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Carefully Taught: The Effect of Regions on Prejudice

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by Jane H. Platt

A problem confronted daily at the New Haven Urban Youth Center, is prejudice. Our students are predominately black and Hispanic, our staff mostly white. This problem, of course, is not unique to our school. Discrimination has a history. It can be subtle, insidious, unconscious, subconscious, hidden, or overt. For these reasons prejudice is both a powerful and a difficult factor to deal with. Prejudice may never be eradicated; therefore there is a constant need for awareness and confrontation. This project will provide a disciplined way of clarifying and deepening my understanding of the multi-cultural context in which prejudice develops.

To apply my unit to the students at Urban Youth Center, I need to plan activities that are concrete, interesting, and on their level. My unit takes its title from the song, "Carefully Taught," in *South Pacific*. We learn at an early age "to hate all the people our relatives hate." My project would be to have my classes and a class in North Carolina do audiotaped oral histories of older people. The questions asked would focus on regional background and experiences of discrimination based on age, sex, religion, class, or race. Both classes would use the same questions and exchange copies of the tapes in order to compare the results. We can tabulate the answers on charts for comparison.

I expect to find that the region where a person lives tends to determine which groups are discriminated against and the ways in which prejudice is shown. For example, in the North prejudice has been denied and repressed. Its manifestation has therefore been more subtle than in the South. In the South it seems to have been more organized, open, and taken for granted. More recently, dramatic changes have been made in the South, and I think both regions are more open about discussing race relations. It will be interesting to see if the project shows this, and how the expression of prejudice has changed over time.

My own awareness of racial discrimination developed slowly. As I was growing up, we were taught to be tolerant. It seemed to be all right to say negative things about blacks but not to say them in front of blacks and hurt their feelings. Only as an adult did I become aware of the pervasive effect this hidden racism had on housing, employment, social acceptance, and equal opportunities for blacks. I didn't know that if one's voice sounded black on the telephone that the apartment would suddenly become "taken." When I read *Black Like Me* by John Howard Griffin, I was shocked to learn of the blatant racism in the South. I didn't know there was a "hate stare" and such complete segregation in schools and public accommodations. I had trouble understanding how people could be so open about treating Negroes as inferior.

In introducing the unit I will attempt to start discussion of the manifestation of prejudice and contrast the Northeast and the South as regions, using a variety of materials. The words to “Carefully Taught” could spark the writing of a paragraph or an essay agreeing or disagreeing with the idea that prejudice is learned. The class could read excerpts from *Black Like Me*, and view and discuss the film *Soul Man*, which is a more humorous treatment of a white man posing as a black. The class can bring in magazine and newspaper accounts of women’s struggles for equal treatment. The class can measure the number of column inches devoted to positive versus negative coverage of teens and children. Consideration has to be given to the placement of the articles. Is it on page one or buried in the back of the newspaper? Religious issues could receive similar treatment.

To put prejudice in context, we could discuss how the 19th century Protestants in New England treated the Irish immigrants and later how they viewed the French Canadians. The concept is that historically new groups of immigrants are seen as beneath or outside of the established group and have problems during the period of assimilation.

As preparation for the oral history project itself, we would develop the idea of what oral history is. Excerpts from Alex Haley’s *Roots* and a discussion of the Foxfire project can set the stage. We will need to discuss good interviewing techniques. There are technical matters on handling the taping equipment and starting the tape by giving the date and naming the participants in the conversation.

Good interviewers set the subject at ease, ask questions to get the person talking and ask additional questions only to clarify a point or keep the conversation on track. It is a good idea to jot down questions as they occur and, when possible, keep them for the end of the talk. At this point we will contact the cooperating class in the South and share written accounts of our activities. Some practice in mock interviews will give students a chance to role play and become comfortable before starting the project.

Interview Questions

The following is a tentative list of the kinds of questions to be used in the interviews. Questions are intended to draw out experiences of discrimination on the basis of age, sex, color, religion, or class. The premise is that the way prejudice is manifested differs from one region of the country to another. In the process the students will be exposed to new information and may develop an understanding of how prejudice is formed.

