

SENSITIVITY EDUCATION

and the Curriculum

GENE STANFORD *

"OUR students don't need sensitivity training," the principal told me. "They get enough of that on their own, standing in front of their lockers."

His remark raises some questions about the nature of sensitivity education (or, as I prefer, human relations training) and its place in the schools. This principal, like many other people, apparently equates this process with sexual experimentation, perhaps having heard unsettling tales of nude bathing, group groping, and night-long marathons of "touch and tell." He overlooks the fact that "sensitivity education" is merely a new name for the same set of objectives that most school districts have been committed to for decades.

Virtually every school, at least ostensibly, sees as part of its task helping children learn more about themselves and others, learn how to work together democratically with others in a group, and develop emotionally and socially as well as intellectually. Yet until recently, learning in the affective domain has been left to chance, or at best it has been limited to impressive-sounding objectives safely tucked away in the faculty handbook and having little to do with daily classroom activities. Teachers may have been told they were responsible for the "total development of the whole child," but they were not encouraged to plan deliberate

exercises for the promotion of emotional growth as well as cognitive development.

However, if a school wishes to promote emotional and social development of its students, it must give as much emphasis to these areas as to cognitive development. The classes in citizenship or "guidance" popular in the 1930's were an attempt to provide this emphasis. Today elaborate and expensive student activities programs are thought to take care of these aspects of the student's development, and any unsolved problems are referred to the school's counseling staff. While it is not my intention to criticize either extracurricular activities or guidance programs, I feel that neither of these can be expected to do the whole job of promoting the affective development of the student body. This task must receive the attention of the entire faculty, through the careful integration of sensitivity education into the existing curriculum.

Such integration is, first of all, consistent with sound psychological principles. As educators have known since the days of Dewey, students are whole persons, both thinking and feeling beings. The affective domain cannot be divorced from the cogni-

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Photos courtesy of the author

To help students become aware of their own and others' values, the author explains the use of the "Values Continuum."

tive; the two are inseparably interrelated. A student reacts to the subject matter of a course emotionally as well as intellectually. He responds to the teacher emotionally as well as intellectually. He responds to other students both emotionally and intellectually. While we may urge students to keep their feelings under control, we can never eliminate feelings—even if we would like to.

The feelings come into play in the classroom continuously. The biology teacher announces that the next unit will be a study of evolution, and a Southern Baptist girl in the second row experiences anxiety. Ten-year-old Andy announces to his teacher, "No woman is going to tell me what to do!" An English class reads Gunther's *Death Be Not Proud* and Jerry remembers his younger brother who died of leukemia. A black girl screams "Racist!" at another member of her social studies class during a discussion of current events. In each of these cases, students are functioning as whole persons, and we must work with their feelings as well as their thoughts.

The subject matter of most courses is an excellent vehicle for teaching human relations. Driver education class, for example, is the ideal time to discuss with students the ways anger affects our behavior. Traditionally, the instructor may have stated briefly to the class, "Don't drive if you're angry or upset." If he feels responsibility for sensitivity education, he will go further, helping

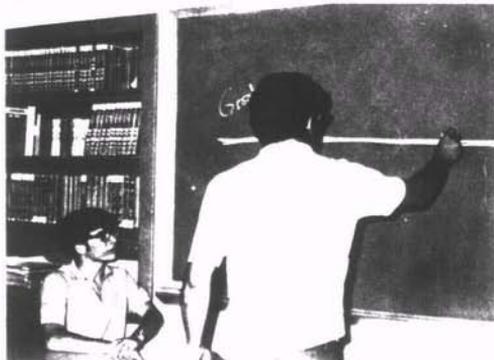
students identify when they are angry, what physical changes take place, and what symptoms to look for. He can also give them imaginary driving situations that could lead to anger and frustration and let them role-play how anger might affect their performance. He could then offer suggestions for handling hostility, responsible ways of coping with aggression, and let students practice these responses. Students would not only be better drivers as a result, but they would transfer their new knowledge to other situations in daily life.

Immediacy of Experience

Another reason for the inclusion of sensitivity education along with subject matter is the immediacy of experience which such education affords. If the school, for example, wants to teach students to work together democratically, then the time to do this is while they are working together on a definite task—not in a special session outside the normal school program. Valuing the contributions of others to a class discussion is a trait that we would hope to develop in students. The time to teach students to listen to each other, it seems to me, is in an actual classroom discussion—not in a counseling session later in the day.

But is it practical to attempt to integrate sensitivity education with the other parts of the curriculum? Does the average teacher know how to "do" sensitivity education? Does the time taken away from other tasks reduce cognitive progress? Several recent experiments testify to the success of combining sensitivity education with the subject matter of courses.

During 1967-68 a project supported by the Fund for the Advancement of Education of the Ford Foundation, under the direction of George I. Brown, Graduate School of Education at the University of California at Santa Barbara, set out to compile and test activities in the affective domain, with particular attention to those which could be included in the conventional curriculum of the public schools. A number of experienced teachers, from both elementary and secondary schools,



Students indicate their feelings about compulsory population control. Barry's mark indicates he is somewhat opposed . . .

used many different types of sensitivity approaches with their classes as a part of the normal subject-matter content of the courses. This "Pilot Project To Explore Ways To Adapt Approaches in the Affective Domain to the School Curriculum" did not include any attempt to measure statistically the effect of the sensitivity exercises on students, but relied instead only on "clinical" evaluation. One teacher's evaluation of the program included the following points: "Better learning of cognitive material; heightened motivation and response to learning situations; greater appreciation of self, nature, others, feelings, etc.; greater pupil responsibility; lessening the desire for drug use on the part of some students and for 'mind-blowing' on the part of others."¹

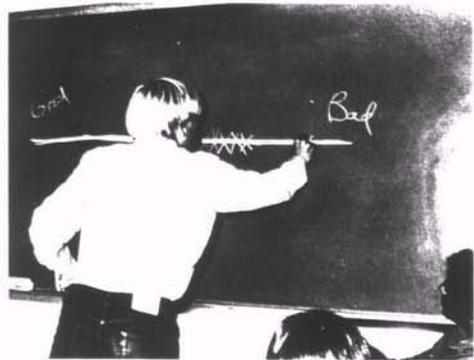
The Human Relations Education Project of Western New York, funded under Title III of ESEA, was established after a survey of educational needs in the region identified human relations education as being of highest priority. Under the direction of James J. Foley, the project attempts "to improve the teaching of human understanding by developing in teachers a greater awareness and sensitivity to the human relations approach. This approach stresses respect for the dignity of every individual and the development of more effective interpersonal relations."

