

Jones

POLICE SEMINAR IN COMMUNITY RELATIONS

City of Detroit
COMMISSION ON COMMUNITY RELATIONS
Research and Information Division

Technical Report 1
September, 1956

September 6, 1966

MEMORANDUM TO: Richard V. Marks
FROM: James Boudouris
SUBJECT: Evaluation of Police Seminar in Community Relations

The Training Program:

Over a period of 4 months, (July-October, 1965), 1800 officers from the Detroit Police Department took part in a training program based on the book, Professional Police-Human Relations Training (Charles Thomas, publisher, 1963) by Siegel, Federman and Schultz. The book is the result of a 2-year study of the Philadelphia Police Department by Applied Psychological Services who "interviewed in depth" 75 Philadelphia Police officers and observed and recorded 267 incidents.

The training program was directed by the Detroit Police Department and the Commission on Community Relations. Twice a week for four weeks (8 sessions) a group of 50-70 officers attended a 2 1/2 hour class session divided into a lecture by an expert on community relations and a question-answer period in Part I, a coffee break, and then in Part II, small group discussions of 7 cases designed by Dr. Siegel to be typical, realistic police-human relations episodes. The cases are taken from the book and have been slightly revised to adapt them to a Detroit setting.

The first training session consisted of a lecture and question-answer period, and an orientation period. The second through eighth sessions included discussions of cases.

A police coordinator, with some prior orientation as to his duties, directed Part II. The general group of about 60 officers was divided into groups of about 10 men in each. The composition of the groups was not controlled. For each group, the police coordinator chose a recorder and a discussion leader.

The men did not receive any prior information on the nature of the cases so that they did not arrive with preconceived ideas about how to deal with them. Each case is divided into three stages: initial entry, fact finding and decision making. After each stage was read, the small groups discussed the set of conference questions (group A or B huddle questions) that were assigned by the coordinator. The recorder kept notes and summarized the discussion to the other groups after each stage. The discussion leader had only minimal instructions on how to involve the men in a discussion of the huddle questions. During the general discussion of each stage the coordinator directed the discussion and had a set of lead questions that he could use for this purpose.

Attitudes and Attitude Change

From a functional point of view, to change attitudes we should attempt to understand what function the particular attitude has for the individual while recognizing that the same attitudes may have various sources in personality, social situations and community practice.

Prejudiced behavior or attitudes may reflect certain inner psychological states such as anxiety, frustration, and so forth. Certain behavior may be related to the officer's self-image as a "tough guy," or as a "manly" officer. To change the officer's behavior might require a change in the man's self-concept since the kind of understanding, patience, and considered behavior this program encourages might be seen by the officer as weak or "wishy-washy."

The social or cultural bases of the police officer's behavior include the training he gets in the department to act "by the numbers," in other words, to know exactly what to do in every situation. It seems to me this could contribute to stereotyping and over-generalizing. Also, the officer may feel that to gain respect from the public he must be firm and authoritarian, but in an emotional context this may lead to "brutality" or what is interpreted by the public at the time as "brutality."

This kind of street incident, where the police officer and the crowd are in emotional states, could lead to behavior that is contrary to the attitudes and training that the officer adheres to when he is in a relaxed, rational setting as he is during a police seminar. To prepare the officer for these situations, emphasis should be placed not on attitudes but on the development of the ability to meet situations objectively and unemotionally. This is part of what has been referred to as the "professionalization" of the police officer. The situation I am describing is probably referred to in what staff participants say they have heard officers say thousands of times, "You guys don't understand what we have to go through out there." To help in gaining this kind of understanding it has been suggested that Community Relations staff spend some time riding in the squad cars.

At the conclusion of the training course, the officers were given an evaluation sheet asking for their opinions of various aspects of the course. The comments and suggestions made here are based on my conversations with the Commission's staff, on summaries of these evaluations that were made by the Detroit Police Department's Research and Planning Bureau, and on a comparison of the seminar with the program outlined in Siegel's book.

Siegel stresses that the intention of the program is not so much to impart knowledge as to alter police behavior. The assumption here is that by influencing an individual's attitude, his behavior is also changed. The following premises regarding attitude change are explicit. Attitude change is possible,

1. if "the range of the experience of the individual police officers is broadened,"
2. if "it can be shown that certain practices fail to satisfy the needs of the police department;"

3. if "the notions and opinions of the individual police officer can be altered" - (this is meaningless unless the distinction is made between opinions and attitude, but Siegel doesn't do this);
4. if it can be shown to the police officer that attitudinal change will not shut him off from his friends and co-workers, and
5. if it can be shown that attitude change will improve his skills, his chances for advancement as well as public attitudes toward the police force.

