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AUTHOR	Prezell, R. Robinson; And Others
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ABSTRACT

In this issue of the NCRIEEO Tipsheet, a short essay discusses professional attitudes, behaviors, and expectations: (1) that will facilitate successful desegregation of public schools, and (2) that will facilitate the extension of equal educational opportunities. It is suggested that educators need to become more aware of courtesy in their behavior. In addition, educators must develop professional competencies that will avert problems, ease tensions, build trust, and create a good learning environment. Conscious cooperation of teachers in desegregated schools is also extremely important. Listed are a number of ways in which educators can improve race relations and the quality of desegregated education. (Author/JW)

Professionalism and School Desegregation*

PREZELL R. ROBINSON, CHARLES A. GLATT AND WILLIAM A. GAINES

NCRIEEO TIPSHEET #3

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THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR RESEARCH AND INFORMATION ON EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Box 40
Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, New York 10027
(212) 870-4804

Edmund W. Gordon, Ed.D.
Director

Wendell J. Roye, M.S.
Assistant Director

The National Education Association is acclaimed regularly as the "world's largest professional organization." When judged by the total number of its members the statement is accurate. To be the largest, however, does not imply that the N. E. A. is the most influential, nor the most effective, nor the most prestigious of all professional organizations — nor is it the organization that it could be.

In workshops and institutes conducted throughout the nation one of the writers has often posed this question: "Can anyone in the audience quote any single statement listed in the Code of Ethics of the teaching profession?" In not one single meeting has anyone been able to do so.

Many causes have been cited to account for the lack of professionalism among educators, even as many descriptions of the meaning of the term have been written. Shortcomings and interpretations are not the problems to be dealt with in this chapter. Instead, we propose to discuss those professional attitudes, behaviors, relationships, and expectations (1) that will facilitate successful desegregation of America's schools and (2) that will facilitate the extension of equal educational opportunities and of increase in the quality of educational offerings for all of America's children.

Perhaps the greatest impediment that hinders accomplishment of these two goals is that complex set of meanings behind the simple phrase, "But we've always done it that way." Deliberately changing established human behaviors is never an easy task; changing the professional behaviors of educators is also difficult. The thesis proposed here is that when schools desegregate, professionalism as a behavioral phenomenon must be different from what it has historically been. The remainder of this chapter might realistically be considered the completion of a sentence that begins: As schools desegregate. . . .

1. Educators need to become increasingly more aware of the role that courtesy plays in

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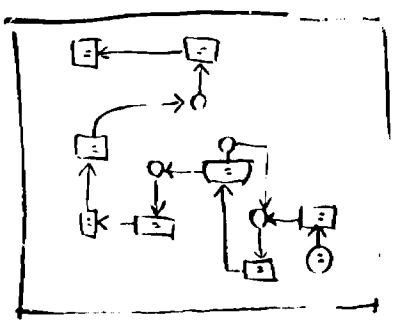
St. Augustine's College, Raleigh, N.C.; Voorhees College, Denmark, S.C.

professional behavior. White men and women throughout American commonly develop relationships with their peers on a first name basis soon after friendships are established. In many school buildings the only persons regularly called *Mister* or *Miss* by other teachers are the principal and some of the older teachers. Use of first names is intended and accepted as a sign of friendliness and acceptance.

Negroes in America historically have not been accorded by whites many of the simple courtesies that whites give each other. One black man said, "I was called *boy* until my hair turned grey, then white folks began calling me *uncle*. Not once in my entire lifetime has any white person ever called me *mister*."

A lady said in a desegregation institute. "My husband has been working for a white man for seventeen years. One weekend recently the white man needed my husband to take a truckload of material to a jobsite on Sunday afternoon. He came into our neighborhood asking some of our friends where *Henry* lived. When they asked him, 'Henry who?' he could only answer: 'Oh, you know Henry who drives that yellow pickup truck. He has a gold filling in one of his front teeth and is usually smoking a cigar. Don't you know who I mean?'" The lady added with much indignation: "Seventeen years and my husband, a deacon in his church, a property owner, a taxpayer, and a hard working man, is just *Henry Who*."



