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*Nurturing that unprejudiced, youthful innocence
may be the answer to better multicultural relations.*



School Safety

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U.S. Department of Justice
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School Safety

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Ronald D. Stephens, Executive Editor
 Stuart Greenbaum, Editor/Art Director
 Brenda Turner, Associate Editor
 Cynthia Randolph, Photo-compositor

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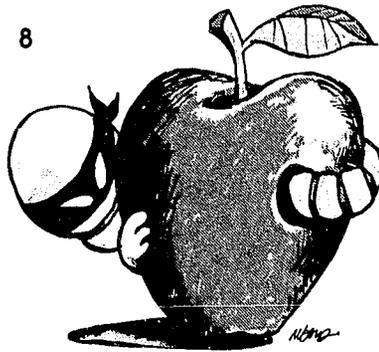
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About the cover:

Kids playing in sewer pipes may be a sad commentary on available recreation for inner-city (San Francisco) youths, but it also suggests a multicultural camaraderie all too uncharacteristic among older youths and adults. Photograph by Stuart Greenbaum, Copyright © 1978. Hand colored by Hope Harris.

CONTENTS

8



10



Updates



34

Resources

NCJRS

MAY 10 1989

ACQUISITIONS

4 Breaking the cycle of disadvantage

By Lisbeth B. Schorr

117138

8 School crime: Annual statistical snapshot

By James R. Wetzell

117139

10 Anti-bias curriculum challenges diversity

By Louise Derman-Sparks

14 Students strengthen multicultural relations

By Sue-Ann Rosch

117140

18 All our children

By James P. Comer, M.D.

117141

20 Students embody role of cultural mediators

By Barbara Huie

117142

23 Breeding grounds for multicultural conflict

By Joyce N. Thomas

27 Principals reach beyond school gates

2 NSSC Update

31 National Update

32 Legal Update

33 Legislative Update

34 Resource Update

9 NSSC Resources

17 School violence prevention seminar

22 Learning handicapped offender conference — call for papers

35 "Principals of Leadership"

Misperceptions and ignorance that frequently escalate racial tensions are being openly discussed and clarified through structured problem-solving sessions.

Students embody role of cultural mediators

Looking back on my school years, it seems somehow ironic that I, whose native language is English, was regularly pulled out of class for enrichment activity — Spanish lessons. At the same time, some schools were forbidding other students from speaking Spanish, their first language.

In years past, children learned about other countries and cultures by reading rather dry textbooks in social studies classes. But today, people from those countries and cultures often are in our classrooms and communities.

With the opportunity that a multicultural setting presents, however, also come problems that must be addressed, such as racial conflict and cultural or behavioral misunderstandings.

A classic example of teacher-related multicultural insensitivity occurred a number of years ago when I was student teaching at an elementary school in south-central Los Angeles. A student teaching colleague introduced a lesson on Japan by saying, "And students, these people eat raw fish. Yuck!" Naturally, 36 students repeated, "Oh, yuck!" I think often of that teacher these days. . . every time I pass one of the proliferating sushi restaurants in this nation.

Barbara Huie is chief of planning for the U.S. Department of Justice's Community Relations Service.

Dealing with multicultural issues

The impact of institutional policy on multicultural education has been raised by Byron Kunisawa, noted consultant and speaker in the field. He points out that, in regard to current school cultural programs that focus on ethnic foods and ethnic dances, the logical learning outcome is fat kids who can dance.

The lesson in these observations is that sometimes we teach well what we hadn't intended to teach at all. The personal perspective of the teacher and the limits of the curriculum influence the school's capacity to adapt to the multicultural make-up of today's student body.

In the past 20 years, immigration to, and migration within, the United States has created and highlighted disputes between racial and ethnic groups. The result has been incidents of violence and increased levels of community tensions. Questions about equity of services and equality of opportunity remain key tension-breeding factors.

School campuses are a microcosm of the larger society. Within their bounds, students learn the basic skills they will need to become productive workers. But the school has a larger role to play. This role is one of helping newcomers learn about and adjust to life in the United States while helping native-born students learn about other countries and cultures. It also includes modeling how

individuals can keep their own identities, yet live and work together in a cooperative, collaborative manner.

In order to ensure the physical safety of all students, and to prepare them for a future in which they will have to function as citizens in a larger society, school officials must be aware of, and responsive to, multicultural and inter-racial issues on campus.

