

E COOSH EEWA: Editorial

TO THE TEACHER:

The following letter appeared as an article in The Northian News Letter. It was submitted by Surrey school trustee Jock Smith, who is an educational counselor for the Department of Indian Affairs. It is a moving document and was supplied by the mother of an Indian child, in the form of an open letter to her son's teacher.

Dear Teacher:

Before you take charge of the classroom that contains my child, please ask yourself why you are going to teach Indian children. What are your expectations. What rewards do you anticipate. What ego-needs will our children have to meet? Write down and examine all the information and opinions you possess about Indians. What are the stereotypes and untested assumptions that you bring with you into the classroom. How many negative attitudes towards Indians will you put before my child?

What values, class prejudices and moral principles do you take for granted as universal? Please remember that "different from" is not the same as "worse than" or "better than," and the yardstick you use to measure your own life satisfactorily may not be appropriate for their lives.

The term "culturally deprived" was invented by well-meaning middle-class whites to describe something they could not understand.

Too many teachers, unfortunately, seem to see their role as rescuer. My child does not need to be rescued; he does not consider being Indian a misfortune. He has a culture, probably older than yours; he has meaningful values and a rich and varied experiential background. However, strange or incomprehensible it may seem to you, you have no right to do or say anything that implies to him that it is less than satisfactory.

Our children's experiences have been different from those of the "typical" white middle-class for whom most school curriculum seem to have been designed (I suspect that this "typical" child does not exist except in the minds of curriculum writers). Nonetheless, my child's experiences have been as intense and meaningful to him as any child's.

Like most Indian children his age, he is competent. He can dress himself, prepare a meal for himself, clean up afterwards, care for a younger child. He knows his Reserve,

all of which is his home, like the back of his hand.

He is not accustomed to having to ask permission to do the ordinary things that are part of normal living. He is seldom forbidden to do anything; more usually the consequences of an action are explained to him and he is allowed to decide for himself whether or not to act. His entire existence since he has been an experiential learning situation, arranged to provide him with the opportunity to develop his skills and confidence in his own capacities. Didactic teaching will be an alien experience for him.

He is not self-conscious in the way many white children are. Nobody has ever told him his efforts towards independence are cute. He is a young human being energetically doing his job, which is to get on with the process of learning to function as an adult human being. He will respect you to do likewise to him.

He has been taught, by precept, that courtesy is an essential part of human conduct and rudeness is any action that makes another person feel stupid or foolish. Do not mistake his patient courtesy for indifference or passivity.

He doesn't speak standard English, but he is no way "linguistically handicapped." If you will take the time and courtesy to listen and observe carefully, you will see that he and the other Indian children communicate very well, both among themselves and with other Indians. They speak "functional English," very effectively, augmented by their fluency in the silent language, the subtle, unspoken communication of facial expressions, gestures, body movement and the use of personal space.

You will be well advised to remember that our children are skillful interpreters of the silent language. They will know your feelings and attitudes with unerring precision, no matter how carefully you arrange your smile or modulate your voice. They will learn in your classroom, because children learn involuntarily. What they learn will depend on you.

Will you help by child to learn to read, or will you teach him that he has a reading problem? Will you help him develop problem solving skills, or will you teach him that school is where you try to guess what answer the teacher wants? Will he learn that his sense of his own value and

dignity is valid, or will he learn that he must forever be apologetic and "trying harder" because he isn't white?

Can you help him acquire the intellectual skills he needs without at the same time imposing your values on top of those he already has?

Respect my child. He is a person. He has a right to be himself.

Yours very sincerely,
His Mother

An Anonymous Contribution

This paper is a discussion of the definition of Equal Educational Opportunity. To understand the meaning of this concept, the basis of thought must first be understood.

All people have values by which their life is built upon. Their decisions are guided by their values. Everything that exists in the world has an interpretation of meaning and importance. Everyone has a concept of how their life should function, how people should relate to others and the relationship of one thing to another. This is because of the values that people believe in are expressed through their actions and environment.

The words "equal educational opportunity" emanate from a value that all people are equal.

In the United States, the Anglo-Saxon population is the largest majority. The basis of voting is by majority-rule. So, if there is any particular issue that arises, and the ethnic minority races are not in favor of the issue, but the Anglo-Saxons are in favor of the issue, the issue will be decided in favor of the Anglo-Saxons. In a majority rule voting procedure, one of the premises is that someone will win and someone will lose. The group with the larger numbers will win, not because their idea was right or had greater merit, but because they had the greater number of votes. This presupposes the existence of inequity among people, that some people are better than others, that some people have more to offer than others, that some people's ideas have greater merit than others.

When people are believed to be equal, all ways of life are equally important, all have ideas to offer that are important, all cultures are equally valid and should exist for those that believe in it, and that all meaningful for those that believe in a certain method. And because there is this respect and belief of equality, one culture will not dictate any beliefs, interpretations or procedures on another culture. Every culture of the world has a right to exist and live in the manner they know best.

