Action Research and Minority Problems

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Mr. Baldau presents in a very clear way the challenge of the person who is trying to improve group relations. Although he is able to paint a relatively friendly picture about the situation in Cleveland, he is eager to stress that he is not at all certain whether his report mirrors more than the surface. Mr. Baldau can enumerate important progresses made by various minority groups in the last decade, but he is not certain whether they will last or create counter-pressure strong enough to reverse the trend. He is quite in doubt about the effectiveness of the techniques used for the betterment of intergroup relations, without being able to offer suggestions for techniques which have been proved to be effective. He asks, therefore, for action-research, for research which will help the practitioner. In the last year and a half I have had occasion to have contact with a great variety of organizations, institutions, and individuals who came for help in the field of group relations. They included representatives of communities, school systems, single schools, minority organizations of a variety of backgrounds and objectives; they included labor and management representatives, departments of the national and state governments, and so on.

Two basic facts emerged from these contacts: there exists a great amount of good-will, of readiness to face the problem squarely and really to do something about it. If this amount of serious good-will could be transformed into organized, efficient action, there would be no danger for intergroup relations in the United States. But exactly here lies the difficulty. These eager people feel to be in the fog. They feel in the fog on three counts: 1. What is the present situation? 2. What are the dangers? 3. And most important of all, what shall we do?

We are presently conducting an interview survey among workers in intergroup relations in the State of Connecticut. We wanted to know their line of thinking, their line of action, and the major barriers which they encounter. Not a few of those whose very job is the improvement of inter-group relations state that perhaps the greatest obstacle to their work is their own lack of clarity of what ought to be done. How is economic and social discrimination to be attacked if we think not in terms of generalities but in terms of the inhabitants of that particular main street and those side and end streets which make up that small or large town in which the individual group worker is supposed to do his job?

One of the consequences of this unclearness is the lack of standards by which to measure progress. When the intergroup worker, coming home from the good-will meeting which he helped to instigate, thinks of the dignatories he was able to line up, the stirring appeals he heard, the impressive setting of the stage, and the good quality of the food, he cannot help but feel elated by the general atmosphere and the words of praise from his friends all around. Still, a few days later, when the next case of discrimination becomes known he often wonders whether all this was more than a white-wash and whether he is right in accepting the acknowledgment of his friends as a measuring stick for the progress of his work.

This lack of objective standards of achievement has two severe effects:

1. It deprives the workers in intergroup relations of their legitimate desire for satisfaction on a realistic basis. Under these circumstances, satisfaction or dissatisfaction with his own achievement becomes mainly a question of temperament.

2. In a field that lacks objective standards of achievement, no learning can take place. If we cannot judge whether an action has led forward or backward, if we have no criteria for evaluating the relation between effort and achievement, there is nothing to prevent us from making the wrong conclusions and to encourage the wrong work habits. Realistic fact-finding and evaluation is a prerequisite for any learning. Social research should be one of the top priorities for the practical job of improving intergroup relations.

Character and Function of Research for the Practice of Intergroup Relations

The research needed for social practice can best be characterized as research for social management or social engineering. It is a type of action-research, a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice.

This by no means implies that the research needed is in any respect less scientific or "lower" than what would be required for pure science in the field of social events. I am inclined to hold the opposite to be true. Institutions interested in engineering, such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, have turned more and more to what is called basic research. In regard to social engineering, too, progress will depend largely on the rate with which basic research in social sciences can develop deeper insight into the laws which govern

social life. This "basic social research" will have to include mathematical and conceptual problems of theoretical analysis. It will have to include the whole range of descriptive fact-finding in regard to small and large social bodies. Above all, it will have to include laboratory and field experiments in social change.

