

Improving Teacher Awareness of Ethnic Life Styles

FONDA L. CHAFFEE *

Teacher education methods and prevailing cultural patterns may, according to this study, be in direct opposition to each other. Increasing teachers' awareness of this fact may help to alleviate this dissonance.

THE family as a unit in society is an old, well established institution among virtually all peoples of the world. Educators, therefore, have a great need to be cognizant of the life styles of peoples of all ethnic groups and socioeconomic levels represented in their classroom audiences. The concept of awareness is applicable to the whole gamut of the educational hierarchy. Responsiveness to the basic life conditions would force educators to refocus their planning and teaching and to make significant contributions to the improvement of the quality of American living.

Life Styles Influence Consumer Patterns

It would appear that there can be a broad gap between the cultural conditions that prevail and the methods of education

to which student teachers are exposed. In fact, the teacher education methods and the prevailing cultural patterns even may be in opposition to each other.

My own recent research¹ designed to study the consumer management patterns of disadvantaged families raises the premise that all educational programs for all cultures (and the disadvantaged in particular) would succeed or fail (a) depending upon the degree to which the programs fit the needs and the interests of ethnic groups for which the programs were intended and (b) depending upon whether these programs are based on data obtained through methods adaptable to and comparable with the various ethnic groups and subcultures of the American society. The term ethnic as used here implies any of the basic divisions of people as dis-

¹ Fonda Cordis Chaffee. "A Study of Consumer Management Patterns of Disadvantaged Families." Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Madison: University of Wisconsin, Department of Educational Administration, 1974.

* Fonda L. Chaffee, Chairperson, Department of Home Economics, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan

tinguished by customs, language, or economic level.

The study involved an in-depth exploration of the consumer management patterns of five disadvantaged families. Resource management patterns provided only a partial explanation of the families' life styles. Attention was also placed on understanding the underlying value system which governed the use of family resources and thus enabled family members to live in a manner approved by or similar to that of the community surrounding them. Evidence reviewed in the literature implied that a family's value system would influence its participation in educational programs and the acceptance of concepts proposed.

This writer wanted to determine if, indeed, educators who were in daily contact with students preparing for teaching professions which dealt specifically with home life in many cultures were perceptive of the value systems held by these cultures. The culture selected for study was that of the Mexican American in the migrant stream.

In brief, the determination was made by means of an instrument labeled "Consumer Value Analysis." It was a modified form of the Allport, Vernon, Lindzey "Study of Values"² which had been designed to measure certain identifiable middle class values, namely: theoretical, economic, aesthetic, social, political, and religious. The adaptation was developed by the writer as a means of comparing the values found to be held by the disadvantaged subculture and the national norm for middle class America.

The author was also interested in the perceptivity of selected educators who are responsible for the preparation of teachers who may fulfill teaching responsibilities related to a disadvantaged culture. The educators were asked to mark the "Consumer Value Analysis" instrument as they perceived the disadvantaged would have replied to the same questions. Although this discussion has been limited to the role of the educator, other

professional and civic employees were also surveyed as to their perceptiveness in relation to disadvantaged cultures.

Much Similarity in Value Patterns

The major findings implied that the value system shown by the disadvantaged did not digress dramatically from those values possessed in middle class society. On the other hand, it was found that the particular educators selected for study were only moderately perceptive of the value system of a culture other than their own and were inclined to underrate the values held by the individuals who were culturally different. The respondents were college and university professors in schools of higher education.

The evidence strongly suggested that objective tests should be developed and administered which would measure the perceptiveness of administrative and educative appointees in regard to the values held by the people in the specific ethnic environment in which the educator would be functioning. The test results should be compared to the values expressed by the ethnic clientele for whom the educative program was planned. Observations made by the author give strong support to the supposition that this recommendation is equally applicable for teachers functioning in the upper echelons of society as well as for those working with the socially and economically disadvantaged.

It is the belief of the writer that comparative studies are needed to ascertain the relevance of the implications in cases where the general Anglo-American educational approach is employed with individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Institutions of higher learning must increasingly provide innovative leadership in the implementation of educational programs and in the sequential training of teachers and administrators at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels. Likewise educators must become more aware of the basic life patterns peculiar to various socioeconomic levels of all ethnic groups. Otherwise many vital points of leverage for educational efforts may be overlooked. □

² Gordon W. Allport, Philip E. Vernon, and Gardner Lindzey. *Study of Values. Manual and Test Booklet*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960.

Copyright © 1975 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.