One extreme, but increasingly common, example of how school indifference can impact the lives of students involves the development of Asian youth gangs. California police officers who have interrogated Asian youth suspects report that the first involvement with a gang usually occurs when immigrant and/or refugee youths band together to combat racial harassment at school. With no outside intervention or redress from their school, parents, community or the police to assure their safety, these students group together for self-protection. If their physical security needs are not handled by school personnel, the group continues, perhaps shifting in focus from defensive to offensive acts, such as local crime activity.

Such youths are more easily recruited by the mobile and often violent Asian youth gangs that have moved from city to city, preying on Asian residents and businesses. These gangs use local youths to help identify likely victims. This chain of events might have been

averted if school personnel had been attuned to the multicultural relationships going on within the student body.

Community Relations Service

The Community Relations Service (CRS), U.S. Department of Justice, was established by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to respond to communities experiencing disputes, disagreements or difficulties related to race, color or national origin. Using the techniques of conciliation, mediation, and technical assistance or training, CRS fosters and supports the efforts of communities and institutions that are faced with the dynamic tensions inherent in a multicultural population. CRS helps these communities and institutions to identify and resolve or manage racial/ethnic conflict in a non-violent, cooperative manner.

During the past 25 years, CRS has responded to crises, such as civil disorders, and to situations where preventive measures can avert potential conflict. School-related disputes have commanded a major share of the agency's attention.

One example of CRS's school-related work involves Amos Alonso Stagg High School in Stockton, California, which is a multiracial, multicultural institution. In 1985, under a system of busing to achieve school integration, the student population was approximately one-third Hispanic (including American-born, as well as documented and undocumented Mexican-born Hispanics), one-third Asian (both new immigrants and American born), and one-third black or white.

As in many high schools and communities across the country, students remained self-segregated in the newly desegregated school. School administrators were concerned about racial tensions among the student body. The school had been the scene of several racial fights, one of which had resulted in serious injury.

CRS offered to conduct a series of sessions at Stagg to implement a Joint Problem-Solving (JPS) strategy. As with any structured problem-solving activity,

JPS consists of identifying and prioritizing problem areas, then implementing solutions. The key, and the factor which often makes the involvement of a neutral third party such as CRS helpful, is that the parties involved may start on opposite sides of the issue and approach the resolution differently because their experiential or cultural backgrounds give them different perspectives. The skilled facilitator must balance individual and group needs, help the group respect differing communication styles, and continue toward an always flexible focus.

Identifying and resolving problems

The Stagg JPS project consisted of a two-day session with students and a subsequent series of meetings with parents, teachers, administrators and staff. Each session focused on the identification, prioritization and potential resolutions of problems. A final session, with representation from each of the groups, resulted in an action plan with task, responsibility and due dates specified.

The student session was perhaps the most instructive in terms of multicultural relations. Approximately 50 students were selected by the school administrators in accordance with minimal CRS criteria: the group must be racially balanced, not all should be "good" students, and those involved must have a willingness to participate.

During the first day, students were assigned to small groups by race/ethnicity. Each group had a CRS staff facilitator. A few adjustments were made at the beginning: two Hispanic males, who had not been initially selected, showed up and asked to participate, and one Hispanic female felt that she should be included in the Anglo student group rather than in the Hispanic group.

Consultation between CRS and school administrators revealed that the two males had been involved in an earlier racial fight. The decision was made that their participation would be valuable and they were added to the session. Approval also was given for the female to move to the group of her choice.

The decision to group students by race/ethnicity was not made lightly. Part of the facilitator's task was to ensure that all students participated. It was anticipated that some of the students might be hesitant to speak out because of language difficulties and because of their cultural upbringing. Separate groups would provide a sheltered environment in which each person could feel more comfortable. Problems common to each group might be better identified and framed in separate groups, and a consensus could be developed in those groups that value such a form of decision making. Lastly, on the second day, assignment to small groups was to be heterogeneous so that racially mixed teams could work on developing potential solutions.

At the end of the first day, each group shared its list in a plenary session with the other groups. Together, the groups discussed the similarities, differences and priorities that became apparent. That evening, CRS staff consolidated the separate lists into one.

On the second day of the workshop, students were reassigned to heterogeneous racial/ethnic groups to brainstorm possible remedial actions for the priority problems identified on the first day. The heterogeneous sessions provided an opportunity for all of the students to meet and work on common problems. At the end of the second day, the principal, a counseling representative and the assistant to the superintendent listened to closing reports on the problems and proposed action plans.

