

Observations Concerning Human Relations in Workshop Settings at Langston University

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In 1953 and early in 1954, a few members of the faculty of Langston University sensed that the Supreme Court of the United States probably would render a historic decision in the near future. This opinion became a reality with the decision of May 17, 1954 declaring segregation in public schools to be unlawful. Individuals on the faculty felt that if such a decision was to be implemented, it would be necessary for many people to accept the principles of the decision. According to Case and Callam, 1954 (*vide* Tumin, 1957), predictions had been made as early as 1950 that nowhere in Oklahoma would desegregation with firm leadership fail.

Furthermore, it was the opinion of some at Langston that the University might well work cooperatively with other institutions of higher education in the state in providing leadership to aid in the desegregation of schools and the integration of students and teachers in public schools. It was hoped that there were institutions which would assume this cooperative leadership and join with Langston in securing financial aid in order to afford adequate funds to obtain consultants and to provide scholarships to encourage attendance at short courses, workshops and seminars. It was projected that educators could and should assume the responsibility for conducting investigations and thereby produce publications for disseminating appropriate information. Finally it was expected that these educators would adopt other procedures which could provide leadership in improving human relations during and following the period of transition.

Research reveals that educators' opinions concerning desegregation and integration vary in Oklahoma as they do elsewhere. These variations range from ultra-liberal to ultra-conservative views. For example, Knebel and Case 1954 (*vide* Tumin, 1957) revealed that white administrators, white elementary teachers, and white vocational teachers score lower on an attitude list regarding racial problems than do white college teachers and Negro teachers. Even though white college professors score higher than other white educators on the list they ranked considerably below Negro teachers attending Oklahoma State University during the summer of 1954.

The Catholic Digest Survey (1956) indicated that most Negroes want to solve the racial problem. Assuming that these findings are true, they may account for the optimism of some Negro teachers at Langston regarding the eventual solution to the racial problem. It is not to be assumed that there do not exist deeply-seated attitudes and prejudices on the part of Negroes as are found in varying degrees among other people, according to Cothran, 1951 (*vide* Tumin, 1957). However, the case in point is that in Oklahoma as elsewhere, the racial problem is one of our most serious problems in spite of evidence of promising practices.

For three consecutive years Langston University has conducted a human relations workshop with the aid and financial support of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, Anti-Defamation League, Oklahoma City Jewish Community Council, State Department of Education and the Urban League.

Each of the workshops has been organized around interest areas. The activities usually carried on in workshops have been a feature of each workshop. These activities included stimulating talks, coke and coffee

breaks, large and small group discussions, free lance periods, movies, reading periods, recreation periods, private conferences, panel discussions and the construction of sociograms. A brief evaluation of the three consecutive workshops follows.

The attendance at the 1955 Human Relation Workshop was not large. Of the 30 Oklahoma residents who registered, 25 were Negro teachers, three were white teachers, and two were Negro P.T.A. leaders. Negro participants were primarily interested in the fate of Negro teachers and students in view of the Supreme Court Decision, while white participants were primarily interested in problems they would encounter with integration and learning more about the Negro in general.

Perhaps one of the most enlightened persons at the close of the workshop was a young white teacher who admitted that her experiences with Negroes had been negligible. She entered the situation with predetermined concepts about Negroes and as a result had both justifiable and unjustifiable fears about them. Hayakawa, 1953 (*vide* Tumin, 1957), in an address delivered to the Urban League in St. Louis, implied that when a person enters into a situation with preconceived concepts, he is likely to experience that which he already has deeply rooted in his personality. This white teacher, finding herself a member of a racial minority group for the first time, was emotionally disturbed, for people behave differently when their status is changed from a member of the majority to that of a minority group, according to Rosner, 1954 (*vide* Tumin, 1957).

The Negro teachers attending the workshop indicated that they were in a state of insecurity and unrest. It appeared to the writer that many of these teachers felt that the problem of human relations involved only Negroes and whites.

The Workshop of 1956 again was held on the university campus with 32 registering and a total of 75 participating. The registered participants were about equally divided between the races. This workshop was much like the one held previously, with the exception that the same degree of tenseness did not seem to exist. School desegregation and integration was again the major subject of discussion, although other problems were also discussed. A more democratic atmosphere prevailed and delicate issues were discussed freely with tolerance and a degree of understanding.

The 1957 Workshop was conducted in Oklahoma City concurrently with a short course called Curriculum Workshop. The directors assumed that this Relations Workshop would have an increased attendance; however, this assumption was in error since only 16 registered. It is believed that the Curriculum Workshop might have affected adversely the attendance at the Relations Workshop, since many Oklahoma City teachers were requested and expected to attend the former.

Principal speakers of the two programs were exchanged and special movies, talks and a panel discussion were added to the previously planned program at times convenient for the Curriculum workshoppers. Thus, by rearranging the parallel programs and by "beating the bushes" for participants the combined programs attracted more than 300 persons.

The personnel and areas of interest were more diversified in the 1957 Relations Workshop than heretofore. International as well as American problems in human relations were dealt with; however, as in previous workshops, school integration and relation problems were of major concern.

In the three-year period, the Langston University Workshops have exposed approximately 700 people of diverse racial heritage and religious

faiths to promising practices of good human relations. This program has not had the anticipated registrations; however, it has rendered service by revealing to an increasing number desirable human relations practices.

The Langston experiences are neither new nor unique. They seem to support conclusions already reached by Case and others, namely, that the desegregation and integration problem in Oklahoma is not as serious as it is in many of the so-called southern states. These experiences also reveal that though the Negro-white problem is not the only problem of human relations, it is a persistent one in Oklahoma as it is elsewhere. It seems, therefore, that if we are to solve the problem of human relations in Oklahoma, as many believe we shall, there is need for continuous effort on the part of educators and others in order to implement ideology concerning relations with good relations practices.

Though law has been responsible for many changed attitudes regarding human relations, it appears to many that education is a very effective medium for improving relations practices.

Workshoppers were in agreement that Oklahoma has many fine examples of good human relations in action. Examples are: desegregation and integration of students in the secondary and elementary school, the attitude that developed relative to Langston University being admitted to the Oklahoma Collegiate Athletic Conference, and integration of Negro teachers in the public schools in Ponca City and elsewhere. Yet, in Oklahoma there still exists the big problem of improving human relations. We need programs designed to facilitate more desirable relations between races, between capital and labor, between student and teacher in the classroom, between religious faiths and between nations. Most workshopers seem to feel that each of us has a responsibility to promote programs which are designed to break down prejudices, fears and misunderstandings. These, apparently, are our biggest obstacles.

LITERATURE CITED

Tumin, Melvin M., 1957. Segregation and desegregation: a digest of recent research. New York: Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.
