

# The Curriculum Commentator

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## Human Relations in the Classroom

*Each month this column, written by a member of the Association, will be concerned with curriculum development: recent trends, issues, conferences, publications, experimental studies, and learning materials. This month's contributor is Charles Dent, studying at New York University as a teaching fellow.*

THOSE OF US who have the opportunity to visit numbers of teachers are becoming aware of "value-rich" situations that make for good human relations in the school and classroom. One of the most stimulating experiences I have had was the fall when I kept a log of the classroom happenings that were charged with much giving and taking among groups or individuals. These happenings were recorded anecdotally and shared with all teachers and principals. In exploring these experiences, it was soon realized that a situation did not have to be highly dramatic to be loaded with opportunities for developing understandings or helping one make adjustments to his everyday problems. Here are some examples:

### What We See

1. The eighth grade that organized itself into a school service club and wrote all teachers in the building to see if there was anything that could be done for them or their groups. (An organization of lunchroom helpers for the primary children developed.)

2. The teacher who said, "That child (sixth grade) is my individual study. He told me that I was the first teacher he ever had who took an interest in his reading." (An intensive study of one child as a part of a child study program led to the revamping of the library procedures for the upper elementary grades of a whole school.)

3. The arithmetic teacher who gave up her free period to visit with a social studies group that was working out some scales

for distances on the globe. (A deeper appreciation of various individuals in the group resulted after seeing them function in a different situation.)

4. The science teacher who, when a sixth grade boy's dog visited the school uninvited, had it brought to the science class to let the children examine its teeth. (Johnny, who did not excel as a contributor to the science class, became hero for a day.)

5. The teacher of the spastic child who was working with her to get her to shape her mouth in the right way to say her vowel sounds. (That takes love and patience. How much more we should be inspired to work with those who are sound physically!)

6. The director who was telling of her visit to the writing class where she asked a boy, "What are you having in here? I can't tell whether it is geography, English, spelling, or writing." The boy replied, "I don't know what it is, but I like it."

7. The language arts-social studies teacher who spent her Saturday afternoon at the State Fair in order to visit the exhibits and be able to answer the children's questions on Monday morning.

8. The principal who installed a barber's chair in the book room, and cut children's hair as a part of his day. (He required the permission of the parents if he cut a girl's hair.)

9. The social studies and arithmetic teachers who voluntarily agreed to exchange rooms in order that the social studies groups might enjoy the benefits

of more cabinet space for their resource materials, reference books, and room activities.

10. The social studies teacher with the keen sense of humor who said to the director, "You should have come yesterday. I had my whistle ready to blow for the children to begin their committee work!"

11. The director of Home and Family Life who asked, "When do we begin using what we know about how children grow and develop in trying to teach them?" (This question came out of her experiences in working with groups of parents where malpractices in classroom procedures often became the topic of conversation.)

These specific evidences illustrate working relationships that contribute to the development of harmonious living and learning. Quite probably their simplicity often causes us to overlook commonplace but real opportunities for extending our everyday understandings and practices. What follows is a description of one group's efforts in using their combined experiences to suggest ways or means of improving their insights and procedures with children.

### What We Hear in Discussion Groups

At a recent meeting of a state organization of ASCD, a group of some twenty-five members studying the topic of improving human relations started its discussion by asking the questions: What can schools do to help people learn to live together successfully? What are the progressive levels of growth in learning to live together?

It was readily recognized that these were not the only questions that might be asked in this area, but these seemed to be the ones of greatest concern to the persons present. The account of the discussion which follows is presented as one example of a group's actual thinking on the problem:

M: We must consider ways of living with people.

- A: We need to accept the child for what he is.
- M: Perhaps the trouble is our attitude toward people who differ from us in speech, manner, culture, race—the ones we call wop, Fatty, etc.
- R: The real heartbreak is that some children are never called anything; they are ignored.
- B: Children and teachers both need to feel acceptance.
- H: The pattern of attitudes and values is taught in the home.
- L: What we need is common understanding. In the big housing unit in my home town the basis for neighborhood relations was to get together over the garbage cans.
- U: (Cites difficulties in a certain locality between Mexican and Negro groups.)
- A: What do parents want for their children? Is it happiness, a better chance? Is it prestige for themselves, or do they verbalize about opportunities for service to humanity?
- R: Some progress is being made in interracial understanding. In my home town big teacher institutes include Negro and white teachers.
- H: Our curriculum problems groups have included members of both groups successfully.
- E: What about our practices in our state ASCD organization?
- N: Why have we reached such low levels in inter-personal relations? Is it the emphasis on the individual child?
- B: Is it the one-child family? Maybe nursery schools can help. The basis of school experiences should be individual needs, not subject matter, but group experience, acceptance.
- N: I understand that the curriculum program at Xville is emphasizing the grass-roots approach.
- B: In our special classes we use play situations to get children to work together before we do any subject teaching. After we have prepared children for the situation, we play the game, then discuss how we did. This helps relieve tensions from individuals of

different economic levels, ethnic backgrounds. Instead of just talk, we practice actual experiencing.