According to Siegel, the cases and the group discussion of them will yield the above premises. Because I think they are necessary to change behavior, I would recommend additional means of satisfying these requirements.

The implicit assumption is that the individual police officer sees a need for change in his attitude and behavior. However, with riots in Chicago, Los Angeles and other cities, but not in Detroit, the police officer may feel that the status quo and not change is to be preferred.

If the cases are perceived as realistic, they might contribute to the above requirements of attitude change. However, 66% of the officers rated the cases as "bad," and many criticized the cases for representing the officer as stupid and not reflecting typical situations.

Studies in attitudes and perception have suggested that a prejudiced person may "fail to understand" a message aimed at altering the prejudiced person's attitude. Part of the difficulty might be overcome by changing the cases enough to improve the police image, but without altering the essential elements of the case. Siegel emphasizes the importance of the police coordinator summarizing what has been said after each stage, but since the size of the group was two or three times the size of the group that Siegel worked with, and since there was sometimes insufficient time for discussion of all stages, a summary of the essential principles of each stage of the cases might be given to the coordinator prior to the sessions. This should be included in the training and orientation of the police coordinators before the training program starts.

The coordinators should (before and during the training program) clearly indicate to the police officers how the training will satisfy certain needs of the department and improve the officers' skills, chances for advancement and the public attitudes toward the force. The role of the coordinator is of such importance that adequate training in this role and the use of the better qualified officers as coordinators is suggested.

Discussion Groups:

An important aspect of attitude change is that the officer should feel that the change "will not shut him off from his friends and co-workers." When the officers were not given instructions on how to form small groups, the tendency was for officers who knew each other, who were from the same precinct or bureau, to make up a small discussion group. This is congruent with studies of attitude change that indicate that change is more likely and permanent when "teams" are trained rather

than isolated individuals. When the men know each other, there is more of a public commitment to improve police-community relations, and as co-workers they will reinforce each other in any changes that may be initiated during the training program.

However, in an occasional group, the opposite tendency was also noted. Officers from the same precinct may provide support to each other to maintain their original attitudes without change. Such groups might be singled out by the Commission staff or the police coordinator for special attention.

The validity of the discussion group method in training and education has been accepted by industry, educators, and psychologists. But Siegel doesn't sufficiently stress the importance of certain principles that seem to be necessary for the success of the method. Although the officers may not know who will be chosen as the discussion group leader prior to the session, a statement of the essential elements of a discussion group could be sent to all officers shortly before beginning the training. This would include an explanation of what the duties of a discussion leader will be, examples of ways to stimulate discussions, an explanation of the importance of participation by the officers during the discussions, and the distinction between discussion and debate should also be stressed.*

Commission staff could also be utilized in this capacity. It was pointed out that police were quite overt in their distrust and hostility toward Commission staff, and saw them as intruders. If the staff is to function as an effective part of the discussion groups, their role should be made clear to the police officers. This could be included in the orientation material that might be sent to officers a few days before the beginning of the program, and their role should be again clearly defined by the police coordinator as part of the orientation on the first day of the session.

Objectives:

Siegel lists nine training objectives of the program, but a comparison between these objectives and the requirements of attitude change listed above indicate a close similarity. The objectives of the program are to help police officers:

1. to develop an appreciation of the civil rights of the public;
2. to become aware of the need to treat people of all ethnic groups with equal fairness and to use force wisely;
3. to develop an adequate social perspective (e.g., refrain from verbal abuse, gain an understanding into the problems and culture of minority groups);
4. to become aware of individual and group differences (avoiding stereotyping);
5. to develop an understanding of how their words and action may be interpreted by the general public;

* According to Siegel, debate refers to defending a predetermined position, while discussion results in exchanging views, and increasing understanding.

- 6. to develop an acceptance of integrated situations;
- 7. to gain an awareness of how his behavior and attitudes will influence the behavior and attitudes of his fellow officers;
- 8. to become familiar with the role of associated community agencies in problems of police-public intergroup relations; and
- 9. (a summary objective of the above) the development in police officers of the skills requisite for anticipating and meeting the police-human relations aspects of
 - a. their work
 - b. incidents rooted in factors of race, religion and national origin
 - c. juvenile offenses
 - d. civil rights complaints, and
 - e. community tensions.

All of these objectives are explicitly stated in the material given to the officers when they begin the training program and are implicit in the cases and in the lectures. These objectives could be used by either the discussion leaders or the police coordinators to underline the main points of the cases and thus eliminate any ambiguities.