The concept of equality has been extended to the education of children. Children carry and live the beliefs of adults.

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Member Outlines W.S.F.P.I Employee Problems

by Sal Sahme
Management Trainee

Recently several members of the Warm Springs Confederated Tribes brought to the attention of the Tribal Council, the Board of Directors and management, concern over the hiring policy and practice of WSFPI. The concern expressed was in regard to the documented employment policy of giving hiring preference to tribal enrolled members but lacking consistency in carrying out this policy. As a reciprocal reaction to the expressed concern, management decided to investigate the situation from a broad perspective, seeing a more indepth analysis of the total situation.

In beginning, the following questions gave direction to the inquiry:

What is the present situation in the veneer plant, the sawmill, and the planer mill in regard to how Indian employees feel they are being treated?

Specifically, what are their feelings toward the existing grievance procedure?

What is the total scope of the situation?

Is there a problem?

If there is, what do the (Indian, Non-Indian and Supervision) employees see as alternative solutions?

Generally, the Indian employees reacted positively when asked, "How do you like your job?" There was no evident hostility or regret in working for WSFPI. The majority seemed satisfied with their particular job.

Many inquired about better paying jobs or wanting to pursue on-the-job-training into job advancement.

A few expressed concern in seeing "white guys," who were "new hires" being advanced into higher paying job more quickly and readily than Indians, i.e., newly hired white employees either not having to pull on the green chain or after "pulling" for a short time quickly being moved into a on-the-job-training positions (mill-wright trainee, carpenter trainee, etc.) or advancing into a better paying job quicker than Indians.

Also, few were suspect of having the interviewer carrying out this assignment, being a scapegoat and a token effort on the part of management, "more lip service with nothing behind it." One individual asked, "why isn't there any Indian secretaries in the main office?"

In asking whether an Indian was a member of the Union or not, I found only five individuals known to be members. Everyone seemed to be aware of the union, but only a handful realized the benefits. Most of the Indian employees felt they received the same benefits whether they belong to the union or not. One individual stated, "working six days a week and having to attend union meetings on Sunday is why I'm not that active."

In addressing the grievance procedure, by Federal Law (The Labor Management Relations Act of 1947), the Union must represent all employees whether they are members or not. However, in asking the Indian employees if they knew what the proper grievance procedure was, the majority didn't know. Most of them stated they felt uncomfortable speaking to

non-Indians. Whenever a conflict arises, the newly hired Indian suggested he would rather keep it to himself or within his peers, or as a final alternative, quit.

In talking to the supervisors, their observations and experience indicated the same, which was completely contrary for the most part to their experience before coming into the reservation situation. In regard to work attitude and work ethics, one supervisor responded, "When I was young, I hardly ever missed a day, these guys have it a helluva lot easier then I didn. This is a totally different situation, It's pretty tough to deal with."

All the supervisors stated the biggest problem is absenteeism. Turnovers seemed to be about the same for Indians and non-Indians. One supervisor stated he didn't think most new hire and rehired Indians realized the seniority principles involved in WSFPI employment policy. Many Indians wondered why they couldn't accumulate or get seniority credit for past work after being rehired.

Another supervisor stated, "When an Indian misses work I don't think he realizes what it's costing him as a tribal member and shareholder to operate and maintain WSFPI. Every time one misses work, the tribe loses money."

One supervisor mentioned, "I have a couple men who can handle just about every job here, but they miss thirty to forty days a year, and I need men on key jobs who are more dependable."

"Production is my biggest concern," a supervisor stated, "I don't have any trouble with absenteeism with the older guys. It's just the younger ones."

Within this inquiry, several recommendations were suggested. These are the following:

From an all Indian grievance committee; Recruit more Indians into the union; Recruit Indians to fill the other needed shop steward positions; Inform the supervisors as to the financial assistance available to Tribal members for training; Educate the tribal members to the role they play in mill and how the whole tribe benefits.

Have an Indian who would serve as more than a counselor, act as a sounding board for Indian concerns, i.e., financial assistance for training, employment counseling, act as an advocate or speak in behalf of individual Indians, sounding board of supervisors, etc.; Educate the supervisors in regard to how Indians have different attitudes toward work, i.e., values, life style, language, (human relation, training), etc; Deal more openly and consistently with Indians, exploring all possible alternatives, communicating to all employee levels, when hiring or firing an individual; requesting suggestions or recommendations.

Given the short time I had to complete this inquiry, the most glaring difficulties in this situation is communication and lack of consistency. Educating the ignorant and developing a consistent employment policy is no less a problem. Clearly one will need time and an open mind. I hope this document is a catalyst to improving the situation, if nothing else.



(COYOTE NEWS)

Published by The Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon.

WARM SPRINGS, OREGON 97761

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The paper will be published semi-monthly.