Where were you born?

Where did you grow up?

To what groups do you belong? or, How would you classify yourself? (By this we mean race, religion sex, age, ethnic group, political party etc.)

What was (or were) the dominant group(s) in your area?

Did you experience incidents that showed someone was discriminating against you or someone you knew? Describe them.

How did you (your family) treat other groups? (access to public facilities, quality of education, acceptance at social functions) Why?

How did they treat you? (Same as above) Why? Have you moved from where you grew up? If yes, how are

groups treated in the new area? Is this different from what you were used to? If no, is there a difference in the same area since you grew up? Why did you or your family move?

What do you miss the most about the area you left?

When were you first aware of prejudice? Were there specific incidents or just a growing awareness?

Were the people who were prejudiced aware of it?

Did you ever have a close friendship with a person who was from another group (or race)? If so, what was the basis of that friendship? Common neighborhood or school? Common job? Just a friendly outgoing person (i.e. personality)?

Did you ever discuss prejudice with a member of another group?

Who were the well-known figures when you were growing up (public figures, movie stars, singers, athletes)?

In addition to the content of the interviews themselves, students will get practice in many subject areas. Skills learned will include interviewing, listening, editing, and analyzing. Other expected advantages are: a wider perspective, recognition of the students' own prejudices, preservation of histories of minorities, exposure to role models, a sense of pride in their heritage and an appreciation of others, and formation of links with an older generation.

The objectives for this unit fall into four categories, the process of doing the oral history research project, knowledge of the Northeast and South as regions, social skills, and language arts skills.

Oral History Research Project

The project will be an opportunity for the students to go through the process of doing research from a primary source. We will talk about what oral history is. My students may not have thought about how people preserved their traditions before the time of tape recorders and video cameras. Excerpts of Alex Haley's *Roots* and perhaps some selections from *Foxfire* will illustrate this. The accuracy of the oral tradition and the sense of pride and belonging that are evident are some of the points I hope to make.

The students will learn interviewing techniques.

1. We will review and practice effective use of a tape recorder.
2. The students will learn to put the subject of the interview at ease, so he/she is not conscious of the tape recorder and can concentrate on the content of the interview.
3. The students will learn to ask open-ended questions and follow-up questions to encourage the subject to keep talking. The interviewer stays in the background.
4. The interviewer should be polite and thank the subject for spending time on the project.
5. A typescript can be made of the interview and the subject asked to review it for corrections, additions or deletions.
6. The results of the interviews will be tabulated and the data compared.
7. Students will analyze the information and report the results.
8. The class will discuss the results and see if conclusions can be made.

Social Skills

1. The students will gain social skills in interaction with their subjects, classmates, and the other class.
2. Through the project the students will focus on listening to the experiences of others and thereby should gain a wider perspective on the subject of prejudice.
3. The students may become more aware of their own feelings of prejudice.
4. Since the subjects of the interviews are older than the students, the students will be exposed to a variety of role models. These may be positive or negative. Some adults may relate stories of experiences they regret, or give examples of things they do better now as a result of learning from their mistakes.
5. The students will have a sense of pride in their heritage and respect and appreciation for others' heritage as a result of forming this link with an older generation.

Awareness of Regions

1. An awareness of the characteristics of the Northeast and the South as regions will develop as a result of the exchange between the classes.
2. Contact with the other students will help motivate them to read about their own region and that of the South.
3. Interviewing people who have moved from one region to another will be especially informative. There are profound implications for individuals or groups who have been displaced either for economic reasons or by being forced to relocate.

Language Arts Skills

1. The students will use critical reading skills in getting background information. They will compare and contrast, summarize, analyze, and draw conclusions.
2. They will extend their speaking and listening skills doing the interviews.
3. In contacting the other class and in writing thank you letters to the subjects of the interviews they will improve their writing and spelling skills, tailoring their writing to the purpose and to their audience.

