

Education at Amache



Photo Donated by **Elaine Wischnowsky**

The "Americanization" of the Japanese included an educational system for both children and adults.



*"A story hour in a nursery class
conducted by Miss Sumi Kashiwagi -
Granada Relocation Center, Amache,
Colorado."*

Photo by **Tom Parker** 12/10/42.

This letter (below) documents the viewpoint of the WRA as to the Japanese-Americans and the educational system that they hoped to set up.

WAR RELOCATION AUTHORITY
Kittredge Building
Denver, Colorado

September 10, 1942

Chancellor Caleb F. Gates, Jr.
University of Denver
Denver, Colorado

Dear Mr. Gates:

Governor Carr was kind enough to forward to me your letter of August 28 suggesting that selected and qualified citizens of Japanese descent in the War Relocation evacuation centers might be trained in the fundamentals and workings of the democratic way of life so that they might go back to Japan after the war as missionaries of such doctrines to the Japanese people.

It is very heartening to know that thoughtful people and public officials not directly connected with the program are giving serious thought to the problems with which we in WRA are concerned. There is much misunderstanding and misinformation about the entire program, and so little comprehension of the basic problem involved in the treatment of this minority group of Americans, and this can only be counteracted by intelligent discussion and education among our own people. By and large, the Japanese-Americans themselves have accepted their anomalous position and hardships during the war with fortitude and good humor, and many of them, particularly those who are educated as well as loyal, are deeply aware of their responsibilities and opportunities as missionaries of our way of life.

As quickly as possible we will establish an educational system among the evacuees so that the children will receive the basic education given to all in this country and learning opportunities will also be available to the adults. All such activities will, of course, be directed toward good citizenship and Americanization and would be excellent preparation for missionary work in Japan, even though it were not specifically pointed up that way in advance.

How would you like to help us plan and perhaps apply as an extension of the University a seminar or discussion course among a selected group of evacuees on the Granada project?

Sincerely,

cc: Governor Carr
John Provinse
J. G. Lindley
C. E. Rachford
M. O. Anderson

Jos. H. Smart
Regional Director



Much evidence for the educational system as well as the lifestyle of the Amache internees may be found in the **Final Report (Education Section)** compiled by Lloyd A. Garrison, Superintendent of Education, Community Management Division, Granada Relocation Center, Amache, Colorado. The report of more than 400 pages analyzes the childhood and adult educational systems at Amache during the years when the camp was open. The following excerpts from this report are illustrative of many elements of life in the camps including the educational system, relocation issues, prejudice, the effect of the war on internees, and issues confronting both the Nisei and Issei.

Housing for personnel was first available in Lamar in apartments and rooms as well as a dormitory room in the basement of the Alamo Hotel. Housing at the center became available during 1943-1944 however,

“unsatisfactory living conditions, unappetizing food and transportation worries lowered the morale and enthusiasm of the group.” (**Final Report**, pg .64.)

School opened on October 12, 1942 offering pre-school, elementary and secondary school programs. The first few weeks were spent orienting the children and identifying concerns.

“Uninhibited classroom discussion was permitted, since many individuals needed to reduce the emotional disturbances caused by evacuation through this unburdening. Debates and forums exploited such topics as the merits of exclusion, discrimination based on race, and the obligations and opportunities of the Japanese American minority.”

(**Final Report**, p. 65.)

In the secondary schools the teachers met to identify the major issues they believed they faced in order to effectively teach the children in the Amache schools.

- “1. The interpretation of American democracy through precept example and participating activities to these sometimes frustrated adolescents.*
- 2. Emphasis on guidance to help pupils achieve self-confidence and feel some security to their school home.*
- 3. The breakdown of traditional Japanese family life and the resultant decrease in parental control.*
- 4. The disintegration of certain useful cultural traits (industry and the like).*
- 5. Nisei racial overconsciousness.*
- 6. Lack of recreational facilities.*
- 7. Difficulty of establishing rapport with parents because of their inadequacy in using the English language.*
- 8. Necessity for stimulating early family relocation.*
- 9. Discovering the real needs and common problems of Nisei youth.*
- 10. Advisability of emphasizing both oral and written language.*
- 11. Adjustment on the part of pupils to communal living.”*

(**Final Report**, pg. 65.)

