

Toward a Technology Which Helps Teachers Humanize Their Classrooms

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THE statement, "It's nice to be nice, but you've got to teach them something," has long been used by some educators to justify placing greater emphasis upon cognitive content than on interpersonal relationships. This statement reflects a basic notion that humaneness and knowing something are, or may be, antithetical. That is, there seems to be a widespread assumption in teaching that the best way to get students to learn something is by being "tough" on them. The toughness very often leads to practices which dehumanize the classroom, and our national dropout problem partially reflects this condition.¹

Writers have not been silent on the effects of low levels of human nourishment in the classroom. Cronbach says that it is obvious that considerateness is better than harshness.² In his book, *How Children Fail*, John Holt states that, "They fail because they are afraid, bored, and confused. They are afraid, above all else, of failure, or disappointing or displeasing the many anxious adults around them."³ Glasser adds his voice to these in his book, *Schools Without Failure*.⁴

¹ D. Schreiber. "700,000 Dropouts." *American Education* 45: 5-7; June 1968.

² Lee J. Cronbach. *Educational Psychology*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1963.

³ John Holt. *How Children Fail*. New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1964.

⁴ William Glasser. *Schools Without Failure*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1968.

In a study of third grade students, Aspy found that the levels of empathy, congruence, and positive regard provided by the teacher relate positively and significantly to the cognitive growth of his students.⁵ Thus, the writer is attacking the notion that a classroom must emphasize its humane or its cognitive components. Indeed, the evidence is that these two components are complementary.

One of the difficulties faced by those who wish to enhance the level of humaneness in classrooms has been the lack of assessment procedures. However, this problem has been somewhat solved by the modification of a technique developed for evaluation of psychotherapy interviews.⁶ The general process is quite simple and employs two basic components: (a) audio tape recordings of normal classroom procedure; and (b) evaluation of those audio recordings by trained raters who employ scales for various dimensions of the classroom interaction. The dimensions which have been investigated are: (a) Teacher Response to Student Meaning;⁷ (b) Teacher

⁵ D. N. Aspy. "The Effect of Teacher-Offered Conditions of Empathy, Positive Regard, and Congruence upon Student Achievement." *Florida Journal of Educational Research* 9: 39-48; January 1969.

⁶ C. B. Truax and R. R. Carkhuff. *Toward Effective Counseling and Psychotherapy*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1967.

⁷ D. N. Aspy, *op. cit.*

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Genuineness;⁸ (c) Teacher Respect for Students;⁹ (d) Teacher Promotion of Student Success;¹⁰ and (e) Student Involvement.¹¹ Each of these scales has been employed successfully by trained raters, and the results are significantly and positively related to students' cognitive gain as measured by standardized achievement tests.

A Model Study

The remaining issue is whether these scales can be employed by a school in the improvement of its program. Fortunately, several schools have begun such an investigation, and by reporting the results for one of those schools it is possible to delineate some relevant aspects of the procedure which is emerging.

Teachers at the Burtonville Elementary School in Burtonville, Maryland, audio tape recorded one hour of their normal classroom

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ D. N. Aspy, "Better Self Concepts Through Success Promotion," *Journal of Negro Education*. (In press.)

¹¹ D. N. Aspy, "The Measurement of Student Involvement," *Contemporary Education*. (In press.)

Teacher	Flanders' Categories									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
A	0	3	2	29	8	16	0	37	0	3
B	0	5	2	29	3	16	3	31	1	7
C	0	3	3	16	3	16	4	36	12	3
D	0	1	0	18	13	10	2	45	0	11
E	0	3	7	18	12	11	0	23	19	7
F	0	8	4	37	1	12	1	30	1	5
G	0	0	3	25	0	5	0	36	27	3
H	0	1	12	14	8	14	3	42	0	5
I	0	0	1	36	1	8	0	49	2	3
J	0	0	4	28	7	4	0	42	5	11
K	0	0	2	7	3	6	3	70	6	1
L	0	0	10	5	5	1	0	13	65	0
M	0	5	3	24	2	9	1	49	0	5
N	0	0	1	8	4	0	0	33	41	0
O	0	1	5	31	17	11	0	29	0	4
P	0	0	3	5	0	0	0	77	12	2
Q	0	15	2	28	0	6	0	45	3	1
R	0	3	1	30	0	10	1	36	0	20

Table 1. Percent of Time in Each of the Categories During One Hour of Classroom Activity

activity. They then forwarded these recordings to the University of Florida College of Education, where three trained raters evaluated them on each of the scales mentioned earlier. The results are listed in Tables 1 and 2.

