

Living together

School programs seek ways to combat prejudice and racism

By Louise Okrutsky
staff writer

RACIST AND sexist filers are found in the vicinity of a high school building in Birmingham. Earlier, students at the University of Michigan come face to face with filers denouncing specific races and ethnic backgrounds. A group of black Wayne State University students demand an African studies department.

Racism, an issue that seemed to have gone underground, is making a comeback. School administrators seek to counter the crudities of hate literature with class work geared toward examining different cultures. Many of these programs are still in the pilot stages, even though educators say that students will soon be living in a world that is more multicultural than ever.

"The northern white suburbs have waited too long. I don't think they should wait until their situation reflects a cultural diversity," said John Telford, assistant superintendent of the Rochester schools.

"The schools are not responsible for the segregated residential areas in the Detroit metropolitan area. The schools inherit the ills and have to find a way to vaccinate the students against it (racism)," he said.

STUDENTS graduating from high school in the next decade will live in a more culturally diverse world, he said.

"They'll be living in a world that's not 99 percent white Christian. They've got to know how to function within that world," Telford said.

"We're in the education business and we are to be preparing people for a culturally diverse society," said Gerald Pine, dean of Oakland University's School of Education and Human Service.

Since July, the university and 12 Oakland County school districts embarked on an effort to promote racial equity in classroom material.

Included in the effort are: Avon-

dale, Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Rochester, Southfield, Troy and West Bloomfield. Combating prejudice among students isn't merely a matter of including information on the contributions made by minority cultures to this country, according to Pine. It extends to the hiring practices of the districts and the attitudes of all of its employees.

Although there are some programs in place in the classroom, many of the efforts are still in the planning stages. Administrators agree prejudices in the classroom won't be solved overnight by a single course.

"There's no specific class. It's not that simple," said Roger Garvelink, superintendent of the Birmingham schools.

INFORMATION about other cultures should be incorporated into elementary school class work, he said. "By high school, it's too late."

In Troy, the district has incorporated cultural studies in elementary classes.

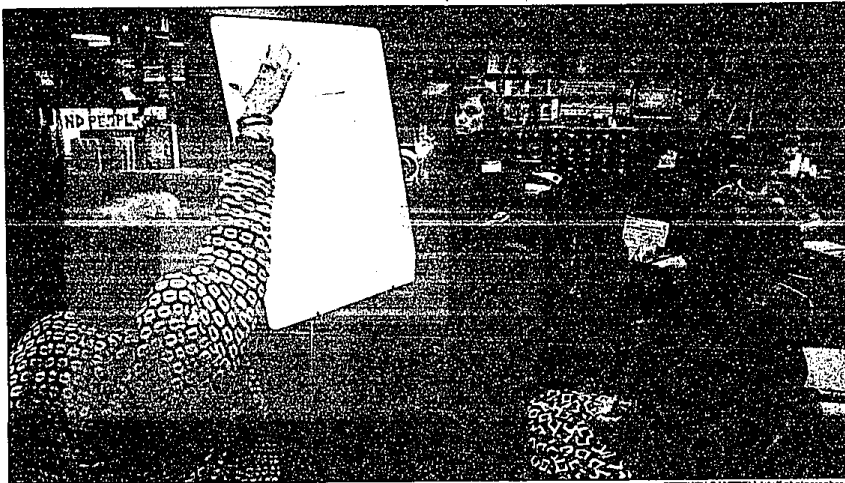
"We do focus on how people perceive each other," said Troy schools superintendent David Spencer. Elementary level study units concentrate raising students' self-confidence as well their concern for others.

Others are working information about minority cultures into social studies programs. Rochester's pilot program concentrates on the sixth through the ninth grades. In the fall, Farmington will begin a course aimed at sixth-grade students, who are included in the district's high schools.

Some districts use a form of the trickle-down theory. They train on student leaders they hope will spread the information and attitudes throughout the schools.

In Avondale, which includes parts of Troy and Rochester Hills, the district's incorporated cultural information into social studies programs.