Studies in attitudes and perception have suggested that when a situation is ambiguous a prejudiced person may interpret the incident to agree with his prejudice, rather than attempt to alter his attitude.

A valuable source of information on the evaluation of the program itself, not on its effectiveness, comes from the officers themselves. At the end of the July, August, and September training sessions, the officers completed evaluation sheets on which they evaluated the various aspects of the program.

A. A useful improvement in the third evaluation was for the four main objectives of the program to be evaluated separately on the basis of whether or not they were achieved. The objectives that the officers were asked to evaluate and the way in which they were ranked are:

First, 60% of the trainees thought this objective was achieved: "To develop an understanding of how officers' words and actions may be interpreted by the general public."

On the following two objectives, the officers were about equally divided: "To develop increased understanding of the social, historical and economic forces which cause some people to act as they do" and "to develop increased awareness of the role of community relations agencies."

The smallest percentage of officers (40%) thought this objective was achieved: "To help police officers continue to work with maximum effectiveness while building public confidence that law enforcement is fair and equal."

They were not asked to evaluate this objective "To add to their knowledge and skills in anticipating and meeting police-community relations situations involving (a) religious, racial and ethnic minorities, (b) juvenile offenses, and (c) community tensions."

B. At the end of the first series, 59% (395 officers) were disappointed with the course whereas, at the end of the second series, 65% were disappointed with it. The question wasn't asked on the last evaluation.

C. "On the basis of your experience in the course, would you encourage your friends at the precinct to sign up for the course"?

	1st Series (July)	2nd Series (August)	3rd Series (Sept.)
Answered "Yes"	64%	65%	60%

D. The officers were asked to evaluate the lectures, questions and answer sessions, cases and group discussions. At the end of the first series, 82% thought the cases used were "Bad" but there was a significant improvement as this percentage decreased to 71% and then 66% by the end of the third series. The group discussions themselves, however, received the largest percentage of excellent or good ratings, 66%.

The evaluation of the cases is probably a reflection of several factors, and not necessarily an accurate appraisal of the quality of the material. The officers might be responding to the image of the police as "stupid," or to their own uneasiness that their attitudes and behavior were being challenged and that they were being called on to change in some indefinite way.

To gain a better understanding of the police officers' appraisal of the training course, I think it would be useful to interview a random sample of men who went through it. The usefulness of such interviews would depend to a considerable extent on their confidentiality.

E. The "Car Stop" case was the only role-playing case used on the training program (the Siegel book uses two role-playing cases), but it was discontinued after the second training series. Of the 8 cases, the officers ranked this case second in order of preference in the first series, and made it their first choice at the end of the second training series.

The effectiveness of the group discussion method depends on the degree to which the trainees can become involved with the cases. Since role-playing requires the men to take an active part in the situation, I suggest at least one role-playing case be used. By providing the officer with only the skeleton of an episode, the responsibility of how a police officer will behave, and what image he will present to the group, is with the role players.

F. The "argumentative married couple" received the fewest number of points on both series and then was dropped; it is a non-racial domestic incident about visiting privileges with children.

G. Some of the comments by the trainees on the evaluation sheets have been mentioned above: presenting the officer in a more favorable way in the cases and making the cases more typical and realistic. Many officers thought the course was a step in the right direction and that they had benefited from it.

Several officers thought the trainees should be assigned to discussion groups so that the men would be from different precincts in order to exchange ideas on how the precincts might handle problems differently. "It also would prevent the discussions from being dominated by officers who know each other and already in agreement."

This is contrary to my above emphasis on continuing the change in attitudes and behavior that is only begun during the training program by training men together who will work together afterwards. This difference might be resolved by experimenting with the two arrangements, but evaluating these variations is a difficult problem.

Further evaluation

The following are possibilities for evaluating the effectiveness of the training program: 1) Although not very likely, one approach is to prepare a questionnaire designed to measure attitudes of the police officers. This could be done before, immediately after, and a certain period of time after the training program. 2) The use of records from the Citizen Complaint Bureau offers some possibilities for evaluating the program but is limited by the probably small number of people who know about the bureau and who bother to use it. A summary of the complaints received during the first six months of 1965 indicates that 75% of the 51 complaints involved the precincts most represented in the subsequent training program. Information is not yet available on the complaints received since the program was begun. 3) Another approach would be with less scientific rigor, but would be practical. This would consist of interviews with a random sample of police officers who went through the program. If these interviews are held about a year after the program, the police officer would have had time to evaluate the influence of the training on the everyday performance of his duties. This too, has difficulties since the validity of the interviews depends on the accuracy of the police officers' introspection.

JB:em