Integrating Social Sciences

An attempt to improve intergroup relations has to face a wide variety of tasks. It deals with problems of attitude and stereotypes in regard to other groups and to one's own group, with problems of development of attitudes and conduct during childhood and adolescence, with problems of housing, and the change of the legal structure of the community; it deals with problems of status and caste, with problems of economic discrimination, with political leadership, and with leadership in many aspects of community life. It deals with the small social body of a family, a club or a friendship group, with the larger social body of a school or a school system, with neighborhoods and with social bodies of the size of a community, of the state, a nation and with international problems.

We are beginning to see that it is hopeless to attack any one of these aspects of intergroup relations without considering the others. This holds equally for the practical and the scientific sides of the question. Psychology, sociology, and cultural anthropology each have begun to realize that without the help of the other neither will be able to proceed very far. During the last five years first timidly, now very clearly, a desire for an integrated approach has become articulated. What this integration would mean specifically is still open. It may mean an amalgamation of the social sciences into one social science. It may mean, on the other hand, merely the cooperation of various sciences for the practical objective of improving social management. However, the next decade will doubtless witness serious attempts of an integrated approach to social research. I am of the opinion that economics will have to be included in this symphony if we are to understand and to handle intergroup relations more effectively.

Two Types of Research Objectives

It is important to understand clearly that social research concerns itself with two rather different types of questions, namely the study of general laws of group life and the diagnosis of a specific situation.

Problems of general laws deal with the relation between possible conditions and possible results. They are expressed in "if so" propositions. The knowledge

of laws can serve as guidance for the achievement of certain objectives under certain conditions. To act correctly, it does not suffice, however, if the engineer or the surgeon knows the general laws of physics or physiology. He has to know too the specific character of the situation at hand. This character is determined by a scientific fact-finding called diagnosis. For any field of action both types of scientific research are needed.

Until recently, fact-finding on intergroup relations has been largely dominated by surveys. We have become somewhat critical of these surveys of intergroup relations. Although they are potentially important, they have, as a rule, used rather superficial methods of poll taking and not the deeper searching of the interview type used by Likert which gives us some insight into the motivations behind the sentiments expressed.

The second cause of dissatisfaction is the growing realization that mere diagnosis—and surveys are a type of diagnosis—does not suffice. In intergroup relations as in other fields of social management the diagnosis has to be complemented by experimental comparative studies of the effectiveness of various techniques of change.

The Function and Position of Research Within Social Planning and Action

At least of equal importance to the content of the research on intergroup relations is its proper placement within social life. When, where, and by whom should social research be done?

Since we are here interested in social management let us examine somewhat more closely the process of planning.

Planning starts usually with something like a general idea. For one reason or another it seems desirable to reach a certain objective. Exactly how to circumscribe this objective, and how to reach it is frequently not too clear. The first step then is to examine the idea carefully in the light of the means available. Frequently more fact-finding about the situation is required. If this first period of planning is successful, two items emerge: namely, an "overall plan" of how to reach the objective and secondly, a decision in regard to the first step of action. Usually this planning has also somewhat modified the original idea.

The next period is devoted to executing the first step of the overall plan.

In highly developed fields of social management, such as modern factory management or the execution of a war, this second step is followed by certain

fact-findings. For example, in the bombing of Germany a certain factory may have been chosen as the first target after careful consideration of various priorities and of the best means and ways of dealing with this target. The attack is pressed home and immediately a reconnaissance plane follows with the one objective of determining as accurately and objectively as possible the new situation.

This reconnaissance or fact-finding has four functions. First it should evaluate the action. It shows whether what has been achieved is above or below expectation. Secondly, it gives the planners a chance to learn, that is, to gather new general insight, for instance, regarding the strength and weakness of certain weapons or techniques of action. Thirdly, this fact-finding should serve as a basis for correctly planning the next step. Finally, it serves as a basis for modifying the "overall plan."

The next step again is composed of a circle of planning, executing, and reconnaissance or fact-finding for the purpose of evaluating the results of the second step, for preparing the rational basis for planning the third step, and for perhaps modifying again the overall plan.

Rational social management, therefore, proceeds in a spiral of steps each of which is composed of a circle of planning, action, and fact-finding about the result of the action.