“The primary task and contribution of the Amache Elementary School was to develop an educational program which would promote understanding of American ideals and loyalty to American institutions and train for the responsibilities of citizenship and economic independence of the family both on the project and in the communities in which the pupils would later live.”

(**Final Report**, pg. 35.)

A glimpse of the lifestyle of Amache residents is evident in the following statement:

“Frequently children showed a need for more sleep. Parents reported the problems confronting them in getting the children to bed early since the family lived in one room. The kindergartens were not equipped to give long rest periods, but in individual cases longer rest periods were provided for.”

(Final Report, pg. 41).

The secondary schools had other challenges:

“Educationally, a basic problem, which has already been discussed, was the language deficiency of many pupils. The effects of this deficiency were notable in several ways. (1) Reading and study were handicapped sufficiently to warrant special emphasis and instructions which reduced the school time for other purposes. (2) Children were reluctant to participate in activities which required oral expression. (3) Parents set patterns of speech and language usage (Japanese) which multiplied the task of the schools. The psychological and social effects could be noted in nearly every phase of the school’s activities and relationships.

Also affecting the lives of junior and senior high school pupils were the problems growing out of conflicts between traditional Japanese mores and their conflicts with approved American customs and thought patterns. The (1) high regard for purely academic learning accompanied by the low place given to vocational education, (2) the barriers placed by parents which circumscribe the social relationships between boys and girls, (3) the predominant place given to the family head in planning the choices and actions of minor children, (4) the mixed national loyalties of some parents who, though not actively disloyal to this country, were either neutral or sympathetic toward their mother country, all these attitudes kept boys and girls from forming stable attitudes or strong beliefs...

Furthermore, the quantity and quality of the athletic material available at Amache made competition with small schools unfair...At the same time several contests were contracted for which were cancelled. Pupils knew that these contracts were broken because of prejudice.”

(Final Report, pg. 201).

“All of these rebuffs and disappointments had their effects upon the morals and attitudes of student groups. It was extremely difficult to teach the ideas and ideals of democratic society and to urge their relocation when constant reminders confronted boys and girls with evidences of prejudice and undemocratic procedures.”

(Final Report, pg. 202).



*“Amache School Children Jumping Rope”
Photo Donated by Elaine Wischnowsky*

Another problem faced the school system of Amache:

"The teacher supply was the principal personnel problem of the Education Section. Even when the factors influencing the teacher supply situation on a national scale are taken into consideration the rate of turnover was excessive. The replacement of the entire teaching staff each year made the maintenance [sic] of a desirable educational program extremely difficult."
(Final Report, pg. 202).

An Advisory School Board was set up in November of 1942 consisting of 10 Amache residents.

M I N U T E S
of the
MEETING OF THE ADVISORY SCHOOL BOARD
August 5, 1943

Attendance

The meeting of the Advisory School Board was called to order at 2:30 P. M. on Thursday, August 5, 1943, in Room 29 at the High School, with the following present:

Mr. Paul J. Terry	Mrs. Alyce Ohama
Dr. George Nagamoto	Dr. Takashi Terami
Mr. Masa Nakano	Mrs. Hama Yamasaki

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as printed.

Releasing School Building to Other Groups

Mr. Terry discussed at some length the revised method of utilization of the school auditorium by various agencies in the community. It was recently decided that fees collected for the use of the building will be turned into the U. S. Treasury. School organizations, however, will not be charged for the use of the auditorium for school activities.

Dental Facilities in the Schools

Dr. Nagamoto presented a drawing of the dental clinic to be constructed in the shower rooms of SH. The plans were approved by the board.

Teaching Staff

Mr. Terry informed the members of the board concerning the resignation of various teachers on the staff and stated that all vacancies should be filled by the time school starts.

Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 3:45 P. M. to reconvene at 2:30 P. M. on September 2, 1943.

