily left to the individual in the absence of institutional behavioral development. The status quo condition of the institution often inhibits individual growth rather than encourages it. A cognitive orientation in a human relations program ought to create a basis for the replication of learning. If analytical skills

are replicable, then the organization, department, or unit can become self-renewing rather than dependent on outside expertise to facilitate its own program. Beyond the self-renewing aspect, the sharing of skill development provides the basis for forming closer human relationships within the organization.

The key to an effective human relations strategy is the human resources available for its creation and eventual implementation. Human resources must be defined on a wider base than is presently the practice. Therefore it is absolutely essential that cross-fertilization of roles be a primary step in the human relations process if any change is to occur.

Human relations strategies which use only traditional roles in the leadership function do so at the expense of a significant pool of hidden resources—custodians, aides, civil servants, cafeteria help, students, community—and in essence maintain the status quo—racism. It must be remembered that all clients experience a number of roles which influence their learning in the course of the educational process. Consequently, all roles represented in that experience must necessarily be involved in any strategy for change.

Further, the human relations training concept is intended to increase the communication among and between individuals, units, departments, and administration. Far too often we fail to understand the roles, goals, and aspirations of our colleagues due to institutional constraints. Cross-fertilization in human relations designs is intended to reduce the impact of the phenomena of separation.

Finally, human relations as a strategy with a curriculum focus can set into motion the rudimentary requirements for change. With proper climate setting and the establishment of the parameters, the program should provide the necessary elements for growth. All that remains is for institutional and individual action which defines goals, objectives, and desired outcomes, if we are to move in the direction of eradicating racism through curriculum. □

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