Negro men have been called *reverend, boy, uncle, 'fesser, doctor, shine, spook, jig*, and a multitude of other nicknames (most of which are deliberately insulting) — anything except *Mister* or *Sir*. Negro ladies have had to answer to *gal, auntie*, nicknames, first names, again anything except *Miss* or *Mrs*.

As a reaction to this lack of courtesy, black people have developed a keen consciousness about last names and titles of respect. In contradiction to the method of friendship shown by whites to each other, Negroes are much more likely to indicate friendliness and acceptance by retaining the more formal *Mr. Smith* or *Miss Jones* once introductions have been made. Even when the title is dropped, Negroes are prone to refer to others by the last name rather than the first, perhaps as a way of calling attention to the importance of last names.

A young black lady came to the speaker in an institute: "I need for you to discuss something openly if you will without letting anyone know that I asked you to. You see, the teachers' lounge is the big problem. I am the only Negro teacher in this school, and in the teachers' lounge those whites won't even speak to me; they just grunt. And they do not even have the professional courtesy to call me by my last name. They just call me *Mary*. Can you get them to see how this affects me?"

He agreed to try, but he also asked Miss Perkins: "Before we meet tomorow, will you please just listen in the lounge tomorrow and come back and tell me what the white teachers say to each other?"

She agreed. The next afternoon Miss Perkins came to the assembly hall and said: "Dr. Glatt, do you know something? I listened in the lounge. Those white teachers just grunt to each other! One asks a question and the others just grunt 'Uh huh,' or 'Uh uh,' or 'Aw,' or something like that. And they all call each other by their first names too."

Miss Perkins simply expected one form of treatment and received another for which she was not psychologically prepared. The white teacher who wants to indicate friendship, acceptance, and the desire to work harmoniously as schools desegregate needs to remember that immediate usage of first names may offend black colleagues. The Negro teacher who begins working with white colleagues needs to hear the meaning being intended by white teachers if first names are used.

Names that are employed form only one type of courtesy. The way a person reacts when introductions are made can be very important. Many white people, not accustomed to shaking hands with blacks, have a tendency to wash their hands after such personal contact. Rejection can be shown in many ways. Learning *not* to *reject* another is more important than is learning not to *show rejection*, but each is essential to profesaionally sound behavior.

Even after friendships have developed across racial lines certain miscues often reveal peraisting attitudes and prejudices. A Negro teacher reported: "You know, it's very interesting how quickly John [a white man] and I became friendly. Right away we were on a first name basis, and I felt comfortable about that. I liked it, because I liked him. When he talks with me about our white colleagues he always calls them *Mister Jones* or *Miss Hanson* although I know that he never calls them that otherwise. And when he mentions his wife to me, he always refers to her as *Mrs. Street*. Now I have heard him talk to

other white teachers about his wife and to them she is just *Sally*. You see, what he really is telling me is that he still sees me as subservient, a being who should not be calling white folks by their first names."

Courtesy is a much broader concept than these examples alone would imply. Simply "obeying one's conscience" or "practicing the Golden Rule" is not a sufficient guide in desegregated schools. Only as educators study and learn about each other, as they become trusted friends, as they diligently work toward helping the entire staff to grow can those professional behaviors develop that will best facilitate the quality of education that democracy demands.

Courtesies that relate to interactions with youngsters, with parents, and with members of the community are very important. Negro men have been called *boy* for so long by whites that even elementary school youngsters are rebelling against this term. A perceptive teacher in a desegregated school will find ways of avoiding boy. The best way is simply to call each person by his own name.

Generalizations have been made here; deviations from them need to be explored in each school with each of one's colleagues.