M: What causes these tensions? Could it be lack of experience of being with other children on the one hand and malpractice in the home and in the classroom—learning prejudices?

U: Keeping children immature makes our big problem.

M: Then our question is: What are techniques in helping children to mature? One solution is reducing rejections: e.g., play produced by twenty rejected children at Franklin School.

U: Group therapy is valuable.

O: Give children a chance to excel in something.

A: Let's stop talking about remedial reading and call it developmental reading.

M: What about those who do not like to read, whose teachers say they can't read?

A: The trouble is that we have placed so much emphasis on the academic that development is ignored.

B: Then feeling an interest, experiencing success is a goal for each child.

M: We could say that living together is so basic a question that it affects even subject matter; human relations are so important that the child can't learn to read if nobody likes him. (Tells anecdote of the boy with appalling haircut and hand-me-down clothes who came to life after a haircut and conventional clothes.)

A: First you sheared and then you shared!

H: What about the box factory worker who can't read? Is it our job to teach him?

U: Yes, to read at his own level and to accept himself.

B: Maybe it would be better to give such persons habits of finishing the job, self-reliance, and initiative.

N: How often music, art, sports save our lives. Should we insist on reading and arithmetic skills for the student who is very good in art only?

A: (Tells of fifth grader who drew answers to tests, finally became interested and acceptable reader, finished junior high school, and is a good waitress.)

M: Let's understand and accept the child before we try to teach him. Merle Bonney's book on sociometry is a good explanation of social acceptance.

As the discussion opened the second day, the group felt that it was in agreement on these points: teachers need to know a great deal more about children; teachers need to respect the child's total personality; teachers must be aware of emotional climates within the classroom; children need to be loved; and teachers, parents, and children need to work together.

Space will not permit an anecdotal account of the second day's discussion, but the questions raised and discussed included these: (1) What should be the standard for the good life? (2) How does the teacher function in helping the child to live with others? (3) What about the emotional climate of the classroom? (4) What about the honor roll practice? (5) What about grouping? Isn't it dangerous to label slow learners? (6) To what extent does the personality of the teacher affect the process? What about her pressures, tensions, and ambitions? (7) How can we get teachers to see the light of acceptance, and not try to fit all children into the same mold? (8) What about the teacher with the wrong attitudes who tries to make a child reach impossible standards every day? How can we help the grade-level, subject-conscious teacher? (9) What about the support of the community?

The discussion of these questions was entered into heartily by the group members, and at the end of the final meeting a consensus had been gained that: We can help teachers understand children and human relations. We can work as a team with teachers. We can set the stage for teachers to feel free to work with children. We can develop relationships as we do things together. We can recognize the importance of good human rela-

tions as basic to learning and teaching. We can include in the curriculum such a wide variety of experiences for the learner that each child may win acceptance, approval, and success. We can provide at school many opportunities for children to work, study, play, and be together—thus supplying an incubator for do-democracy. We can recognize the highest levels of good human relations in helping the other fellow, sharing, learning from each other in a group, and appreciating the contributions of each. We can all work at these things in order to keep improving.

### What We Read in the Literature

**1950 YEARBOOK.** Caroline Tryon tells us at the end of the first chapter in the 1950 ASCD Yearbook, *Fostering Mental Health in Our Schools*, that

... the conditions of good mental health require that the schools create a situation for *all-day-long* where there is a healthy emotional climate—where good human relations between child and child, and between teacher and child can flourish. It will mean providing many more experiences that relate to spontaneous and developmental interests of children. It will mean not only learning to evaluate the total development of the child, but also developing ways of evaluating our own progress toward providing the conditions for good mental health.

This book will have far-reaching effects on education today. It compares the processes of a child's development with the processes of acquiring specific learnings, and shows that the thinking, feeling, doing aspects of development are as rich as a child's development of skills.

