

DE FACTO INTEGRATION IN BEL AIR

By ALICE M. CLARK, *a parent active in the Bellagio Road School program.*

IN BEL AIR, California, fashionable and exclusive suburb of Los Angeles, there is an elementary public school with forty-five Negroes enrolled. And in nearby Westwood, home of UCLA, twenty-seven Negro students attend a junior high school, while another sixty are regular pupils at an elementary school in the same area.

These examples of integrated education in upper and middle-class white sections of Los Angeles, where they might least be expected to occur, are isolated exceptions to the city's overall pattern of de facto segregated schooling. And these few facilities are integrated only because parents themselves have so arranged it.

The successful integration of these three schools, despite misgivings of the education establishment, is achieved through the controversial student transfer system. Negro children are taken in buses, at considerable private expense, to all-white schools outside their own districts. Two parental groups, one Negro and one white, administer all details

of the transfer and finance it as well. Their joint project is notable for its underlying spirit, rather than as a final solution to the overall problem of school integration. From the start, the two groups worked together at every stage of the planning, and the Negro children who enrolled were made to feel solidly welcome. In the view of their parents, these factors of receptivity and mutuality are the keys to the project's initial and continuing success.

The plan began to evolve some two years ago when it became apparent to civil rights groups, concerned parents, and to the Board of Education, that there were many vacant classrooms in Los Angeles schools, primarily in white areas, and a corresponding lack of them in predominantly Negro areas. Out of this situation grew the Board of Education's open-school policy which permits a student to transfer to any "open" school of his choice, that is, any school where one or more empty classrooms exist, but stipulates that the student must provide his own transportation.

As it worked out, no significant integration resulted. Very few individual Negro parents were able to take advantage of it because of the prohibitive transportation cost. And a test case



—Photos by John W. Lampl.

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transfer project, approved and financed through the Board of Education, failed after one semester and was never tried again.

Civil rights groups felt from the beginning that the board's policy was nothing more than a placating gesture to their demands, a "minimum" effort that shifts responsibility from the board to individual Negro parents. And these groups saw in the board's handling of its test case, carried out in a hostile white community, an attempt to prove that an expensive bus transfer program, paid for with taxpayers' money and in violation of the neighborhood school concept, would be impractical and unworkable.

It was then that a small group of Bel Air parents determined to disprove the board's theory. Their initial effort began at Bellagio Road School in Bel Air when the school was declared "open" in late 1963. Leader of the pilot project was Mrs. Burt Lancaster, wife of the Hollywood star and past president of Bellagio School's PTA. Mrs. Lancaster has long been active in civic and school affairs in Los Angeles, and in the new project she hoped to create a model that other open schools could follow.

In order to find Negro parents interested in participating in the project, the group went to the Reverend James H. Hargett of the Church of Christian Fellowship in Negro-populated central Los Angeles. When Mr. Hargett announced the proposal from his pulpit, response came from Negroes much like himself, intelligent parents concerned about getting a good education for their children, but not interested in charity; these parents wanted instead an opportunity to take an active part in the process. Most of them were already doing what they could in their own school dis-



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tricts, and they thoughtfully weighed gains made there, through their own efforts, against the risks of entering their children in an all-white school.

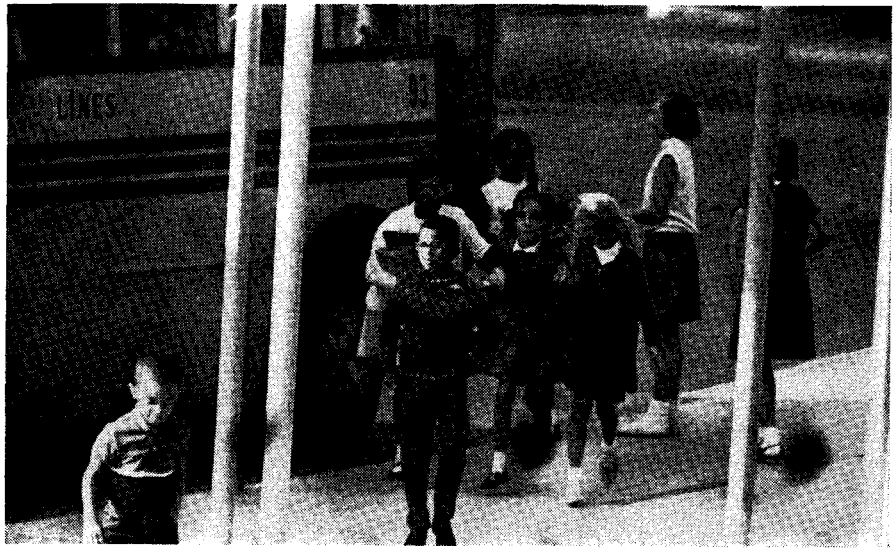
"We want to do more than get them out of a poor school," one parent said. "There is no point in transferring them unless we know through investigation that the new school is a genuine improvement."