2. Educators must continue to develop *professional competencies* that will avert problems, ease tensions, build trust, establish rapport and create a good learning environment. Certain stereotyped expectations often cause teachers to make important behavioral errors. For example, white teachers sometimes share these general (unquestioned) assumptions: (1) that all Negroes are "alike" in many ways; (2) that although distinct differences do exist among Negroes, still any given black person has special insights into Negro life that whites do not have; and (3) that the fact of being Negro automatically gives a Negro teacher certain insights about working with black children that white teachers can never have. Negro educators, of course, share a similar set of notions about whites.

These assumptions may not be entirely inaccurate. The bases for them, however, are cultural and social, not racial. Only a small proportion of America's black people have *only* African ancestry, and few whites are *purely* Alpine, Nordic, or Mediterranean. White teachers generally are from lower middle class origins and few achieve upper class status. Negro teachers may have lower or middle class origins, but in many communities form the social elite among Negroes once they join the professional ranks. Because of social status, black teachers often are less knowledgeable about lower class children than white teachers are.

A young Negro woman who had just moved to a large Midwestern city from the South was assigned a teaching position with an otherwise allwhite faculty. During the summer she worked with a task force of teachers and administrators in the school system that had been given the job of helping to pave the way for successful desegregation. She told one of the writers: "My principal worked with the task force and I am the only teacher from our school who was part of the team. Now he wants to use me to handle all of the problems that involve Negro students — in addition to my regular job. I can't solve all of the problems, especially when I don't know the children involved. He is just using me as a *house nigger*, and he refuses to belive that I don't have all of the answers."

Yet, because of our historically segregated society, teachers may have insights about children of similar racial origins that others may not have. As schools are desegregated, such insights need to be shared.

From folklore, novels, movies, and television white people have developed stereotyped ideas about the homes from which black children come. When visits are made, whites are often surprised to find basically the same cosmetics, foodstuff, toiletries, decorations, furniture, and other possessions in Negroes' homes that they are personally accustomed to, especially when similarities of income, educational attainment, and occupation exist.

We can develop greater competencies for working with children across racial lines through these experiences that destroy erroneous stereotypes. Once such a development has begun to take place, we can be more efficiently prepared for dealing with *real* differences as we learn more about why those differences exist.

Two of the most difficult tasks for teachers are (1) offering advice and help to one's colleagues, and (2) accepting advice from one's colleagues. As faculties are desegregated these tasks become more difficult if one permits social and cultural conditioning to perpetuate biases. Courses in human relations and in intercultural relations can help to develop those competencies needed in unified schools; but the most effective growth can come from the personal interactions in which we engage with fellow educators across social and racial lines.

3. Professional cooperation between whites and blacks will not develop until educators accept that interdependent nature of the teaching-learning process which we have behaviorally denied for so many decades. As teachers perceive themselves to be historians, mathematicians, coaches, social scientists, artists, musicians, administrators, counselors, and scientists, they are apt to behave as if human existance and learning are also subdivided and pigeonholed. Is "English Literature" a separate entity from "English History," or "Math I," or "Music Appreciation?" Of course it is not. But one might graduate from a secondary school without ever having learned that they are all interrelated. Much more is being said currently about the role that "Black Studies" ought to play in the curriculum.

Physicians have specialized their skills almost to the point of eliminating the General Practitioner, but the obstetrician is not concerned only with the prospective mother's womb and fallopian tubes. He must care for her as a total human being. When his knowledge is limited he turns without hesitation to a colleague for consultation.

A child in school who is experiencing difficulty in learning history may be excelling in literature, and perhaps he could excel in history if his teachers planned together for him to succeed as a *human being*. The black child who has learned not only to distrust white people but also to fear the white educational establishment and to suspect any authority, needs to learn how to trust, to become a part of his school, and to cooperate with authority in effecting change — and he may never learn these unless his teachers have learned how to work together. Those white children who have been taught at home that Negroes are inferior may never accept a black person as an intelligent and learned gentleman without help from white teachers.

In desegregated schools professional cooperation often begins with problems related to student behaviors, but it must not end there. We have found that team planning, team teaching, and team evaluation across racial lines are essential to successful desegregation. Teachers alone ought not to be involved in these activities; students, counselors, administrators, and parents also need to work cooperatively for success.