Strategies

My students will read examples of discrimination because of age, sex, race, class, religion, or appearance. They will discuss their own experiences of such prejudice. Using the book *Ecidujerp-Prejudice* by Irene Gersten, they will try to discover why people treat others differently on the basis of group membership. Other exercises will help develop this theme. My students can measure the column inches devoted to teenagers in a local newspaper.

They can rate them as positive or negative and examine the balance.

We can use the song, "Carefully Taught," to write an essay or start a debate on whether people are taught to be prejudiced or are born that way.

We can watch excerpts of the movie *Soul Man* and list the stereotypes portrayed—e.g. All blacks are great basketball players.

They can bring in magazine and newspaper articles of women's struggles for equal treatment.

Religious issues can be discussed such as school prayer, public funds for religious schools, nativity scenes or menorahs on public property etc.

We will discuss the fact that each new group of immigrants had to struggle for acceptance. A documentary, *An Immigrant's Story, A Long, Long Journey*, on videotape, through the experiences of a young Polish boy, presents a vivid example.

For each of these areas of prejudice the class can develop a chart listing examples from readings or personal experience.

The class in North Carolina will be contacted and the project explained. We could do the same exercise as we are doing in the seminar. Each group could list what they think are characteristics of the other region and compare that with the response of the students living in that region. They can exchange photos of themselves and thumbnail biographies. A packet of information on the schools can be prepared and exchanged.

The class can develop a list of questions to be used in the interviews through brainstorming and testing in mock interviews. They should be similar to the ones listed in this paper.

The class will practice interviewing techniques by interviewing each other and perhaps a few adults in the building. A warm-up exercise is for students to be paired and given 10 minutes to ask each other some questions. Then, going around the class, each person introduces the other person to the class.

Contacts will be made with the adults to be interviewed and then the actual interviews will be done.

The interviews will be reviewed, discussed, tabulated and analyzed. The tapes will be copied and exchanged with the other school.

When I first mentioned this project to my class, their reaction was "You're dead wrong. We don't need to do no project like that. We're not prejudiced." I tried to explain that it wasn't personal. We were going to look at prejudice as a phenomenon, but they persisted in their belief that I was directing this at them. Although developing clarity and consciousness about one's own biases is part of my purpose, the strategy needs to be

oblique. Emerging consciousness and changing attitudes will be by-products, rather than the actual content of this project.

We will have ongoing correspondence with the other class. After exchanging ideas of what the other area is like the class can break into cooperative groups to research different aspects of both regions and report to the class. They can write what their perception is and ask the other class “Have you had experience with this?”

Large charts on butcher paper or newsprint can be used to compare information from the interviews and can guide class discussion about the significance of the results. When the interviews are completed, we will try to tabulate the answers and compare the information. We will look at the similarities and differences in the responses. Are there patterns according to region or age, or do we have just a collection of individual responses? Did it matter which part of the country one grew up in? How did moving from one region to another affect a person’s experience with prejudice? Are people taught to treat others as individuals or as members of a group? What things did you learn that surprised you? Did you learn anything new about yourself?

Part of the discussion of the results will include the concept of going beyond prejudice to an appreciation of differentness. I would use the following quote from *Bigotry* by Kathlyn Gay p. 119 to introduce a discussion of positive things we have learned about others and ourselves.

Reducing prejudice usually begins with personal attitudes, exploring how one feels toward people who appear different or act in a different way from oneself. People who have low self-esteem and feel threatened by difference or who need the security of group acceptance may have problems appreciating differences—whether those differences are in color, religion, gender, income, physical shape, size, and abilities, or mental capacity.

A person with a strong sense of self-worth is probably well aware that each of us is unique in her or his own way. At the same time, all people have similar basic physical and emotional needs. To live peacefully in a multicultural society, we need to understand our commonalities as well as learn about and respect different lifestyles and traditions. It also helps to have empathy, or be able to ‘walk in another’s shoes.’

We can list qualities we admired in the people we interviewed and in each other. In my church every spring, we have a Flower Communion. The idea came from a Unitarian minister in Prague, Czechoslovakia, named Norbert Capek, who was martyred at Dachau in 1942 for his anti-Nazi preaching. Each person brings a flower to the service to be placed in a large container. At the end of the service each person takes a different flower. This symbolizes the fact that each of us brings a unique gift to the community and we all take something away as a result of our fellowship with each other. Perhaps the class can do something similar.