With this in mind, let us examine for a moment the way intergroup relations are handled. I cannot help feeling that the person returning from a successful completion of a good-will meeting is like the captain of a boat who somehow has felt that his ship steers too much to the right and therefore has turned the steering wheel sharply to the left. Certain signals assure him that the rudder has followed the move of the steering wheel. Happily he goes to dinner. In the meantime, of course, the boat moves in circles. In the field of intergroup relations all too frequently action is based on observations made "within the boat" and too seldom based on objective criteria in regard to the relations of the movement of the boat to the objective to be reached.

We need reconnaisance to show us whether we move in the right direction and with what speed we move. Socially, it does not suffice that university organizations produce new scientific insight. It will be necessary to install fact-finding procedures, social eyes and ears, right into social action bodies.

The idea of research or fact-finding branches of agencies devoted to improving intergroup relations is not new. However, some of them did little more than collect newspaper clippings. The last few years has seen a number of

very significant developments. About two years ago the American Jewish Congress established the Commission on Community Interrelations. This is an action-research organization designed primarily to function as a service organization to Jewish and non-Jewish bodies in the field of group interrelations. It is mainly interested in the group approach as compared to the individual approach on the one hand and the mass approach by way of radio and newspaper on the other. These latter two important lines are the focus of attention of the research unit of the American Jewish Committee.

Various programs try to make use of our educational system for betterment of intergroup relations, such as that of the American Council on Education. The College Study in Intergroup Relations at teachers colleges, the Citizenship Education Study in Detroit, and, in a more overall way, the Bureau for Intercultural Education. They all show an increased sensitivity for a more realistic, that is more scientific, procedure of evaluation and self-evaluation. The same holds in various degrees for undertakings specifically devoted to Negro-White relations, such as the American Council on Race Relations in Chicago, the Urban League, and others. It is significant that the State Commission Against Discrimination in the State of New York has a subcommittee for cooperation with research projects and that the Inter-Racial Commission of the State of Connecticut is actively engaged in research. The recent creation of major research institutions at universities has also helped to broaden the vistas of many of the existing action organizations and in making them more confident of the possibilities of using scientific techniques for their purposes.

I cannot possibly attempt even in the form of a survey to discuss the many projects and findings which are emerging from these research undertakings. They include surveys of the methods which have been used until now, such as that just published by Goodwin Watson; studies of the development of attitudes in children; studies of the relation between intergroup attitudes and such factors as political belief, position in one's own group; experiments about how best to react in case of a verbal attack along prejudice lines; change experiments with criminal gangs and with communities; the development of many new diagnostic tests; and last but not least, the development of more precise theories of social change. Not too much of the results of these projects have yet found their way into print. However, I am confident that the next few years will witness rapidly increased output of significant and practical studies.

Example of a Change Experiment on Minority Problems

One example may illustrate the potentialities of cooperation between practitioners and social scientists. In the beginning of this year the Chairman

of the Advisory Committee on Race Relations for the State of Connecticut, who is at the same time a leading member of the Interracial Commission of the State of Connecticut, approached us with a request to conduct a workshop for fifty community workers in the field of intergroup relations from all over the state of Connecticut.

A project emerged in which three agencies cooperated, the Advisory Committee on Intergroup Relations of the State of Connecticut, The Commission on Community Interrelations of the American Jewish Congress, and the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The State Advisory Committee is composed of members of the Interracial Commission of the State of Connecticut, a member of the State Department of Education of the State of Connecticut, and the person in charge of the Connecticut Valley Region of the Conference of Christians and Jews. The state of Connecticut seems to be unique in having an interracial commission as a part of its regular government. It was apparent that any improvement of techniques which could be linked with this strategic central body would have a much better chance of a wide-spread and lasting effect. After a thorough discussion of various possibilities the following change-experiment was designed cooperatively.