4. The fear of saying the "wrong thing" often causes us to say nothing. The essence of teaching and learning is communication, but educators are notoriously poor communicators. In many instances the way we pronounce words, the tone of our voice, the look in our eye, the gestures of our hands, the posture of our body, the way we hear but do not listen, the comments we do not make, the compliments we do not give, the advice we do not seek, the friendships we do not establish, the respect we do not show, the gratitude we do not express, and the moves we do not make communicate who and what we really are. "What you are speaks so loud (ly) that I cannot hear what you say" is much more than just a trite cliche.

A teacher stated: "I grew up in a home where I was taught to love and to respect everybody; and I can honestly say that I have no prejudice toward Negroes or toward anyone else." A black colleague was heard to whisper, "She must also have learned that Negroes are invisible. Everytime she meets me on the street she just looks right through me and doesn't speak." Another lady remarked: "The only Negro in our school is the maid. She is a wonderful woman and we all just love her. She is the best friend any of us has. We confide in her, we give her presents, and we have coffee together in the teachers' lounge every morning. We don't have any problems at all." "How wonderful!" said a teacher from another school. "May I suggest that the next time you and your family have her and her family over for dinner, tell her how much you love her." (The conversation ended abruptly.)

One Negro teacher customarily pronounced *right* as if it were spelled *rat*. During his first year in a desegregated school he could not understand why the white younsters laughed when he used such expressions as "Do it *rat* now." Once a colleague had called his *mispronounciation* to *attention*, he became very self-conscious and for weeks said very little to anyone at the school, including his students. Finally he was able to accept that his fellow teacher was simply trying to help him communicate more effectively.

The writers were working in a rural school system with teachers and administrators in an inservice institute. On the backrests of two front row seats in the old auditorium

three huge letters had been carved: "K K K." The speaker stopped his talk when he saw them and asked: "Have you ever asked yourselves what you are teaching a child when you march him into this room for an assembly program and have him sit in one of these chairs? What do these letters communicate to him?"

In a nearby school a huge mural had been painted on one wall of the auditorium. It was a plantation scene. The overseer sat astride a beautiful horse. He was wearing a neatly pressed plaid shirt, a white hat, and he carried a riding crop in his hand. Immediately below the white overseer two Negroes had been painted. They wore only shoes and trousers. Their backs were bent as they dragged long cotton sacks along the rows. The school was in the first year of desegregation. Whereas formerly the student body had been all white, now it was one-third black. Again the speaker asked, "What does this communicate to children?"

In a third auditorium two huge portraits adorned the stage. One was of Robert E. Lee; the other of Jefferson Davis. The same question was asked.

Teachers often are reticent about discussing certain topics across racial lines, especially those topics they fear may cause embarrassment. Sex, immorality, illegitimacy, venereal diseases, mixed ancestry, the slave era, absent fathers, intermarriage, courtship, religious behaviors, dialects, name-calling, and housing are some of these. That such phenomena can be openly discussed by black and white people working together has been effectively demonstrated in dozens of workshops. White teachers often are afraid that they will offend black colleagues by referring to these topics. And they may offend — because all black persons do not respond to discussions alike. The way in which concepts are examined is very important.

These topics are being openly discussed on television, in novels, on radio, in college classes, in jokes, in slanderous remarks, even in Congress. More importantly, they are commonly discussed by students, but without the expert guidance that their teachers ought to be giving. Until open discussion of sensitive areas characterizes professional behaviors, those goals suggested earlier in this chapter cannot be accomplished

5. *Growth*, suggested Dewey decades ago, is a lifelong process. Learning is growth, and teachers must continue to grow if professionalism is to develop. The knowledge explosion precludes the possibility of any teacher continuing to deal with "the same old topics in the same old way." A desegregated classroom is a different psychological "field" from the traditionally segregated classroom. Not only is the content of education becoming greater, but those sociological and psychological factors that affect learning are more important now than they ever before have been.