The class can give a reception for parents and the subjects of the interviews. Information gained in the project can be displayed and cooperative groups can select various ways of presenting their findings, such as preparing skits, debates, displays, or booklets.

Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan One—Introducing the Unit

Objectives

1. Through an exercise the students will experience prejudice.
2. The students will reflect on personal experiences of prejudice and share them with the class.
3. The students will develop a definition of prejudice and be given a brief overview of the oral history project.

Materials *Red and blue stickers, lollipops or other small candies, chalk board, chalk, flip chart, marker, pencils and paper.*

Procedure

1. Introduce the exercise (10-15 minutes)

“We’re going to do something a little different today. For this lesson you will each wear a sticker. You will find out later what the stickers are for.” Teacher puts a blue or red sticker on each child’s clothing. Children are chosen at random, not blue for boys or all blacks etc. The teacher wears a blue sticker. The teacher “discriminates” for the rest of the exercise. The “blue” children are called by name (not sticker color) for the “best seats here in the front.” Children are called to the chalkboard to do difficult math examples. The “blue” children are praised, the “reds” criticized. Teacher gives lollipops (or other small candies) to “blues” only. The exercise is stopped, but the stickers are left until after the discussion so everyone knows who was “blue” and who was “red.”

2. Discussion

A. Who can tell what the stickers were for?

B. How did I treat people in the class? (Elicit the fact that the “blues” were favored. They got best seats, praise, candy.)

C. Why did I pick only “blue” people? (Teacher was a “blue.”)

D. How did the “blues” feel? (Favored, rewarded, special, superior) Did the “blues” feel bad in any way? (Some may respond that they felt uncomfortable to be teacher’s pet, or get things their friends didn’t.)

E. How did the “reds” feel? (Disappointed, sad, angry, jealous, shocked, etc.)

F. Did you realize it was an exercise, or did you think I had really gone ill on you? If you knew it was an exercise, did you still feel bad?

3. Sharing experiences

Okay. Everyone go back to your regular seats. Here are lollipops for the ‘reds.’ You can remove the stickers now. I’d like everyone to take a paper and write about a time when someone

treated you differently because you belonged to a certain group. It could be bad—someone’s mom wouldn’t let you play with them; or good—you got a privilege because you were in the honor society. You have about 10 minutes. When time is up get each child’s report and list them on the flip chart under headings: Age, Race, Sex etc.

4. Summing up

What we have experienced today with the “blues” and “reds” and at other times in our lives is called prejudice or discrimination. It happens when someone treats you as a member of a group rather than as an individual. It can be in your favor or against you. When I gave out candy to the “blues,” I was acting prejudiced in *favor* of the “blues” and *against* the “reds.”

This marking period, we are going to study prejudice. We will interview people about their experiences, exchange information with a class in North Carolina, and do reading and other activities. We will talk about the differences between the Northeastern and Southern regions of the United States. We’ll look at the reasons that people act prejudiced toward certain groups of people.

Homework Make a list of at least 10 things people are allowed or not allowed to do based on their age. For example 10 year-olds aren’t allowed to drive cars. This week try to bring in newspaper or magazine articles showing this.

Lesson Plan Two—Regional Characteristics

Objectives

1. The students will work successfully in cooperative groups.
2. The students will compare their impressions of the Northeastern and Southern regions with those of the North Carolina students.
3. The students will learn a method of checking impressions against facts where possible.
4. The students will use good communication skills working in their groups and with students in another state.

Preparation Prior to this lesson the students in Connecticut and North Carolina have made lists of 10 characteristics of both regions and have exchanged the lists. They have defined regions by listing which states are included in each region. The premise is that the characteristics listed are impressions, with no right or wrong answers. The responses are used as a basis for refining and extending knowledge of the region. The teacher has selected five groups, each mixed in ability.

