

Educating Academy Students for a Multicultural Society

BY JAMES R. NASH

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What I was observing on the chapel platform was not supposed to happen. Lisa, a popular Caucasian South African girl, was part of a small singing group. She stood between Sharon and Audrey—very dark-skinned sisters from the Caribbean islands. As they took their positions to sing, they put their arms around one another.

We often see such closeness in girls who have grown up together under similar circumstances. However, these girls had just become acquainted at the academy. For Lisa to enter into this kind of a friendly relationship was in opposition to the way she had grown up. I asked her about it. Were her actions only for singing special music? Her response was unequivocal. "Sharon and Audrey are very dear to me, the closest of my friends." She paused, then added emphatically, "This has been good for me, coming from where I come from."

How did this friendship happen? What can a school and its faculty do to create an

atmosphere that goes beyond tolerance to acceptance and close fellowship among different races and cultures?

Educating for acceptance in a multicultural society does not just happen. It requires careful planning by a school's administration and faculty. The program must be designed to promote a philosophy that says: "All have been created equal, and here we believe this with all our hearts." How is this done? Here are a few ideas that have been successfully implemented in secondary schools.

Know Your Student Body

Study the student roster. Note the various ethnic, cultural, nationalistic, and socio-economic groups that are included. The variety may surprise you. This assessment will assist faculty members who may themselves be struggling with feelings of prejudice. When they know that specifically identified members of their school family come from different backgrounds, they can be sensitized to

strategies that better meet the needs of a diverse student body.

Recruit Multicultural Faculty

As faculty openings occur, recruit qualified individuals who will complement the composition of the student body. Role models are very important to the self-image of minority students, and provide a broadening influence on those from the majority culture.

Decorations

Decorate the classrooms and public areas of the school with artifacts, designs, and colors relating to the various cultures that exist in the school family. This must be done tastefully, in order to enhance this theme: From our differences we come together with respect and pride as a *family*. A school flag or seal that depicts some of these elements helps to foster feelings of school spirit and unity.

School Bulletin

Examine your school bulletin and advertising material. Do they encourage international students to attend your school? Prepare a carefully written admission statement that warmly invites students of all races and ethnic groups to enroll so as to enhance your student body. As this statement is read by students and parents of the majority culture, it offers an explicit invitation for them to help provide a supportive family atmosphere.

Recruit Multicultural Leaders and Resource Persons

Actively include people from *all* backgrounds in planning and implementing school programs and activities. Select pupils from a variety of backgrounds to serve as student leaders, to offer prayers, present speeches and worship talks, to hold membership on student committees, to fill student jobs (if visa permits employment), and to participate in other ways. Adult resource people should be selected with the same objectives in mind. Choose individuals who are from, who were born in, and who have visited or studied in other lands to speak, to give special music, or to assist in other ways with the school program. Special functions that may be included in this effort include worships, chapels, Christmas programs, and graduation services.

Social Activities

Consider planning a Saturday night activity that features recreational and social activities from the places represented by people on campus. In a day academy, plan an international dinner on a certain Sabbath each year, and invite the local church to participate.

Include specific information and objectives in an open but sensitive manner.

Special Emphasis Week

Schedule an annual special emphasis week to promote brotherhood among all groups who come into the students' lives. This theme can be the basis for chapels, worships, weekend services, even special assemblies during the week. Have the cafeteria prepare meals and desserts from an international menu. Bulletin boards and decorations should also support the theme. Include a day for students to wear their national dress. Have prayers offered in other languages by students and faculty. This is a good time to schedule the Saturday-night activity to depict internationalism.

Seasonal Activities

Christmas parties and other seasonal activities can include customs from other parts of the world. Parents and families from outside the school can be invited to assist with this. While a number of traditions may be similar, many are different and unique and will create student interest.

Curriculum

Include in the school's curriculum or schedule special courses that provide recognition and information on subjects that relate to the cultures in the school family. This information can be included in history, literature, sociology, economics, religion, home economics—any course that the faculty's abilities and enthusiasm will support.

Challenge the faculty and students to be creative. Help them to develop their own ideas in addition to those suggested here. This can provide an exciting and enriching experience for the entire school family.

Seventh-day Adventist education is much more than a course of study leading to a diploma. It is more than semesters, quarters, and grading periods; more than GPA's, credits, and requirements, more than Bible classes, worships, and chapels—it is *all* that and much more. It is treating others as you would have them treat you. It is service and witnessing to others. It is effective education in a pluralistic society. It is ensuring that the total school family learns to provide a warm and comfortable atmosphere for others to come and learn about life, themselves, and the loving God who created all this diversity. □

Examine your school bulletin and advertising material. Do they encourage international students to attend your school?

Conduct programs and in-service activities for students and faculty that specifically address multicultural objectives. Schedule films that motivate viewers toward greater understanding and appreciation of other cultures and races.

Establish a Language-learning Program

If your student body includes persons with limited English proficiency, schedule classes in English as a Second Language, or make specific plans for mainstreaming these students in regular classes. Analyze the abilities of these students to determine which methods will best meet their needs. The curriculum for this program should be described in a published statement. Its aim should be for the student to learn the new language as soon as possible so as to be able to take advantage of the school's complete program.

Orientation

The opening-day orientation should include written information and a strong verbal promotion of the established philosophy for the school family relating to cultural and international relations.

James R. Nash is Director of Admissions and Records for the University School (K-12) and Vice-Principal of Andrews Academy, Berrien Springs, Michigan. His experience includes service as a boarding academy dean, teacher, and principal.