Recent research findings have indicated that the ideologies and stereotypes which govern intergroup relations should not be viewed as individual character traits but that they are anchored in cultural standards, that their stability and their change depend largely on happenings in groups as groups. Experience with leadership training had convinced us that the workshop setting is among the most powerful tools for bringing about improvement of skill in handling intergroup relations.

Even a good and successful workshop, however, seems seldom to have the chance to lead to long-range improvements in the field of intergroup relations. The individual who comes home from the workshop full of enthusiasm and new insights will again have to face the community, one against perhaps 100,000. Obviously, the chances are high that his success will not be up to his new level of aspiration, and that soon disappointments will set him back again. We are facing here a question which is of prime importance for any social change, namely the problem of its permanence.

To test certain hypotheses in regard to the effect of individual as against group settings, the following variations were introduced into the experimental workshop. Part of the delegates came as usual, one individual from a town. For a number of communities, however, it was decided the attempt would be made to secure a number of delegates and if possible to develop in the workshop

teams who would keep up their team relationship after the workshop. This should give a greater chance for permanency of the enthusiasm and group productivity and should also multiply the power of the participants to bring about the desired change. A third group of delegates to the workshop would receive a certain amount of expert help even after they returned to the community.

The faculty for the workshop included Dr. Lippitt as Project Director, Dr. Bradford from the NEA and Dr. Benne from Columbia University. There is no time here to go into detail of the training procedure.[1] However I should mention a few points related to research.

The first step in carrying out such a design calls for broad fact-finding about the different types of intergroup problems which the various communities have to face. Communities and teams of group workers in the communities would have to be selected so that the results of the three variations would be possible to compare. In other words, this project had to face the same problems which we mention as typical for planning process in general.

The experiences of the members of the State Advisory Board of the Interracial Commission of the State of Connecticut were able quickly to provide sufficient data to determine the towns which should be studied more accurately. To evaluate the effect of the workshop a diagnosis before the workshop would have to be carried out to determine, among other things, the line of thinking of the community workers, their main line of action and the main barriers they have to face. A similiar re-diagnosis would have to be carried out some months after the workshop.

To understand why the workshop produced whatever change or lack of change would be found, it is obviously necessary to record scientifically the essential happenings during the workshop. Here, I feel, research faces its most difficult task. To record the content of the lecture or the program would by no means suffice. Description of the form of leadership has to take into account the amount of initiative shown by individuals and subgroups, the division of the trainees into subgroups, the frictions within and between these subgroups, the crises and their outcome, and, above all, the total management pattern as it changes from day to day. These large-scale aspects, more than anything else, seem to determine what a workshop will accomplish. The task which social scientists have to face in objectively recording these data is not too different from that of the historian. We will have to learn to handle these

[1]See summary of training procedure in, "Training Community Leadership Toward More Effective Group Living," by Palmer Howard and Ronald Lippitt. *Adult Education Bulletin,* August, 1946.

relatively large units of periods and social bodies without lowering the standards of validity and reliability to which we are accustomed in the psychological recording of the more microscopic units of action and periods of minutes or seconds of activity.

The methods of recording the essential events of the workshop included an evaluation session at the end of every day. Observers who had attended the various subgroup sessions reported (into a recording machine) the leadership pattern they had observed, the progress or lack of progress in the development of the groups from a conglomeration of individuals to an integrated "we" and so on. The group leaders gave their view of the same sessions and a number of trainees added their comments.

I have been deeply impressed with the tremendous pedagogical effect which these evaluation meetings, designed for the purpose of scientific recording, had on the training process. The atmosphere of objectivity, the readiness by the faculty to discuss openly their mistakes, far from endangering their position, seemed to lead to an enhancement of appreciation and to bring about that mood of relaxed objectivity which is nowhere more difficult to achieve than in the field of intergroup relations which is loaded with emotionality and attitude rigidity even among the so-called liberals and those whose job it is to promote intergroup relations.