Introduction “Today we are going to work in five groups. I will give each group a characteristic of the two regions. Your task is to make a chart with four headings and a place to write your conclusions. The headings are: Northeast Thinks, South Thinks, Agree, and What are the facts? Ask and answer questions on the characteristic to clarify what information is needed to draw conclusions.”

Material

Sheets with characteristics from both regions,
large sheets of paper, markers, and reference materials.

Procedure In groups students set up chart and develop questions to arrive at conclusions.

Example 1—Characteristic: Climate

Northeast	South	Thinks	Agree	What Are Facts?
Thinks				
South	South	Yes	Temperature	
hot & dry	is hot & dry	&	Rainfall data	
NEast is	NEast is cold	No	Temp & Rainfall	
variable	& wet		data	

Questions How hot is the South? Is it hot all the time?

What kinds of weather does the Northeast have? How often does it rain?

Conclusions These questions can be answered fairly scientifically with measurements recorded in reference materials.

Example 2: Friendliness

Northeast	South	Thinks	Agree	What are facts?
Thinks				
South known	Southerners are	Yes	Observations,	
for	friendlier	Yes	stories,	
hospitality			opinions	

Question How do we define friendliness? What does a person do to show he/she is friendly? Can you measure how friendly a person is? Are there some people in each region who are friendly and some who are not?

Conclusion It is possible to make lists of traits of a friendly person. It is hard to measure exactly how friendly a person is, much less the people of a region. Results could be called impressions or

opinions rather than facts.

Summing up

Groups report and discuss results. Results are combined on a large chart. A typed or handwritten smaller version is prepared to mail to the other class. Some characteristics can be measured and reported scientifically, others are matters of opinion. Later the next set of five characteristics is handled the same way. In addition, students are asked “What is funny about people in the other region?” (Their clothes, speech, mannerisms, rural, city slicker and so forth). Rather than analyzing these, they are shared and children can react to them informally.

Lesson Plan Three—Practice Interview

Preparation The class has developed a list of questions to ask. They have discussed techniques for interviewing.

Material Lists of questions, “biography”/role sheets, observer’s checklist, pencils, and paper

Introduction “We will be going out to do our interviews soon. To get ready, we’re going to do some practice interviews in class. What is your purpose when you interview someone? (To get information). What kind of information do we want for this project? (Answers to questions on the list we developed). Do you think you might have problems in getting that information? (List problems on a flip chart. Ex. Person may be shy, doesn’t want to talk, person gets off subject.)”

“Today we’re working in groups of three and we’ll see what problems we may have. One person will be the interviewer, one the subject, and one an observer. After about 15 minutes we’ll get back together and share what we have learned.”

Practice Interviews

Groups go to their areas. The interviewer gets a list of questions, the subject a biography which has a list of points that would be brought out in an ideal interview, and a role to play (shy, repetitive, rambling). The observer has a list of what to look for and a pencil and paper to record observations.

Sharing

Each observer is asked, “Did the interviewer ask the questions he/she was supposed to ask? Did the subject answer in a satisfactory way? What was the subject’s role in your group? How did the interviewer handle the problem? Was he/she able to get past the problem? Did he/she make the shy person comfortable? Get the rambler back on the subject? etc.” Time is allowed for interviewers and subjects to give their reactions to the exercise.

Summing Up

Use the flip chart to review problems and ways of dealing with them. Add any problems and solutions that came up during the sharing. “Most people will be very cooperative when you interview them. By looking at possible problems ahead of time, you will be ready to do a good job.”

“Tomorrow Mr. ____ (one of the teachers) will visit our class and several of you can practice asking him questions.”

Teacher References

The readings include research on prejudice, interviewing and both documentary and fictional accounts of experiences of prejudice. The readings are selected to provide background and to identify materials to use with the children.

Aboud, Frances E. *Children and Prejudice*. New York: B. Blackwell, 1988.

Bettelheim, Bruno. *Social Change and Prejudice, including Dynamics of Prejudice*. New York: Macmillan, 1975. Study on prejudice in adults, ways in which attitudes have changed.

Brown, Alan R. *Prejudice in Children*. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1972.