¹ George I. Brown. *Now: The Human Dimension*. Big Sur, California: Esalen Institute, 1968. pp. 6-3, 6-4.

Groups of teachers experienced in the use of affective activities in the classroom work for a period of one to two weeks in an in-service program with the entire faculty of a participating school. They meet with teachers, share materials and methods, give demonstration lessons, and make suggestions for how teachers can integrate human relations training into the classwork. Although no measurement of changes in student attitudes or behavior was undertaken, the staff of the Human Relations Education Project did find a significant change in the attitudes of participating teachers, as measured by a semantic differential pretest and post-test:

Impact of Sensitivity Education

To determine more carefully the impact which sensitivity education has on the attitudes and behavior of participating students, I undertook the teaching of experimental English classes at Horton Watkins High School in suburban St. Louis during the school year 1969-70. In an experiment designed by Gordon R. Garrett, the school's Director of Research, groups which received the sensitivity education were paired with control groups meeting at the same time and taught by the same teacher. Each experimental group and each control group comprised approximately ten or twelve students in grades 10-12. Two pairs of groups studied grammar and composition for the semester;



. . . while Kevin demonstrates that he feels more strongly against it than others in the class.



By sitting back to back, students discover that eye contact and nonverbal cues are essential to good communication.

two other pairs studied nonfiction and science fiction literature for the same period of time.

Both experimental and control groups were expected to cover the same cognitive subject matter for their courses. But experimental groups spent approximately one-half of their class time experiencing learning activities in the affective domain. These ranged from giving their first impressions of one another to practicing maintaining eye contact while talking to another person.²

Whenever possible, the affective activities were linked directly to the subject matter of the course. For example, a group might be told to locate and correct all the improperly used pronouns in a paragraph furnished by the teacher—but with half the class acting as observers of the process, later furnishing their classmates with feedback on their performance. Or they might be given a short description of the various roles a member can play in a group—initiator, summarizer, etc.—and then be put to work writing as a group a paragraph in a particular style, with each person having been assigned one of these roles to play during the discussion.

The science fiction class played the “Lost on the Moon” game—described in “Interac-

² A complete description of most of these activities appears in an earlier publication: Gene Stanford and Barbara Dodds Stanford. *Learning Discussion Skills Through Games*. New York: Citation Press, 1969.

tion Briefs” in the February 1969 issue of *Today's Education*—as a means of learning to listen carefully to the contributions of others and reach consensus. The game was followed by reading a short story about a lunar explorer who gets separated from his mother ship. Nonfiction students read Ardis Whitman's essay, “Let Us Speak to One Another,” and then discussed what things were impeding open communication within their own classroom group.

Analysis of the results of the experiment is not complete at this writing; however, some outcomes are apparent. Experimental groups demonstrated more ability to accept the value of all members' contributions, take responsibility to contribute to discussion, and respond to other contributions, as measured by direct observation using the *Classroom Interaction Management Analysis Record* developed by Richard A. Schusler. The difference between experimental groups and control groups in this regard is significant at the .01 level. Members of experimental groups appear to have felt significantly closer (at the .001 level) in their relationship with the teacher and with other members of their class than those in control groups.

A pupil reaction questionnaire administered at the end of the study indicates that students in experimental groups felt they learned more about getting along with others, learned more about themselves, enjoyed this class more than any other, and would recommend that all classes be taught in this way, than did the students in the control groups. In the cognitive realm, experimental groups—who devoted only one-half of their classroom time to cognitive goals—did at least as well as control groups, who had the entire period for work on subject matter. In the case of the groups studying grammar, the experimental groups showed significantly more improvement (at the .01 level) than did the control groups. In short, the study provides specific evidence that taking time for sensitivity education can make a significant difference in a class's attitudes and ability to work together, while not reducing pupils' progress toward cognitive objectives.

Assuming that a school district is con-

vinced of the need to include deliberate human relations training in its curriculum, what is the best way to begin? First, teachers must determine the specific affective goals they see as the concern of the school. Frequently these are already included in a general way in the school's philosophy or statement of objectives, but they need to be translated into concrete, behavioral terms. After teachers are certain about what goals in the affective domain they wish to promote, they are ready to devise deliberate activities to move students toward these goals.

The activities designed and adapted by such experimental programs as the Brown Project and the Human Relations Education Project mentioned earlier may be useful or may suggest other possibilities. In-service training in group dynamics and humanistic

psychology may provide helpful background information. While teachers are devising the training activities they wish to use, they should be alert for appropriate ways to integrate these into their existing course of study. Released time should be provided for the writing of actual lesson plans and the sharing of ideas with other teachers.

Human relations training exercises can be a valuable part of the student's classroom experiences. In addition to helping his social development, such training, when integrated into the curriculum, can increase his ability to work with other members of the class and in some cases can actually improve his performance in subject matter. School districts should not hesitate, therefore, to translate their abstract objectives in the affective domain into deliberate learning experiences. □

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