Professionalism demands continuing planned growth for teachers. University degrees are but one means of expediting such growth. Travel, "Cultural" experiences, new and different work assignments and responsibilities, reading, interaction with people — these are also important ways of growing.

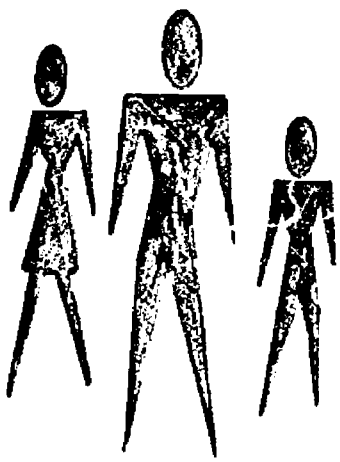
One of the writers has a small greenhouse that becomes his "sanity saver" when the outside world begins to close in. A seedling is planted, watered, fertilized, pampered, cultivated, and given lots of Tender Loving Care. The gardner knows about when to expect the little flower buds to appear and about when he can move the plant on to the dining room table for decoration. He plans for success with each plant.

One of the best methods of planning for successful growth in human and professional relationships is: (1) to identify the behaviors that need modification; (2) to devise those activities that will facilitate the desired growth; (3) to engage oneself in those activities; (4) to modify behavioral strategies in terms of their experimental effectiveness; and (5) to plan further growth so that the process is never ending. Unless specific behaviors and attitudes are identified as objectives and then pursued, personal growth often is too haphazard to be meaningful.

Prejudice in other persons is much easier to deal with than is one's own personal prejudice. A Negro lady who is one of the top administrators in a large urban school system told this story from her own life: "Three years ago I attended a four day national conference on race relations. During the time there I became very good friends with a white man from the West Coast. We ate together, talked a lot about some very sensitive problem areas, and quickly became very close friends. In fact, I would say that we became as close as two people could in a short period of time. The administrative staff had planned a dance for the last evening before the conference ended. My friend from Oregon stepped up to me and asked: 'May I have the pleasure of this dance with you?' I was taken completely by surprise; I didn't expect that at all. Suddenly I saw him not as my friend at all, but as a symbol of all the white men who have exploited black women. He was the plantation owner in a black cabin; he was George Washington catching his death of cold returning from a visit to his Negro mistress; he was the store keeper taking his pay for groceries in sexual activity; he was the illegitimate father of brown children. The thought of his arm around me and his body pressed to mine was totally repulsive! I hated him!

"It all happened so quickly — in a split second — that he probably saw no change in my expression. But I hated him! Then my great moment of truth dawned. Then I realized that *I was the prejudiced person.* I was seeing a booky, a whitey, a Mister Charley; not my friend who was simply accepting me as a woman whom he had come to know, to respect, and to like. *How ashamed I was!*"

Recognition and acknowledgement of personal prejudice form the fertile ground in which seeds of professional growth can best sprout.



Professionalism implies that associations of people are competent to *police their own ranks* and that they will do so. Medical doctors who violate their ethical code are dispelled from their professional organizations. Unethical lawyers are barred from practicing law. Joe Namath had to choose between being part owner of a nightclub frequented by "unsavory characters" and playing professional football

Educators have been so concerned with establishing themselves as "being professional" and with gaining bargaining rights (among other activities) that the policing of ranks has all but been forgotten. Incompetent teachers in some instances have been made "specialists" or supervisors or adminstrators. Incompetent administrators have been given impressive titles and unnecessary responsibilities to reward their "faithfulness."

Principals will support a teacher who is wrong when confronted by a parent whose child is right. Superintendents often "cover" for staff members who would be expelled from any other professional organization. Teachers who refuse to grow are given salary raises equivalent to the increases given their productive colleagues.

