

Skills for Social Living

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THE POPULAR negative attitude toward young people is paralleled by a similar attitude toward our educational systems. We read that recent studies reveal that the "schools are failing to prepare students for citizenship"; that many persons, high in circles of statesmanship, fear that even though we win the war, "we may lose the peace" because our envoys are not smart enough to outsmart our enemies, to say nothing of our allies; that the increase in juvenile delinquency is due to the fact that the schools do not teach "a proper respect for authority."

From these and many other negative criticisms come various kinds of reactions. Some of us take up the cudgels for our good old "tried and true" educational philosophies, while others, believing that there must be some fire when there is so much smoke, attempt to look objectively at our schools. After all, a negative attitude is always futile; what we need is a positive way of looking at education. What are the goals that we are shooting at in our American schools? Can these goals be visualized in general as well as in specific terms?

Youngsters need to grow up with a knowledge of how to live as well as how to add or spell or use reference books in the library. Ruth H. Anderson, Dean of Girls at East High School, Denver, Colo., discusses in this article ways by which schools may help children and young people to learn to live and work together.

We can attempt to answer these questions for the secondary school by taking "the long view" of the goal of the adolescent's education. Many recent studies, such as those made by the Progressive Education Association, the Institute of Child Welfare, and the Harvard Growth Study, have given us a splendid basis for evaluation. Their findings may be summed up as proving that the chief mission of secondary education is to help young people to understand themselves, to discover their best powers, and to develop a philosophy that will give purpose to their living.

We admit that there are other goals for secondary education, but, as adolescence is the particular time when the individual is preoccupied with working out his role as a man or woman, it is important that he be provided with an environment that will help him achieve satisfactory social relations. This fact has implications for his friendships with his peers and his contacts with teachers and probably will have more lasting effect upon his life than the subject matter of the curriculum.

When we look at the particular or specific goals of the adolescent's education, we are again reminded of many famous lists of "needs" to which we may well refer. Concensus of opinion will give us the following:

1. Each child needs a sense of belonging to the group. There should be

opportunities in school for him to associate informally with his peers, to cooperate with them, and to make a contribution to the group activity.

2. Each child should have the experience of evaluating his abilities and his special interests to the end that he may understand himself. He should also have help in overcoming his deficiencies so that his social development will not be inhibited.

3. Each of us needs the support of people to make life worthwhile. An understanding of human relationships is a most important aspect of social development. In addition to belonging to a group each person establishes close confidential relations with individuals. If high school boys and girls do not work out their relations with people successfully, they never will be able to find their places in groups, to make lasting friendships, to find mates, or to experience satisfactory family life.

4. Growth of personality depends on a feeling of security not only in the peer group but also in relation to family status. Each child needs to develop his own personality so that he may enjoy status in whatever group he finds himself.

5. The secondary school needs to look positively at its program for the prevention of delinquency. Surely its function is prevention and not cure. It must have teachers who understand and enjoy young people. It must cooperate with the home. It must provide a guidance clinic and special classes for the maladjusted. It must be community conscious. It must offer plenty of well-supervised activity.

Does the secondary school curriculum provide for the achieving of these spe-

cific goals within the curriculum? We can all think of courses, programs, and activities which do contribute consciously to the development of skills for social living. In many schools the classes in social studies, which obviously deal directly with people and how they live, provide opportunities for boys and girls to achieve social relationships. Language, too, is identified with personality development. A person's speaking and writing give insight into his needs and tensions, and we are well aware of the fact that ease in social relations is greatly increased in homes where children are encouraged to participate in family discussions.

Developing Social Living Skills in and out of the Classroom

Unfortunately, formal classroom routine has too often thwarted expression or has put too much emphasis on written language before the child has had enough experience with informal speech. The curriculum in home economics can provide experiences related to the social needs of growing boys and girls. Among these may be such things as what to do and say at social functions, what to wear, how to prepare and serve simple meals, and how to develop many other techniques that are important in achieving status with one's peers.

The program of physical education has a strategic position for contributing to the personal-social relations of individual students. Frequently, a better picture of the child's development can be gained in the gym, the shower room, and on the athletic field than in any other part of the school program. The informal nature of the situation makes it an ideal place to observe the social

reactions of boys and girls. In fact, the material in practically all the courses offered in high school has implications for human understanding. Literature and science are obviously wide fields for such development. But no course will be humanized unless the teacher has a deep understanding of human life and conduct, and only as teachers increase in appreciation of human values will their courses take on significance for students.