Ellison, Ralph. *The Invisible Man*. Franklin Center, PA: Franklin Library, 1980.

Foxfire Fund, Inc. *Foxfire*, Vol. 1. Rabun Gap, GA: Foxfire Fund, Inc., 1967.

Griffin, John Howard. *Black Like Me*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977. Useful for concrete, day-to-day experiences. Griffin tells the objective details and the psychological effects of his "being black."

Haley, Alex. *Roots*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1976. This gives an example of oral history in the way Kunta's family passes down the language and lineage and in the way the griot's story and Haley's research match. It also demonstrates that African slaves came from a culture that was religious, literate, hard-working, and highly developed.

Henderson, George Wylie. *Jule*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1989.

Kozol, Jonathan. *Children of the Revolution*. New York: Delacorte Press, c1978.

Kozol, Jonathan. *Death at an Early Age*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967. An indictment of the Boston school system and documentation of the damage done by well-meaning professionals.

Lang, Susan S. *Extremist Groups in America*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1990. This book is shelved with the children's books. It is included with the teacher materials for excellent background on recent developments. It has graphic descriptions and may not be suitable for the younger children.

Lee, Harper. *To Kill A Mockingbird*. New York: J.B. Lippincott, 1960. Advanced students can read the book, Fifth graders might see the film.

Sitton, Thad. *Oral History, A Guide for Teachers (and others)*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983.

Williams, John E. *Race, Color, and the Young Child*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976.

Wilson, August. *The Piano Lesson*. New York: Dutton, 1990.

Wilson, August. *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. New York: New American Library, 1965.

Wright, Richard. *Black Boy*. New York: Harper and Row, 1945.

Children's References

Nonfiction

Aylesworth, Thomas G. and Virginia L. Aylesworth. *State Reports. Northern New England*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1991. Covers Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, giving data on climate, industries, plants and animals, history, famous people and an address to write for more information.

Carlson, Dale. *Girl's Are Equal Too, The Women's Movement for Teenagers*. New York: Atheneum, 1976. Discusses historic and modern views of women's capabilities, and deals with issues such as marriage and careers.

Croom, Emily Anne. *Unpuzzling Your Past, A Basic Guide to Genealogy*. Whitehall, VA: Betterway Publications, 1983. Chapter 7 has lists of questions to ask in interviews.

Freedman, Russell. *Immigrant Kids*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980. Pictures of children going through Ellis Island living in tenements, working in factories. Text describes their experience.

Gay, Kathlyn. *Bigotry*. Hillside, NJ: Enslow Publishers, Inc., 1989. For more capable readers (6th grade or above). Discusses discrimination on the basis of race, religion, and ethnic group; hate groups, civil rights, what keeps prejudice alive, language of bigotry, and how to make a difference in your community.

Gersten, Irene Fandel and Betsy Bliss. *Ecidujerp Prejudice, Either Way It Doesn't Make Sense*. New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1974. With concrete examples, this book deals with what prejudice is, how it feels, and what you can do about it. Sources for teachers and readings for children listed.

Jennings, Jerry E., Ed. *The Northeast*. Grand Rapids, MI: The Fideler Company, 1977. Covers New England states plus Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia.

Mayberry, Jodine. *Recent American Immigrants*. New York: Franklin Watts, 1990. This series includes Asian Indians, Chinese, Cubans and Caribbean Islanders, Eastern Europeans, Filipinos, Koreans, Mexicans, and Southeast Asians. History, culture, and famous people.

Meltzer, Milton. *The Jewish Americans, A History in Their Own Worlds 1650-1950*. Experiences of ordinary people taken from such sources as letters and diaries.

Fiction

Lattimore, Eleanor Frances. *A Smiling Face*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1973. The story of seven-year-old Grace Piper includes a friendship with Ruby Morrison, a black girl whose family has just moved into the neighborhood in Freedom, Kentucky.

Taylor, Mildred D. *The Friendship*. New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1987. This short story gives a glimpse of race relations in the 1930's in Mississippi through the eyes of nine-year-old Cassie and her brothers.

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