As schools have desegregated a number of incidents have occurred that exemplify the kinds of incompetence that our profession cannot justify. A college professor in a northern school had several Negro students one summer. One of the students, a graduate of a small segregated college in the South, did exceptionally poor work. He recorded a C as her final grade. Several days later she came into his office and pointedly accused him of granting the C "only because I am Negro and you are a white man and prejudiced." The professor said simply: "You are quite correct. You are Negro, I am white, and the only reason you received the C is because I am prejudiced. Were I not, you would have received the failing mark that you actually earned."

This is reverse discrimination, or overcompensation, which is just as detrimental to sound professionalism as its opposite is. Yet, as schools desegregate, as teachers face new experiences of working with children of different racial origins, as change creates apprehension and anxiety, such practices have emerged. Can they be tolerated?

Gross professional misconduct occurs when a teacher gives grades that deceive youngsters into believing that they are achieving those educational objectives that will insure later success if they are not actually achieving those objectives. One Negro father stated: "My son brought home good grades throughout the year. On *Parents Night* the teacher told us that he was doing fine. But when he went to junior high school the next year, we found that he was reading at fourth grade level."

In some states as the dual school system has been eliminated Negro teachers and especially Negro principals have been "phased out." A contingent of teachers from one system that has more black than white students revealed recently: "Although we have more Negro students each year, we have fewer Negro teachers. As our people retire, as they move, and as they quit teaching, only whites are hired to replace them." Deliberate action of this kind is grossly unethical and merits investigation.

Black women teachers, especially from small towns and rural areas, have reported in desegregation workshops that often a most reprehensive form of exploitation exists in segregated schools that have Negro principals. According to their charges, if a black lady wants a job teaching in certain schools, she must be willing to have sex relations with the administrator. If she wishes to retain the job, the practice must continue. This may be neither a valid charge nor a general practice; but if it does occur, professionalism is absent.

Desegregation of schools is a traumatic change in our culture. The time may be ripe, however, for all forms of hidden incompetence, traditional and reverse discrimination, and exploitation to be examined and policed.

Until this happens, the quality of educational offerings in our culture cannot be raised significantly.

The fear of being labeled a bigot or a racist or of being called prejudiced has affected the educational process in America during the last decade. White administrators are often heard to say: "Before you seriously contemplate reprimanding a Negro teacher or especially recommending one's dismissal, you had better have an iron-clad case. If not, you will have the NAACP on your back immediately!" Instances of discrimination ought to be exposed — preferably by our professional organizations. But the fear of confrontation with any organization ought not to deter elimination of weaknesses in our school systems.

6. An important aspect of professionalism in desegregated schools is *the setting of behavioral examples* for young people. In one large suburban school system the principal and one assistant principal are white and the other assistant principal is black. The writers spent most of a day working with these men on some problems related to desegregation. They noticed that whenever the three worked together they all referred to each other as *Mister*. When the black man left the office for a few minutes each of the two whites referred to him in conversation as *that boy*. When this was called to attention, each denied awareness of this change in nomenclature. These actions are also noticed by students.

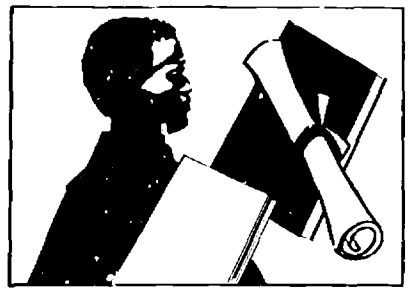
A Negro lady said: "Our superintendent always refers to the white high school by its name, *North High School*. But in eight years I have never heard him refer to our school by its name. He has always just called it *the other high school*." Students also noticed these remarks.

When faculties desegregate, a most natural reaction to the change is for individual teachers to retain established friendships and to develop new friendships with colleagues of similar backgrounds and with whom one has "something in common." Unless deliberate efforts are made to widen friendship circles and to include fellow teachers of other racial origins, rigid segregation can occur in the hallway, in the lounge, and in the cafeteria. Young people perceive these behaviors and pattern after them.

Many American children come from homes where they are taught to hate, to discriminate unfairly, and especially to oppose desegregation of schools. The only chance many of them have to escape such pernicious learnings may be the school experiences. Churches in America are segregated; families are segregated: schools alone have been given the directive to unify this nation.

