ACROSS the country, Human Relations Education has taken on a new meaning. It is now being seen as an important aspect of democratic education for all the children of all the people, rather than as an innovation that deals mainly with minority-majority group relations. Teachers are beginning to see that many behavior problems are evidences of the difficulties that are encountered by children in their efforts to relate themselves to others. They are also becoming sensitive to the blocks to learning that are created by bad human relations and to the release of creativity that results when the quality of the relationships in the classroom is improved.

There is at present considerably less concern about the content of Human Relations Education and much greater preoccupation with the process. The “information” approach and talk about the contributions of minorities to civilization are giving way before the certain knowledge that facts often play a small part in changing attitudes, that attitudes are evidenced in action, and that learning has been accomplished when behavior is changed. The need in schools and colleges is for the development of positive programs in which the worth and dignity of every human being find expression and are recognized. The form of such programs, their content, techniques and methods of evaluating the outcomes are matters of serious study in many places.

Difficult problems in human relations exist in those places in which there is a large turnover of personnel or a yearly addition of large numbers of new teachers, or large areas of segregated housing in the community, or an influx of large numbers of children caused by migration of workers. In Portland, Oregon, for example, three hundred new teachers must be oriented each year. In Los Angeles, Superintendent Stoddard is quoted as saying that he has enough new children coming into the system to require the opening of a new elementary school for 350 children every Monday morning. In such school systems, there are too many lonely unattached people who for too long a time find themselves without friends. In school the children suffer from feelings of rejection and of being unwanted which get in the way of learning. The teachers in these situations are confronted with two problems: (a) developing their own insights and the know-how of setting up teaching-learning experiences which rapidly will give equality of status to newcomers; (b) helping the newcomers to learn quickly the skills of relating themselves to others.

There is evidence in many places, that the needs of children which arise from social differences are neglected. Many teachers do not yet understand the implications of the social structure of American society. They therefore tend to punish children for those “defects” in speech, manners, habits and value judgments over which the children have no control because they are a part of the culture into which an
individual is born and in which he lives. Often children are bewildered by this treatment and they absorb the idea that difference is a reason for rejection.

Evidences of Progress

Progress in Human Relations Education is being made wherever teachers have recognized the value of group work and are developing the skills needed to use it effectively. Moreover, as they themselves learn to do new things, as they make mistakes and are frustrated, they gain insight into the way failures crush children, as well as the way success and praise lift spirits and release energies. Teachers need to understand the importance of these elements in the development of good human relations in the classroom.

Considerable attention is being given to the study of education for the gifted, partly as a result of Ford Foundation grants. It is heartening to find that many teachers concerned with these projects are thinking about how the children feel about themselves and others. They are learning what has to be done to help the superior pupils to relate themselves warmly and effectively to each other and to their less gifted age mates. In like manner teachers are giving a more sympathetic ear to questions about how the children at the other end of the scale feel, what status building experiences they need, and how they can be helped to gain more acceptance and success.

On a wide front, school systems are giving status to Human Relations Education through the creation of projects and the setting up of committees, commissions and councils. In some places the first steps of necessity are taken in connection with crisis situations. Exploration of their curricular implications follows in due course. In other districts, having been in existence for more than a year, organized groups are moving into development of teaching techniques, resource units and changes that may be required in the structure of the school day. Some of these councils are created by state departments and the county is the theatre of their activity. Other committees are commissioned by city administrators. Still others belong to individual schools where their work is centered around the immediate human relations problems and needs of the school and its community. Very often the educators coordinate their work with community groups—mayors' commissions and human relations councils.

Also on the credit side, are evidences of crumbling walls. From New Orleans, for example, comes word of bi-racial professional meetings at which teachers forget their color differences. In Seattle, Washington, teachers are assigned regardless of race and without respect to the population mixture in the school. In Chicago substitute teachers are allocated without reference to color. In Los Angeles a Christian principal writes a play so that Hanukkah is included in the December festivities and encourages colleagues to do the same. These are signs of the times that can be duplicated in many areas.

Problems That Call for Answers

On the debit side may be heard cries from parents, for example, that children carry knives. In an Eastern city it may be the Italians who are accused. In a Midwestern town it may be the Negroes. On the West Coast the complaint may be heard about the Mexican students. And then perhaps an Anglo-Saxon voice may be heard, "My son always carries a knife, but it is a little one!" Why does a boy carry a knife? Maybe he just "needs" it. Maybe a
little guy feels grown-up when his hand touches the knife in his pocket. It could be that a thrill of adventure comes from knowing that a knife is tucked away where no one can see it. But by and large, trouble comes only when fear stalks in the background. The question to be answered is, "Who is afraid of whom?" Then suddenly comes the realization that the big, the overwhelming, the dangerous fears are in the hearts of the children of the minority groups. Here is a human relations problem of great magnitude. What can teachers do now to help these children to gain status, to experience success, to feel their adequacy, to be accepted, to have the courage of spirit that will enable them to walk uprightly knowing that violence will not befall them, and that they in turn will have no need for weapons with which to do violence to others.

Other fears continue to play a part in classrooms across the country. Children are still afraid of failure, afraid of sarcasm, afraid of being let down, afraid of ridicule, afraid of reprisal, afraid of being asked, "Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" Fears abound in the home, on the street, in the school. They turn into hostilities and aggressions, into attacks on people, on property and on ideas.

Much needs to be done to establish the fact that a human being has to like himself before he can like others. Teachers must like themselves as people, as teachers, before they can create warm, positive relationships with their pupils. The current attacks on teachers are not helping them to do this. Parents have to be shown that the harm done to teachers inevitably reaches their children. Teachers' respect for themselves is sometimes an outgrowth of personnel practices. In one place there is a fine creative relationship between teachers and "top brass." In another, when a teacher hears the comment, "I know your superintendent," he is likely to respond, "That's more than I do. We can't get into his office and we never see him in the schools."

Some memories of discussion periods have significance. On one occasion, a young teacher listened attentively to the description of the kind of school in which Human Relations are of first importance. Then he commented, "People say, 'Teacher, teach Human Relations!' When do I? How do I? Can I do that and cover my course of study, too? What kind of person must I be? Who is there to help me?"

In a university, a junior listened with growing incredulity. Then she said, "How do you 'up-educate' teachers for that kind of school?"

At an open meeting for teachers, the senior high school department head listened to the questions and answers and said, "Can't a good Latin teacher do these things along with the study of Latin grammar?"

In another city, a Junior High School English teacher listened and shook her head. "Yes, I know," she said, "but I still can't stand these kids who don't know how to read. I don't want them in my class!"

One evening at dinner, a common learnings teacher (or was it the core teacher or the teacher of the basic course, or the block class, or the combined class) glowed as she said, "Never before have I had so much joy in teaching. I know my children. I love them. They care about me. They can even take it when I 'blow my top' occasionally. We work things out together. And do you know, they do such a lot of good work. Their parents say it is because they are so happy."—Gertrude Noar, educational consultant, Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.
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