The social program of the school is important in educating and developing young people. The work of the student council, the club program, and assemblies—all aim to provide opportunity for personal-social relations, but none can succeed unless the adult who sponsors such activities is sensitive to the problems of the students concerned.

In the foregoing discussion, the needs of boys and girls in their development toward social maturity have been pointed out, as well as the provisions that most modern curricula have made for supplying these needs. It is obvious, however, that, while attempts have been made in isolated courses and social programs to coordinate all services of the school, changes are needed in order to provide for a coordination that will make the skills for social living available to every child.

What are these changes? As already pointed out, the curriculum of the school will be lacking in effectiveness unless the men and women who are employed to teach are people who can maintain good social relations and who like growing boys and girls. Someone has said that "the greatest asset of the American secondary schools today and the greatest liability are the teachers."

The extent to which the teacher can help his students to attain emotional balance will depend upon the success he has in his own relationships with people.

"Good Relationships Are Caught Rather Than Taught"

Teachers who use the classroom to maintain their own security are a detriment to the emotional atmosphere of the school. The use of sarcasm is one common evidence of insecurity; so also is the resorting to competitive devices which often hurt both the students who succeed and those who fail. Pressures brought about by grades, honors, and examinations often destroy the mental hygiene of the classroom situation. Students are sensitive, also, to faculty relationships. The way teachers get along with each other can do much to set the tone of the school and to develop a friendliness that will carry over to all phases of the school life. "Good relationships are caught rather than taught." No other criteria for the selection of teachers for high school seems as important as this quality of friendliness, for it is basic to the understanding of students.

This faculty *esprit de corps* will make possible the objective consideration of the needs of young people to the end that a philosophy of education may be arrived at. This is an absolutely essential procedure if a coordinated program is to be provided for the teaching of social skills. The program can move no faster than the speed at which the fundamental philosophy is accepted by the majority of the teachers.

Some such class as "core," "social living," or "general education" seems an obvious necessity. This is the place

where the common needs of young people are taken care of and out of which their specific needs will be directed. The teacher of this class will act as counselor to the individuals of the group over a period of years or as long as the student remains in the school. Guidance is the most important function of this grouping and all schools give at least lip service to the importance of individual differences in ability and achievement.

The teacher-counselor of the "core" group has opportunity to observe children and to keep various kinds of data about them. "Every teacher a counselor" is a noble slogan, but in practice this will not be possible until all teachers have been prepared to undertake guidance functions. There is not time here to mention specific units of work that will form the subject matter of the "core," but the social values that have been ascribed to previously mentioned courses in social studies, language, home economics, physical education, science, literature, etc., are all available here with the added advantages of flexibility in the time and sequence of presentation, as well as the opportunity of presenting the available follow-up to be found in the specific courses provided by the curriculum.

Small Planning Groups Bring Parents Into School Program

One of the significant advantages of the "core" organization of a school lies

in the situations it provides for co-operation of parents and students and teachers. In many general areas their cooperative efforts are needed for the solving of problems. The small planning group, related to the activity of one class, gives an opportunity for parents to consider the educational needs of their children in a more vital way than is provided by membership in the P.T.A. Such situations as social affairs, selection of courses, health, activities—both inside and outside of school—individual student problems, as well as units of work to be studied in the "core" class, will help maintain good relations between home and school when sympathetically dealt with by wise school people.

Special services of the school, such as classes for slow learners and the mal-adjusted, case conferences, services of the school nurse, can best be administered through the "core" class because the teacher-counselor makes it her business to see that students who need these special helps are aware of the services available.

Let us not complain negatively about the omissions of modern education. Nothing can be accomplished without a positive, constructive attitude. Again let us look to our goals. The urgent educational need is an understanding of human relations so that young people may enjoy their work, their citizenship, their family associations, to the end that life will be more meaningful to them.

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It is a luxury to learn; but the luxury of learning is not to be compared with the luxury of teaching.—R. D. Hitchcock, *Eternal Atonement: Receiving and Giving*.

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