A youngster in one city perhaps illustrated best the importance of behavioral examples: "Our teacher has been telling us about freedom, equality, brotherly love, and all of those things. One day she mentioned her own son who is my age. I asked her later if he could attend my birthday party later in the week. She looked funny and said: 'Oh! I do wish that he could. But his father is taking him on a trip that day.' I saw him later and asked, 'How was your trip?' He just looked at me and said, 'What trip? I haven't gone anywhere'."

When children see black and white adults working together, playing together, planning together, laughing together, and accomplishing together, these behaviors are emulated. When they perceive tension, suspicion, animosity, isolation, and avoidance, they behave in those fashions. The professional role of educators in desegregated schools is more demanding and more exciting than in dual systems. The best is necessary; anything short of the best is detrimental to quality in education.



7. Behavioral scientists consider *competition* to be an important social process. A young man who graduates from high school at the head of a class of fifty people may find college much more difficult than if he had been tenth in a class of five hundred students. The competition is different. And American education is a competitive process.

All Negro schools are not inferior to all white schools, and the products of segregated schools are not always poor scholars. In America a large body of evidence does suggest, however, that graduates of black schools have generally been exposed to educational experiences that do not measure up to the education provided for the graduates of white schools. If one who has attended segregated black classrooms continues his education in a segregated black college, the educational gap between him and his white counterpart continues to widen. If he then becomes a teacher in a segregated black school his professional growth may be seriously impeded. This has been the fate of many American black teachers.

When schools are desegregated Negro and white teachers often find themselves competing in an open situation for the first time. The

fear of not "measuring up" to the competition has kept many teachers from becoming more actively engaged in this great social change. Fear of embarrassment, fear of failure, and fear of "letting my people down" create reticence. Cooperation can be a more effective behavioral process than competition is, but we have not been taught to cooperate. The entire educational process is one of vying for grades, for privileges, for recognition, for acceptance, and for success. The American Dream is built of rugged individualists, of capitalistic enterprise, and of personal accomplishment. We have not actually worked together to build our nation; it has been built in spite of our refusal to work together.

The quality of education in this country may improve in spite of our not knowing how to work together. Some of the truly great success stories that have come from our schools are a result of the competitive spirit. Teachers who for years coasted along basically repeating last year's experiences with each new group of students now have found themselves striving for excellence because of open competition across racial lines. "After all," said one black physics teacher, "I knew that I was the best teacher in the black school. What I feared was that I might be the worst teacher in the white school. So I burned the midnight oil and racked my brains to make sure that I was as good as the best there, too."

A white teacher told of his experience effectively, albeit crudely: "I didn't want to teach with 'them.' But I couldn't stand the thought of a damned *nigger* being a better teacher than I was. Man, I've been working my tail off since we desegregated." Granted that his motivation was professionally unsound, we accept the behavior that resulted.

Ideally the behavioral ingredients of professionalism in desegregated schools might be arranged sequentially in this order:

1. Proper motivation
2. Planned growth
3. Relevant experiences
4. Appropriate reinforcements
5. Cooperative efforts
6. Encouraging rewards
7. Successful achievement

We are more concerned, however, with *consequences* than with sequence. The goals of professionalism in desegregated schools were identified earlier in this chapter: facilitation of successful desegregation of America's educational system and facilitation of extension of equal educational opportunities and of increase in the quality of educational offerings for all of America's children: these are the *raison d'etre* for schooling today.

*Prezell R. Robinson, Ed.D., is President of
St. Augustine's College, Raleigh, North Carolina

William Anthony Gaines, Sr., Ph.D., is Director,
Educational Leadership and Human Relations Center
Saint Augustine's College
Raleigh, North Carolina

Charles Albert Glatt, Ph.D., is Associate Director,
Advanced Training in Reading Program for
Desegregated Schools in North Carolina,
Educational Advisor to the Raleigh, North Carolina,
Citizens Relations Commission

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