In accomplishing this task, a number of secondary multicultural issues were raised. CRS staff helped students to resolve misperceptions or points of ignorance about other groups that had arisen during the previous day's activity.

For example, non-Asian students referred to all Asian students as "the Vietnamese," even though the school's Asian student population also included Cambodian, Laotian, Chinese, Japanese and Filipino students. The real-life impact of this misidentification became

apparent when an Asian student explained that after an altercation between a Mexican and Laotian student, a group of Mexican students returned to seek retribution — and took it out on a Cambodian student. The Cambodian student felt the need to link up with other Asian students for self-protection.

In discussing the differences between Asian ethnic groups, non-Asian students volunteered information about other intraracial differences that existed on campus. For example, "cultural" differences in clothing and territory were apparent between Mexican gang and non-gang members, between black "jocks" and other black students, and between white "stoners" and other white students. Students identified a desire to maintain closer communications with students of other ethnic groups.

Participants in the Asian group had said they felt intimidated by black students. This feeling of intimidation occurred because the black students often stood in the middle of the hall or doorway and conversed loudly. CRS staff members explained the differences in cultural styles, and that "loud" can be a culturally determined behavior just as "soft-spoken" can be. Such behavior is relative and should not necessarily be taken personally, the CRS staff pointed out to the students.

Implementing the action plan

As anticipated in the JPS design, one of the key accomplishments of the process was the establishment of productive working relationships between all parties involved. In addition to the multicultural interaction that was achieved and planned, students expressed appreciation for the opportunity to be listened to and treated as adults. School administrators and other adults willingly accepted the responsibility to discuss joint concerns with the students.

Through the workshops, several common priority areas were identified and addressed: racial/ethnic tensions, discipline, student-teacher relations, counseling, student activities, the physical plan

and parent involvement.

A progress report from the Stagg High School principal to the Stockton Unified School District Board members outlined several improvements that had been made based on recommendations and activities emerging from the workshops. Within a year after the JPS workshops, the number of suspensions during the quarter had dropped from 147 to 47. A Conflict Management Team was created, the amount of graffiti on campus was substantially reduced, and corporal punishment was eliminated. In addition, the school was painted during the summer.

CRS staff provided training for Stagg High School staff and students to implement the student conflict management program and assist in identifying additional resources, such as the local university, to augment other action plan items.

Crisis response and preventive actions

One productive approach to the problems inherent in a multicultural school setting is to consider both crisis response and preventive actions.

Crisis response actions:

- establishing and training a student conflict response team to identify and intervene in pre- and post-conflict situations;
- training security staff and teachers about the differences of cultural impact on behavior;¹
- negotiating a contingency response plan with the appropriate law enforcement agency; and/or
- establishing a rumor-control apparatus that includes, at a minimum, a school administration representative, the school operator, local law enforcement agency, student response team leaders and parent group leaders.

Preventive actions:

- establishing and maintaining a policy of racial tolerance for administrators, teachers and students to reduce the potential for racial conflict;
- reviewing institutional (particularly

assignment and discipline) policies for potentially disproportionate racial impact;

- providing cross-cultural training for teachers and staff;
- developing a parents cultural advisory group that would invite school administrators and teachers to cultural events occurring in the community; and/or
- establishing a multiethnic curriculum.²

These efforts can be coordinated by school administration to maximize the opportunities and minimize the conflicts in multicultural student bodies. □

For information or assistance in implementing any of these or other responses, contact the Community Relations Service, 5550 Friendship Blvd., Suite 330, Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815, 301/492-5929.

Endnotes

1. See Thomas Kochman, *Black and White Styles in Conflict* (Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).
2. See James A. Banks, *Multicultural Education: Theory and Practice*, 2nd ed. (Boston, Massachusetts: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1988).

Learning handicapped offender conference — call for papers

A learning handicapped offender conference on "Making the Process Work: A United Effort" is planned for November 12-15 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at the Hilton Towers-Gateway Center. The conference will be co-sponsored by the National School Safety Center in conjunction with Eastern Kentucky University's Department of Correctional Services.

Legal issues, learning problems, court/school interface, service delivery, curriculum and other topics concerning the learning handicapped offender will be discussed. *Anyone interested in making a presentation or presenting a paper at the conference must submit a written proposal by May 31.*

To submit a proposal or for additional information, contact Carolyn Eggleston, State University of New York, Special Education/OMB 113B, New Paltz, New York 12561, 914/257-2836.