Another who negotiated with the Board of Education over a period of some two years for a better teaching staff in his neighborhood school, and finally achieved a measure of success, had to choose between the security of the now improved "home" school and the challenge of distant Bellagio School. "But," he added, "I wish my high school boy could have had the advantage of going to Bellagio."

The choice was perhaps easier for a third parent, herself a teacher in the Los Angeles school system, whose daughter had just completed a three-year private school. This mother decided to accept because she, a professional, was alert to her child's need for a strong academic program. "If her new schedule had left her unsupervised after school, however, I would never have considered it," this working mother said.

These are only a few of the ideas, emotions, and fears which Negro and white parents discussed in a series of planning sessions. Ultimately, two administrative groups were formed; one, "Transport a Child," finances the plan; the other, "Parents for Better Education Exchange," composed of participating Negro parents, coordinates all other details, such as private transportation, supervision of children at bus stops, and "sitting" arrangements for first and second graders who are released an hour earlier than the older grades.

Bus transportation for the group costs \$38.50 per month per child. It is paid for by each participating parent to the extent of \$12.50 a month, with a downward sliding scale adapted to each family's income. The difference is made up with a subsidy by the fund-raising corporation "Transport a Child." A total of \$4,067 was raised at TAC's first annual cocktail party, indicating the extent of parental support. Bellagio parents, as well as a growing number of outsiders, continue to support TAC, permitting the project to extend to other open schools.



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extra space as a music room for our own children."

"What good is it doing?" was the thoughtful question of another. "They just get on the bus and go back to their own neighborhoods. What kind of integration is that? What is it going to do to those children to be exposed to Bel Air and then go back to their own homes? It seems artificial to me."

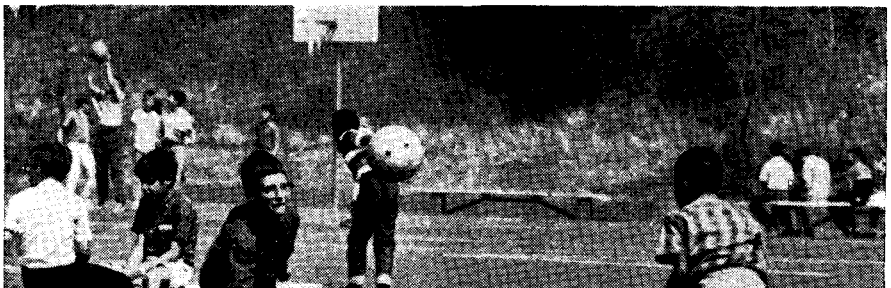
The founders of the Bellagio project would be the first to admit the validity of many of these criticisms; they do not see the pilot project as a perfect or final solution to the complex issues of integration, but rather as an example, on an admittedly small scale, of successful racial mixing in perhaps the most significant context, the school, the institution with which the child has the most intensive and prolonged contact.

The Bellagio planners, and particularly the Negro parents among them, are also well aware that the success of their project depends heavily on the elusive intangible factor of receptivity

on the part of the white community involved. Mr. Hargett, in fact, predicted that the "unique strands" peculiar to Bel Air would be absent in projects at other schools and cause them to fail.

Three other white communities have, however, accepted the challenge of integrated schooling, and a fourth will adopt the "Transport a Child" plan in the fall. The Bellagio founders now hope that these few successes will prove to the educational establishment that integration is possible through a carefully structured busing plan reinforced by cooperative white communities. It is hoped that the Bellagio plan will be adopted at more and more open schools, until it becomes city-wide and publicly financed.

Whatever the outcome of future integration efforts, it is clear that the children themselves are making workable whatever projects their parents initiate. One white child at Bellagio, whose mother had asked, "Does that colored boy sit next to you in class?" replied, "What color?"



The Times as Teacher

World Affairs Workshop, compiled and edited by the New York Times and the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Encyclopaedia Britannica Press, 425 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60611, \$58.50; books available separately at \$1 each) is a new social studies program for high school students.

By BONNIE BARRETT STRETCH

IF YOU FIND a large blue box labeled "World Affairs Workshop" in the classroom or teachers' lounge, for heaven's sake open it. Examine it with enthusiasm, but if you use it in the classroom, keep a quizzical eye and a skeptical mind. It is an excellent package of material guaranteed—if used properly and with some imagination—to make social studies exciting, be it history, economics, or geography.

