Schools must look carefully and honestly at the widening rift betwen the white and the Negro, the suburbs and the city, the poor and the affluent, and find ways to close it. . . .

A Curriculum Design for Social Change

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CURRICULUM is a reflection of the social milieu; thus curriculum change must be based on an understanding of social change. Today, with social changes occurring at a remarkable rate and likely to accelerate rather than to settle into a predictable pattern, it is almost a given of curriculum design to say, "We need changes in curriculum." We do need changes, and, what is more significant, we will continue to need changes at a rate at least equal to the changes that occur in the whole society.

It is clear that the sciences have met the challenge to education far better than have the fields of English and social studies. The new math, computer courses, and the introduction of nuclear physics into the high school curriculum have prepared students to understand the workings of the technical base of our society far better than do their parents. On the other hand, the fields of English and social studies have to do, at a very basic level, with the questions of what a man is and what he might become, and few individuals claim to understand the human implications of an age dominated by the computer and by urban sprawl.

Our Urban Crisis and the Curriculum

For Americans, some of the most crucial human issues of our time are those that have to do with poverty and discrimination. When we examine the traditional objectives of the social studies curriculum in our schools, they inevitably include items such as:

> The student: (a) grows in his capacity to recognize the basic needs of his society; (b) acquires a sensitivity to the values of his society to learn how he may safeguard its rights for himself and others, and how he may contribute to its improvement; (c) realizes that human dignity and the worth of the individual are of first importance in human relationships; and (d) functions today and in the future as an effective citizen in a democratic society.

Balanced against the realities of the classroom and the desperate need of the society to have leaders and citizens who, in fact, *have* learned what the schools say they *will* learn, these aims sound like hypocritical platitudes.

One of the many problems of our society that demands sensitive, experienced leaders for their solution includes 40,000 people living in circumstances that meet the Department of Labor's criteria for indigence. The rural poor of the south have migrated to the cities of the north and west, bringing neither urban skills nor understanding of the requirements for city living. This, combined with the flight to suburbia of the white middle class, has created an urban crisis; a breakdown of educational and welfare institutions, and a hiatus of understanding and communication that will continue to cause urban riots and unrest.

An astonishing proportion of Negro and white, poor and middle class youth grow up aware of the existence of the other, yet unfamiliar with the fears, hostility, and humaneness of the other. Much of the middle class has hardened into a position of opposition to government support for the poor, and a position of grave reluctance to champion the massive institutional changes that the urban crisis requires.

The youth of the inner city, disillusioned with the motives and behavior of much of the white middle class, are beginning to vent their rage in unreasoned riots, which further widen the gap by increasing the fears of the suburbanites. The society is dividing against itself to the detriment of all and the loss of a decent life in the inner city.

Our educational institutions in both the cities and suburbs and at all levels of training must face the challenge of closing this gap in understanding if these institutions are to fulfill the promises on which they were founded. In the second half of the 20th century, schools must bridge the chasm of fears and ignorance that separates the urban poor and the suburban middle class.

A Curriculum Proposal

Let me suggest one direction for curriculum change that would help to develop in secondary school students the attitudes and understanding that they will need as future citizens coping with a growing and changing urban society. This direction of change has been anticipated by a few relatively small private liberal arts colleges.

Institutions such as Antioch, Goddard, and Bennington require students to devote a portion of their undergraduate experience to field learning. Students leave the campuses to engage in volunteer work in inner city schools, community organizations, and welfare institutions. They meet with professionals attempting to deal with the problems of the urban poor, and they work with the poor who are trying to deal with the often indifferent or unsympathetic, overworked professional.

The undergraduate, while he does not have the skills, power, or knowledge to effect changes, does testify, by his presence, to a commitment and concern and can often act as a link between the poor and the public institutions. However,

the most important aspect of this experience is the understanding the student gains of the human and social problems that are not solved by either his presence or the public institutions. On returning to the campus, the student can translate his insights and frustration into categories of possible directions for social change.

Implementing this kind of program in the secondary schools would require a clear understanding of the psychological support and professional supervision that the adolescent, as contrasted with the college student, would need. Though these considerations are beyond the scope of this paper, we can see the general kind of experience that could be offered, and the questions that would be raised on the students' return to the classroom.

A student making the choice to enter a social studies curriculum that offers a field experience would be given the training in interpersonal relations, urban problems, fact gathering, and interpretation that would enable him to aid the community institution to which he would be assigned. Students could be assigned as auxiliary personnel in elementary and junior high schools, as tutors for elementary school children, as community worker assistants, and as health aides in schools and clinics. In these settings they would come into contact with people who need public services, and would begin to understand the needs of those in the urban community who protest that services are not adequate.

Suburban school students who are working in the cities could visit classes in the city schools, and those from the city might visit other schools in the city and in the suburbs. When students return to the classroom, discussions and texts that deal with civil rights, discrimination, urban problems, as well as the broader issues of United States history and government, could be focused on traditional reform movements and current proposals, movements, and trends. This would move students away from an acceptance of platitudes and generalities toward a realistic appraisal of this society's prospects for an equitable and democratic future in an increasingly technical, urban environment.

The need to develop new skills in coping with our social problems is not likely to be met if we continue to depend on specialists and on a traditional curriculum in our schools. Our social problems must be understood by all citizens as something more than what can be found in our present textbooks if the United States is to meet the increasingly complex challenges of its urban centers.

The schools, if they truly believe that their task is to teach the student "to recognize the basic needs of his society" and to become "an effective citizen in a democratic society," need to look carefully and honestly at the widening rift between the white and the Negro, the suburbs and the city, and the poor and the affluent, and find ways to close it.

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