"These are such sensitive and emotion-charged areas that one course



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Dina Lockman, facilitator of the World of Difference workshop at Pembroke School, Birmingham, explains that cultural un-

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Workshops heighten cultural awareness

By Louise Okrutsky
staff writer

AT DIFFERENT times during the last two years, teachers in districts across the state have been told to get acquainted with either a potato or an orange.

That exercise to discover special characteristics in everyday things is part of a workshop to heighten cultural sensitivity in teachers and administrators. "A World of Difference," offered by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith aims at helping people to confront their own preconceived notions. Later, lessons from the workshop can be inserted in a class regular study unit.

Last week at Pembroke School, Birmingham, teachers concocted sometimes silly, sometimes sweet stories about their group's potato. Once they've gifted the spud with a personality, many groups, especially

children, are reluctant to throw it back in the box, according to Dina Lockman, the ADL representative who was Pembroke's group facilitator.

WHILE IT might seem a silly exercise, the potato illustrates that familiarity breeds respect. "Interaction counteracts prejudice," Lockman told the group. "Children working together for a common goal reduce prejudice, not my coming to tell you about my holiday."

It was in that spirit that a student exchange took place between Quanton School in Birmingham and Leonard School in Southfield. Quanton's teachers attended the World of Difference workshop last spring and made it the theme of the 1988-89 school year.

The letters and video greetings exchanged by homogenous Quanton and by comparison, racially mixed Leonard helped the children have

empathy for each other according to Quanton principal, Janice Hammond-Matthews.

In the two visits between the fifth grade classes, the students reacted fairly typically, according to Leonard principal Carol Pyke.

"They did have a better understanding of children from another community but fifth graders are fifth graders. It wasn't like they were going into the inner city. Southfield is very middle class," she said. In contrast to the Birmingham school's homogenous population, Leonard has a 77 percent black student population.

"The children didn't see it from that angle," Pyke said. "They didn't see color or any of those things. The biggest thing was that Quanton was a neat school because it has stairs. And the Quanton students like Leonard because it's new and bright and has a lot of art work on the walls."

HAMMOND-MATTHEWS sees effects of the World of Difference program on a group of third grade boys to whom she teaches reading. The story concerning a white family's struggle with a town's prejudices after they adopted a black son caught the group's sympathy. "I was impressed with their sensitivity," she said. "They felt badly about the boy."

In addition to promoting cross cultural understanding, the year's activity extended to understanding handicapped persons. A fifth grade boy with spina bifida talked with other classes about ways in which he worked with his disability.

After a year of activities, Quanton students put together a memory book. Many of them said the exchange with Leonard was the highlight of their year, according to Lockman.

That's the sort of program that the ADL hopes will combat racism and prejudice in students and adults. Recognizing prejudice and calling it by name will help eradicate it, Lockman says. "Ignoring an ethnic remark is accepting it," she told Pembroke teachers. "With minority kids, you have to be their advocate before they need an advocate. You have to make them feel you are on their side."

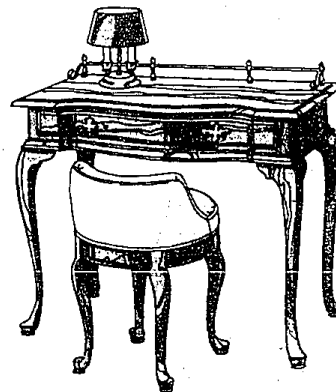
Incorporating the contributions of different cultural groups into lesson plans will foster an appreciation of their achievements, she said.

In addition to Birmingham and Southfield, teachers in West Bloomfield and Farmington have attended similar workshops, according to the ADL's Marge Ansell. "Of course, prejudice is taught in the home. It can be counteracted in school," Ansell said.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Pembroke teacher Nancy Evangelista participates in a skill which examines the preconceived notions teachers can have about different types of students. There's the stereotype of the nonconforming gifted child, the jock who doesn't like to study and the artistic student who'll never understand mathematics.



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