This and similar experiences have convinced me that we should consider action, research and training as a triangle that should be kept together for the sake of any of its corners. It is seldom possible to improve the action pattern without training personnel. In fact today the lack of competent training personnel is one of the greatest hinderances to progress in setting up more experimentation. The training of large numbers of social scientists who can handle scientific problems but are also equipped for the delicate task of building productive, hard-hitting teams with practitioners is a prerequisite for the progress in social science as well as in social management for intergroup relations.

As I watched, during the workshop, the delegates from different towns all over Connecticut transform from a multitude of unrelated individuals, frequently opposed in their outlook and their interests, into cooperative teams not on the basis of sweetness but on the basis of readiness to face difficulties realistically, to apply honest fact-finding, and to work together to overcome them; when I saw the pattern of role-playing emerge, saw the major responsibilities move slowly according to plan from the faculty to the trainees; when I saw, in the final session, the State Advisory Committee receive the backing of the delegates for a plan of linking the teachers colleges throughout the state with certain

aspects of group relations within the communities; when I heard the delegates and teams of delegates from various towns present their plans for city workshops and a number of other projects to go into realization immediately, I could not help but feel that the close integration of action, training, and research holds tremendous possibilities for the field of intergroup relations. I would like to pass on this feeling to you.

Intergroup relations are doubtless one of the most crucial aspects on the national and international scene. We know today better than ever before that they are potentially dynamite. The strategy of social research must take into account the dangers involved.

We might distinguish outside adversities and barriers to social science and the inner dangers of research procedures. Among the first we find a group of people who seem to subscribe to the idea that we do not need more social science. Among these admirers of common sense we find practitioners of all types, politicians and college presidents. Unfortunately there are a good number of physical scientists among those who are against a vigorous promotion of the social sciences. They seem to feel that the social sciences have not produced something of real value for the practice of social management and therefore will never do so. I guess there is no other way to convince these people than by producing better social science.

A second threat to social science comes from "groups in power". These people can be found in management on any level, among labor leaders, among politicians, some branches of the government, and among members of Congress. Somehow or other they all seem to be possessed by the fear that they could not do what they want to do if they, and others, would really know the facts. I think social scientists should be careful to distinguish between the legitimate and not legitimate elements behind this fear. For instance, it would be most unhealthy if the findings of the Gallup Poll automatically would determine policy for what should and should not become law in the United States. We will have to recognize the difference between fact finding and policy setting and to study carefully the procedures by which fact finding should be fed in the social machinery of legislation to produce a democratic effect.[2]

Doubtless, however, a good deal of unwillingness to face reality lies behind the enmity to social research of some of the people in power positions.

A third type of very real anxiety on the part of practioners can be illustrated by the following example. Members of community councils to whom I have had

[2]See "Public Opinion Polls and Democratic Leadership," by Dorwin Cartwright, *Journal of Social Issues,* Vol. 2, No. 2, May, 1946, p. 23-32.

the occasion to report results of research on group interrelations reacted with the feeling that the social scientists at the university or in the research arm of some national organization would sooner or later be in the position to tell the local community workers all over the states exactly what to do and what not to do.

They obviously envisaged a social science "technocracy". This fear seems to be a very common misunderstanding based on the term "law". The community workers failed to realize that lawfulness in social as in physical science means an "if so" relation, a linkage between hypothetical conditions and hypothetical effects. These laws do *not* tell *what* conditions exist locally, at a given place at a given time. In other words, the laws don't do the job of diagnosis which has to be done locally. Neither do laws prescribe the strategy for change. In social management, as in medicine, the practioner will usually have the choice between various methods of treatment and he will require as much skill and ingenuity as the physician in regard to both diagnosis and treatment.

It seems to be crucial for the progress of social science that the practitioner will understand that through social sciences and only through them he can hope to gain the power necessary to do a good job. Unfortunately there is nothing in social laws and social research which will force the practitioner toward the good. Science gives more freedom and power to both the doctor and the murdered, to democracy and fascism. The social scientist should recognize his responsibility also in respect to this.