From the **Final Report; Advisory School Board Minutes**

"In some respects the work and attitudes of the group were disappointing. An examination of the minutes will show that as a Board they failed to assume any great responsibility. They were, as the name implies, purely advisory. This deficiency is probably the result of the inherent nature of the situation in which they worked. The activities of the Section were well-defined by administrative policies and procedures beyond their control. They were not responsible for financial controls, employment, or general administration. Without responsibility they refused to take a definite position on most issues. The axiom of government that 'where rests responsibility there must rest authority' was especially true in this instance."
(Final Report, pg. 10).

Adult education was also offered, the primary task of which

"was to promote understanding of American ideals and loyalty to American institutions which would enable the individual to become a more effective and functional worker and citizen."
(Final Report, pg.146).

"Adult education was recognized as a valuable factor in adapting the mature Japanese Americans to new surroundings, new communities, new activities, and in many instances, new occupations."
(Final Report, pg. 147)

As the primary concern of the WRA became relocating internees and preparing them for occupations outside the centers, a focus of the adult education became vocational training.

"The facilities for vocational education for out-of-school adults in the Granada Project were as complete as could be found in a community much larger than Amache. They consisted of a farm of three thousand acres, complete with machinery, tools, livestock, and crops of a greater variety than produced on the average farm in this locality; a project garage equipped to do all of the repair and maintenance jobs required; a carpenter shop, plumbing shop, electrical shop, blacksmith shop, refrigerator repair shop, barber shop, beauty shop, retail merchandise store, a slaughter house, offices employing all types of clerks and stenographers, a shoe repair shop; and a high school vocational department available for night work consisting of a well-equipped auto mechanics shop, woodshop, a commercial department and a homemaking department."
(Final Report, pg. 165).



"Harvesting the first spinach from the project farm"

Photo by **Joe McClelland**, 6/4/43

For the younger people the classes may have had more value.

“Many of the younger men and women learned skills that enabled them to go outside to jobs away from the center and from the influence of older Japanese groups. This did much to help scatter the relocatees to many parts of the country and helped prove that people of Japanese ancestry could do something besides grow vegetables.” (Final Report, pg. 172)



“An adult education class in pattern drafting.”

Photo by Tom Parker 12/10/42

“How much the adult school contributed to Americanization of the residents in the center could not be determined. It has been said that more Japanization than Americanization went on in the centers. The avocational classes did very little to help the people speak English since more Japanese was used in these classes than English in spite of every effort to the contrary. These classes were, however, very effective outlets for hundreds of adults.”

(Final Report, pg. 160)

In part, the difficulties in the adult educational system came from the generational differences between the Issei and Nisei.

“Foreign born peoples from other countries had an incentive for studying English and citizenship since they could become citizens but the Issei had no drive whatever since the privilege of citizenship was denied them.”

(Final Report, pg. 160)

“Since Japanese was spoken in many homes, English students admitted that they were reluctant to speak English with their friends and neighbors, because they would become objects of criticism and ridicule. As relocation took more of the younger group from the center the older people became stronger in their influence over center activities and thinking. This change made the job of promoting Americanization programs more difficult. There was little cooperation from the older men in building either classes or forums for the purpose of helping the people learn more of American ways.”

(Final Report, pg. 160)

With the end of the war with Japan on August 15, 1945 the Amache camp began to close down. Most of the people left in the camp were relocated. Since the Issei were generally older, were sometimes forced into changing their life-long occupations and often had little property or money left over following the war, it was very difficult for many of them to start over. Many believed that the United States owed them care, which resulted in some remaining in the camps until they were forced to evacuate. Because of their experiences during the war, some of these formerly loyal Japanese-Americans ultimately decided to return to Japan. While there are still some disputes about whether the internments were necessary, in 1989 the United States government would end up apologizing to the Japanese-Americans by offering them a redress of \$20,000 for each surviving evacuee.



Guilt is a Form of Suppressed Anger
by Lily Havey

"So many Issei (first generation Japanese) used to sigh, "shikataganai" ("it can't be helped"). It was their way of accepting their fate. But I wondered what their honest suppressed feelings might have been. Could they have felt like driving a spear into the gods that betrayed them?"