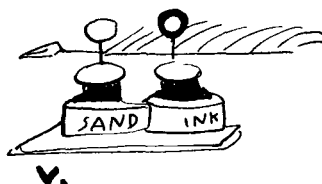
The *New York Times* and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* have prepared a program designed to relate the usual high school social studies courses directly to the events making daily headlines, with the intention that both the classroom and the newspaper will be better understood.

At the core of the program are six books, each covering an area of the world in ferment—the Middle East, Communist China, the Soviet Union, Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia (see p. 34 for reviews of the first three of these books). Since most textbooks deal inadequately with such areas, these books already break through the traditional constrictions. The books are written by *New York Times* correspondents with the accuracy and effort toward objectivity for which the *Times* is famous. For anyone who reads that newspaper daily, the style of writing and points of view will be familiar. But considering the newspaper standards in most of the country, it should be a breath of fresh air for those who do not read the *Times*. The *Times* has its prejudices, but better the *Times* than the *East Cupcake Gazette*.

But the books are only the beginning. Some very handy card files supply biographies of ninety-five world leaders and socio-economic information about each nation covered in the set. The cards are not only handy; they can also be easily updated as today's fact passes into history and a new one takes its place.

Although the publishers declare the books and the supplemental cards to be the "core" of the program, the materials that will no doubt determine its success are the Teacher's Guide and the Problem Cards. Both were prepared by *Britannica* editors, working with social studies teachers and advisers. The Problem Cards offer questions to be answered or discussed by the students. The Guide contains answers to these questions and suggestions for discussion and research. An outline of each book is also given. The Guide's most useful contribution, however, is the section on "How to use the Workshop in various disciplines." Study aims are suggested and a cross-referenced index to the Outlines enables the teacher to find the sections in the books that are pertinent to his subject area.

A similar section is called "World Problems Index." It organizes references in each area-book under general topics of problems shared around the world. It is designed to "enable your class to get a world view" but strikes me as very inadequate. The conception of international problems that might be



dealt with internationally is certainly one of the most important of our times and one which the post-World War II age, for all its madness, has accepted more earnestly than any previous modern age. But the workshop includes only the index, plus twenty Problem Cards. Any package has to limit itself, but during these years when nationalism—in America as in the rest of the world—is so strong, so dangerous, and so outdated, it is a pity not to include a full section on internationalism, its multitudinous problems and failures and its enduring achievements, occasional though they are.

On this point and many others the *World Affairs Workshop* is far from complete. Its editors, of course, make no claims of perfection, but a danger remains that some teachers will take the books, the Guide, and the cards as the last word. The danger is greatly enhanced by the fact that a bibliography of other books and materials was forgotten by the editors until the last moment. The printed sheets to be inserted into

the package will no doubt appear as an afterthought, not likely to impress teachers or students with the need to search further. But better late than never, and the bibliography, reportedly, will be formally incorporated into the Teacher's Guide at a later printing.

I have not seen the bibliography, but I hope it includes a great many books that do not join the *Times* in the middle of the road, that treat the issues with original thought not to be found in the mass media. For there is no such thing as objectivity, and while it is a good thing to begin with a solid base of fact, it is necessary to see that fact in all lights before an individual can determine which light *he* thinks reflects the truth most truly.

This is the trap of the great gray *Times*, in these books as well as in its daily reporting. While it strives sincerely for the greatest objectivity possible, and its efforts place it among the great newspapers of the world, it nonetheless views the world primarily through American eyes. *Times* reporters are more alert to America's imperfections than most, but they do tend to whitewash "our side" somewhat and make the Enemy seem the blacker by contrast. Our government's stated motives are rarely scrutinized and the implication clearly is that though it bungles things upon occasion, on the whole it is on the side of the angels. Communism, however, is continually suspected of duplicit motives (for example, in the book on Southeast Asia: "The Vietnamese Communists signed the Geneva agreement with the firm intention of renewing at an opportune time their drive to the south"; no substantiation for this statement is offered) and little effort is made to understand why this particular political and economic theory attracts so many of the world's peoples.

The inclusion of C. L. Sulzberger's book, *America and the Third World*, however, is an important gesture toward correcting many of the faults I have criticized. Mr. Sulzberger's book provides a "World Outlook" that helps greatly to enlarge one's understanding of the areas and problems discussed in the other books. Unfortunately, only one copy of this book is enclosed, for the teacher alone (there are five copies of each of the other books). It is to be hoped that the teacher will read it thoughtfully and well.

It is difficult to believe that this package will not be a boon to every social studies class in which it is used. The best teachers will keep their skepticism active and use it as a springboard to expand discussion and inquiry. More timid teachers may stick strictly to the Guide and text, but the books alone should arouse new interest and understanding in the students.