Research on Majorities and Minorities

It has not been the intention of this paper to discuss detailed findings of social research in intergroup relations. I feel, however, that I should mention two points which illustrate, I think, basic aspects.

Intergroup relations is a two-way affair. This means that to improve relations between groups both of the interacting groups have to be studied.

In recent years we have started to realize that so-called minority problems are in fact majority problems, that the Negro problem is the problem of the white, that the Jewish problem is the problem of the non-Jew, and so on. It is also true of course that intergroup relations cannot be solved without altering certain aspects of conduct and sentiment of the minority group. One of the most severe obstacles in the way of improvement seems to be the notorious lack of confidence and self-esteem of most minority groups. Minority groups tend to accept the implicit judgment of those who have status even where the judgment is directed against themselves. There are many forces which tend to

develop in the children, adolescents, and adults of minorities deep-seated antagonism to their own group. An over-degree of submissiveness, guilt emotionality, and other causes and forms of ineffective behavior follows. Neither an individual or a group that is at odds with itself can live normally or live happily with other groups.

It should be clear to the social scientist that it is hopeless to cope with this problem by providing sufficient self-esteem for members of minority groups as individuals. The discrimination which these individuals experience is not directed against them as individuals but as group members and only by raising their self-esteem as group members to the normal level can a remedy be produced.

Many whites in the South seem to realize that one prerequisite for progress is the enhancement of self-esteem of the southern Negro. On the other hand, the idea of a positive program of increasing group loyalties seems to be paradoxical to many liberals. We seem to have become accustomed to linking the question of group loyalty and group self-esteem with jingoism.

The solution, I think, can be found only through a development which would bring the general level of group esteem and group loyalty which in themselves are perfectly natural and necessary phenomena to the same level for all groups of society. That means every effort should be made to lower the inflated self esteem of the 100 percenters. They should learn the prayer from the musical-play, *Oklahoma.* "Dear God, make me see that I am not better than my fellow men." However it is essential to learn the second half of this prayer that goes something like "but that I am every darn bit as good as he." From the experiences thus far I would judge that raising the self-esteem of the minority groups is one of the most strategic means for the improvement of intergroup relations.

The last point I would like to mention concerns the relation between the local, the national, and the international scenes. No one working in the field of intergroup relations can be blind to the fact that we live today in one world. Whether it will become politically one world or two worlds, there is no doubt that so far as interdependence of events is concerned we are living in one world. Whether we think of the Catholics, or the Jews, the Greeks, or the Negroes every group within the United States is deeply affected by happenings in other places on the globe. Intergroup relations in this country will be formed to a large degree by the events on the international scene and particularly by the fate of the colonial peoples. It will be crucial whether or not the policy of this country will follow what Raymond Kennedy has called international Jim Crow policy of the colonial empires. Are we ready to give up the policy

followed in the Philippines and to regress when dealing with the United States' dependencies to that policy of exploitation which has made colonial imperialism the most hated institution the world over. Or will we follow the philosophy which John Collier has developed in regard to the American Indians and which the Institute of Ethnic Affairs is proposing for the American dependencies. This is a pattern which leads gradually to independence, equality, and cooperation. Whatever the effect of a policy of permanent exploitation would be on the international scene, it could not help but have a deep effect on the situation within the United States. Jim-Crowism on the international scene will hamper tremendously progress of intergroup relations within the United States and is likely to endanger every aspect of democracy.

The development of intergroup relations is doubtless full of danger and the development of social science in this field faces many obstacles. The picture, however, which I have been able to paint, the progress of research and particularly that the organization of social research has made during the last few years, makes me feel that we have learned much. A large scale effort of social research on intergroup relations doubtless would be able to have a lasting effect on the history of this country.

It is equally clear, however, that this job demands from the social scientists an utmost amount of courage. It needs courage as Plato defines it. It needs the best of what the best among us can give, and the help of everybody.