**FIVE ILLUSTRATIONS** of situations spelling out good human relations in the classroom are included in Volume I of the *Elementary Evaluative Criteria* (Tentative Edition) developed by the South-Wide Workshop on Elementary Evaluation and approved by the Executive Committee

of the Southern Association's Cooperative Study in Elementary Education. H. Arnold Perry of the University of North Carolina is chairman of the group which worked out this approach to evaluating the *quality* of what is going on in a good elementary school today under five headings: Viewpoint, Function, Program, Resources, and Planning.

Volume II is the Workbook for applying the evaluative criteria to the local situation both by the local school faculty and by a visiting committee on evaluation. You will be especially interested in the emphasis placed on child growth and development in these criteria, and in the list of characteristics of a good elementary school.

**HUMAN RELATIONS-HUMAN RIGHTS.** Examples of human relations in the curriculum and the total school program are also included in *Improving Human Relations*, Howard H. Cummings, editor, Bulletin Number 25 of the National Council of Social Studies. This booklet is a summary of the work completed by the Council in the 1940's in this area and represents a very valuable anthology for all teachers.

One should also have the booklet, *America's Stake in Human Rights* by Ryland W. Cray and John T. Robinson, which is the Council's Bulletin Number 24. This booklet advances seven basic concepts in human rights education with excellent activities suggested for developing them.

**HOWARD A. LANE** says in *Shall Children, Too, Be Free?* (Freedom Pamphlet, 1949. Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith) that:

... School should be a place where children's abilities and talents are employed for the benefit of all each day. (p. 20)  
Every school child, every day, should participate in group enterprises that employ his energies, thought, skills, and talents in the improvement of the quality of living of his group. Furthermore, every child should participate daily in work discussion, seek-

ing information about the activities, problems, hopes, and aspirations of the group with which he feels citizenship. This group should be ever expanding, encompassing, ultimately world-wide. Children need help in maintaining constant information on the actions and concerns of their representatives at all levels of government—student council, board of education, neighborhood council, city council, representatives and executive in state, national, and United Nations capitals. (p. 29)

**CURRENT MATERIALS.** In this connection, it is interesting to note four examples of current materials. The *Co-operative Study of the Mobile Public Schools*, which was conducted by the staff of the College of Education of the University of Alabama, consists of five volumes which include excellent materials for the use of teachers and students in the study of the historical and economic development of their communities and county. This seems to be a new departure as far as school surveys are concerned, and a new source of materials for the enrichment of classroom discussions.

*World Understanding Begins with Children*, Delia Goetz, (Washington, D. C., U. S. Government Printing Office, Bulletin No. 17, 1949), is intended to help the inexperienced teacher who feels a lack of background for developing international understanding. It gives sources of information and materials, and suggests ways to select and evaluate them.

*Aviation Education* is a report of a committee of the American Association of School Administrators, H. B. Bruner, chairman, (Aviation Education Division, Civil Aeronautics Administration, Washington 25, D. C.). A timely report which includes implications, philosophy, and examples of approaches to air-age education

in such places as New Orleans, Denver, and Phoenix. It also includes a list of sources of aid and materials of instruction with a selected minimum list of aviation texts.

*UNESCO Today, An Informal Report . . .*, (Washington, D. C., U. S. Government Printing Office, November 1949), is divided into two parts which gives UNESCO and its goals in Part I, and UNESCO in the United States in Part II. This brief report is very informative concerning the six themes of the UNESCO movement which affect American attitudes and understanding. They are: educational reconstruction; exchange of persons; education about the UN, its agencies and their objectives; improvement of teaching materials; human rights; and the problems of "food and people."

**TWO TEXTBOOKS** that show great promise through their points of view about the meaning of democracy and how it may function in the classrooms of America are *Building a Free Nation*, Clyde B. Moore, Helen M. Carpenter, Laurence G. Paquin, Fred B. Painter, (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1950), and *World Neighbors*, Thelma G. James, Walter R. Northcott, Marquis E. Shattuck, (Harper and Brothers, New York, 1950). *Building a Free Nation* emphasizes the interaction of peoples, places, and materials in the development of this country's history. This often-told story of the building of our country becomes the story of the building of our country's ideals. *World Neighbors* is an anthology of world literature for high school students and teachers. Its publication emphasizes anew the value of this approach for developing better human relations and world understanding through literary appreciations developed in the classroom.

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