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CITIZENS INTERRACIAL COMMITTEE OF SAN DIEGO COUNTY
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TIPS TO THE MAJORITY (WHITE) TEACHER IN THE MINORITY SCHOOL-COMMUNITY

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A PRIVATE COMMITMENT

In reviewing the rationale for the initiation of this kind of an approach to one of our most pressing and urgent social problems, and without analysing the many historical factors which have played a major role in creating this dilemma, there are a few basic assumptions upon which all subsequent observations are based and perhaps these--some of them at least--assumptions should be briefly mentioned.

1. That each of you is not only intellectually but emotionally and wholeheartedly committed to this position: that an interracial or inter-ethnic experience is best for both the staff or leadership group and for the entire population of youth with whom you will be most intimately involved.

2. That each of you is thus prepared--or willing to become prepared--emotionally and individually to now engage actively in this program in whatever way your talents allow, without any reservation.

3. That each of you have been made aware of--at least knowledgeable about--some of the resistances inherent in this approach and involvement as you now initiate; resistances growing out of the many years of false beliefs and misconceptions about minority persons in general, and about Negroes and Mexican-Americans in particular.

And further, in this regard, you are aware of the subtle means of expressing your personal biases, racial prejudices and discriminations in their many nuances: that you, as members of that majority group in our society, are more likely to be personally guilty of such practices, although many times undeliberately, because in our society, this is the "normal way to behave toward" such persons and it is generally "expected" of you to behave in such a manner.

This assumption is thus predicated upon the commitment that each of you are prepared to continue to examine your own attitudes in this "private domain" and take that painful step to admit their existence when necessary and doggedly seek ways of overcoming them or at least understanding their influence on your behavior and controlling their overt expressions.

You should remember, however, that generalizing about people is not the monopoly of the majority group: indeed, all members of our society have been subjected to the same educational system and teaching in schools, churches, and communities, and have thus equally "learned" or been conditioned by the myths which are basic to our ways of thinking and behaving. It becomes increasingly clear then that all persons without regard to color or national origin must engage seriously in self-reflection. This paper, nevertheless, is directed for obvious reasons generally to those of the majority group whose resultant behavior toward the minorities is much more likely to be of crucial import.

FINDING AND DEFINING THE MINORITY CHILD

This term "finding the child before attempting to teach him" is another way of saying that the child or student you bring with you in your head, mind, or imagination is NOT-NOT-the same child you will speak to, and of, and with. "Your child" will have to first be replaced in your daily classes by a REAL child before you can do very much about effectively and positively interacting with him in a REAL classroom and in a real-personal manner.

More precisely, "finding the child" is the "lead-in" process of "defining" the child. The moment he meets you, "his new teacher", changes should and must begin to happen inside him, the real child. Most importantly, however, strange things (changes of a complex nature) should and must start happening inside you at the same time. Unless and until something begins to happen to you inside, there is every reason to wonder whether or not you have begun to find and define that "real child."

In this process of "finding and defining" the child and yourself, you should remember that this is basic to all subsequent acceptance and rejection of you. And how you go about this task is just as important as what kind of a boy or girl you really find. At this stage of the operation, then, the PROCESS is far more important than what he or she can or cannot do; that is, the skills he or she may or may not possess. Because the rest of your program will depend upon how well this phase is carried out, we shall relate the entire concept of staff-and self-development within this general framework. As teacher, or as any such worker, recruitment and training of staff members must in any system be a process of "development in action": the worker and the child must move along concurrently. To this end, here are a few factors to bear in mind:

1. Whatever your accepted and utilized criteria or standard for hiring good leaders from the majority group, apply this same criterion to members of the so-called minorities. Do not apply different standards; be consistent. TO ASSUME THAT YOU DO THIS NATURALLY AND EASILY IS TO MAKE THE FIRST ERROR!

2. Don't consider anyone for an assignment because he is a Mexican, a Negro, or a Japanese.

3. Of course, likewise, he should NOT be eliminated because he is such a person--or because he does not fit this or

that "preconceived" idea of a "Negro" or "Mexican-American", etc. We all "invent" such persons and "patent them" in our heads for exclusive use later. All persons do this.

4. To be "over-nice" to one is another way of telling him out loud that you consider him "different". And he (or THEY) will be the first to sense how you truly feel inside.

5. Just be yourself--whatever that is--not "somebody else."

6. Talk to them as you would to any person; which may not be easy.

7. Whatever the decision reached on any given person, present it to him straightforward; don't "beat around the bush." He would be most interested in knowing in which specific areas he did not personally measure up to your standards, just as you or I would be in the normal course of things.

8. Make only the allowances for him that you would likewise make for a member of the majority group (white person) under similar conditions; be sure that the minority group person "feels" this fact; he doesn't necessarily have to be "overtly told." Always challenge your student; they expect you to expect them to give their best. Keep the standards high, but realistic; guard against feeling "sympathy or pity" for them for they neither need it nor want it. In short, don't lower the standards arbitrarily.

   The "community-is-not-ready," or "they are not-ready-yet" attitude will be taken by these little "experts" as meaning, correctly that you are not ready!

9. Hire or select a member because in your best judgment he or she would make a good addition to your project, not because he or she would "be a good Negro or Mexican or Japanese" on your committee or program.

10. Accept each as a full person with all rights and privileges.

11. Guard against his "becoming a specialist" on Negroes, or on Japanese, etc.

12. Guard against feeling obligated to him or her for any reason.

    A. He wants to be alone at times - just as you do.

    B. He wants to dislike or even hate at times - as all people do.

    C. He wants to get angry at times, "blow his stack at times", and still have the freedom to do so again as a human being.

13. Learn to accept or love or like each, because he or she is himself, not because of his ethnic identity. Because he is Bill, a nice guy. NOT because he is Bill, a nice Negro; or Lopez, a grand Mexican.

14. But learn to dislike them on the same individual basis.

15. Show your true feelings about any person when appropriate; if you dislike a minority group person, treat him just as you treat all other persons whom you dislike.

16. Seek assistance when needed. It's a sign of strength to know when you need help, of weakness when you know you need it but refuse to seek it or reject it when properly offered.

17. Meet some of the members of the community more intimately after you have become more adjusted in your new job.

18. Dances and other affairs are more likely to be integrated when allowed to follow "natural" lines than when you "plant" ideas around about how "unnatural" integration is.

19. Remember always:

    A. He does not want to be somebody SPECIAL, but just himself, ordinary or mediocre.

    B. That each wants the right to LOSE as well as win, fail as well as succeed. But above all, evaluated on the same basis as all other human beings!

    You must do more than just want to accept as a full human being another who is superficially different; you must also work at this most difficult job.

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