These results along with those of previous studies were then forwarded to the teachers and principal at Burtonville Elementary School. The previous studies were included to provide information about the relationship of the scale ratings to other components of the school, that is, achievement test gains and attendance. Also, they indicated procedures which might be employed by the Burtonville School.

The principal and faculty at Burtonville Elementary School decided to use the data from the tape ratings to investigate three phases of their program:

1. The relationship of the levels of facilitative conditions to student achievement
2. The relationship of the levels of facilitative conditions to student attendance
3. The variation in the levels of facilitative conditions between days of the week. (That is, were they more constructive on Monday than on Friday?)

In addition to these studies they began to investigate procedures they might employ within their own faculties to enhance their already high levels of human nourishment. This extension of the study meant audio tape recording more classes throughout the year to determine the stability of the levels of human facilitation.

These are just beginnings, but they represent the kind of effort which we think is both possible and practical at this point in time. Certainly, it gives these teachers an opportunity to come to grips with the issue of just how effectively they are implementing their belief that the human being is important in their classrooms. In addition, these teachers represent the kinds of courageous educators who are asking bold questions and are willing to put themselves on the line to find the answers.

One final piece of information seems of utmost importance. Since two principals

Teacher	Success promotion	Student involvement	Meaning	Genuineness	Respect
A	3.3	4.0	3.0	3.3	3.6
B	4.0	4.3	3.9	3.6	3.9
C	3.9	4.1	4.0	4.0	3.8
D	3.0	4.0	3.0	3.0	3.8
E	4.1	4.5	4.4	4.3	4.0
F	3.0	4.1	4.0	4.1	4.0
G	3.7	4.4	4.2	3.8	4.2
H	3.0	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.4
I	3.8	4.3	4.0	4.3	4.3
J	3.5	3.9	3.8	3.9	3.6
K	4.0	4.4	3.5	3.7	3.7
L	5.0	5.0	4.9	4.9	5.0
M	3.0	4.0	3.8	3.7	3.8
N	4.0	4.2	3.8	3.9	4.5
O	3.0	4.0	3.5	3.3	3.6
P	3.7	3.5	3.5	4.0	3.5
Q	3.5	4.0	3.9	3.5	4.0
R	3.3	3.8	3.9	4.4	3.5

Each of the scales has five points, with "1" representing low levels and "5" representing high levels.

Table 2. Average Level Achieved During One Hour of Classroom Teaching

simultaneously expressed an interest in pursuing this type of study, it was possible to observe the "administrator effect" upon this process. From a previous study we had assessed these two administrators' levels of empathy, congruence, and positive regard

during an interview with an undergraduate student. The Burtonville principal performed well above the minimal facilitative levels described by Truax and Carkhuff,¹² while the second principal was well below those levels. The foregoing writing describes the results obtained by the Burtonville principal, while, by way of contrast, the second principal reported that his teachers would be too threatened to participate in such a study.

The results of this phase of the investigation suggest that the principal's level of interpersonal functioning may be a significant factor in determining his teachers' willingness to become involved in this kind of in-service training. Perhaps the ultimate proof of the Burtonville principal's trusting relationship with his faculty lies in the fact that even though his teachers were given the option of identifying their tapes with either their names or a code number, *all* of them printed their names on their tapes. Apparently this principal was able to communicate his genuineness in a manner which helped his teachers perform in professionally courageous ways. *This* is the climate in which we can afford to ask *real* questions and get *real* answers. □

¹²C. B. Truax and R. R. Carkhuff, *op. cit.*

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