

A curriculum plan for a sensitive area

To Teach Loving

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LOVING and being loved are two of the most fundamental and misunderstood of all human needs. Teaching children to love has not been considered very exciting, or even possible, so schools have never taken the opportunity to devise ways to make the teaching of loving possible. Crime and divorce rates, military conflicts, and mental health statistics all are convincing evidence of the need to include loving as a central focus in the curriculum.

The most significant factor in teaching students to love is the atmosphere (in or out of the classroom) created by the teacher and other adults. Only when the adult role model is a loving one will all that s/he does become meaningful to children. If adults working with children or teenagers can express their concerns openly and warmly, most students will learn to respond similarly. One of the most difficult things to remember is that loving a person means granting privacy and accepting negative feelings, in addition to providing companionship.

Children, like adults, can love and respond to love only when they feel worthy of being loved. The first task in teaching loving, therefore, is to help each child develop a positive self-concept. Many opportunities for success, as well as challenges, are necessary to maintain this positive self-concept.

The teacher's personality is vital in helping children feel valuable as people. In pro-

viding for the individual's social, emotional, and physical needs, the teacher must maintain an honest relationship with children. Being cheerful and displaying affection in simple ways can add to this loving atmosphere. Asking for, listening to, and using children's opinions are excellent ways to convince others of their importance. A classroom where people are able to talk out their differences, rather than resort to physical or verbal abuse, will provide patterns for relationships which can continue as an integral part of the child's life style.

A teacher who makes a conscious attempt to demonstrate loving attitudes can then begin to develop classroom activities which will further extend experiences in loving situations. The following suggestions can readily be adapted to include children of all ages. Many are experiences currently shared in most classrooms already, but the purpose of these is to teach loving. The activities are listed in broad curriculum areas, but their implications for loving reach far beyond the classroom.

● **LANGUAGE ARTS** activities offer excellent opportunities for a child to express many emotions, including love. Reading or being read to in a loving manner can have an

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immense emotional impact on children, although bibliotherapy should be attempted only by a trained therapist. Children who feel alienated may relate well to Taro Yashima's *Crow Boy* (Seafarer Books, 1969) or *The Hundred Dresses* by Eleanor Estes (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich). Family relationships may be clarified through reading *Sam* by Barbara Corcoran (Atheneum, 1967) or *Peter's Chair* by Ezra Jack Keats (Harper & Row, 1967). For older children, *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is especially suitable in a curriculum based on loving.

Records, flannelboard stories, or stories told by adults or children can lead to the discovery of ways that others express feelings. The record "Free To Be You and Me" from Bell Records contains a variety of stories and songs designed to develop pride in children. "William's Doll" and "It's All Right To Cry" by Rosey Grier are among the excellent presentations done on the record.

Younger children can dictate stories or letters, while older students can write or type theirs. These personal stories are very important in maintaining an atmosphere of acceptance of the child's feelings. They may also serve to help the child clarify personal emotions or thoughts.

Puppets created by children from a variety of materials may allow the child to express emotions that s/he would be reluctant to voice otherwise, as happened to a kindergartner named Tommy, who needed a furry bear puppet to talk to his friends the first few days.

Pictures are an excellent aid for starting discussions, writing stories, or creating collages. Polaroid pictures, slides of classroom activities, or baby pictures may lead to an improved self-concept.

Poetry, fingerplays, and nursery rhymes have expressed emotions for many generations. For example, "Little" by Dorothy Aldis may help children better understand siblings.

In a room for young children the house-keeping corner, including dolls and dress up clothes, is valuable in helping children express emotions and explore roles. Older children might choose to videotape them-



Photos by Charles McClurg

A positive self-concept helps children to love and respond to love.

selves in role-playing situations for further discussion and evaluation of their behavior.

Incidents often occur in the classroom or elsewhere which can also be used as the focus of a discussion. Open ended questions such as "What would you do if . . . ?" provide unlimited opportunities for students to propose alternate solutions to their problems.

● **MUSIC** is another excellent curriculum area through which children can explore feelings. "If All Men Are Truly Brothers" is not well known, but the words are extremely appropriate in developing the ability to love. Moving to music can be an exciting or relaxing way to release emotions. Listening to "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks" can result in a variety of activities based on his adventures.

Music from different cultures as well as American folk songs are sources of information about people and can be fun to learn as well. The story of *Baboushka and the Three Kings* by Ruth Robbins (Parnassus, 1960) is followed by a plaintive Russian folk song which brought tears to the eyes of four-year-olds Debbie and Chelly.

Children should also be encouraged to



create freely their own rhythmic patterns and moods with their bodies, voices, and a variety of instruments.

● **SOCIAL STUDIES** has often been the only segment of the curriculum which dealt in any way with feelings. Extending many of these classroom activities will make it possible for children to explore human emotions such as love.

Field trips might be planned to observe how adults work to help other people. Follow-up activities could include experience stories, role playing, or further exploration of careers. Visitors to the classroom could demonstrate more portable interests and vocations. Children should be actively involved in the planning and decision making for field trips or visits, working together to make all arrangements.

Many commercial kits are available which are designed to help teachers organize their thoughts in planning for group activities in the affective domain. These kits are expensive, but could be useful as a resource guide.

● Explorations in **SCIENCE** and **MATHEMATICS** are useful in helping children discover more about themselves and the physical world, which in turn can lead to greater self-awareness, a most necessary prerequisite to loving. Weighing and measuring their own bodies is an excellent method for students to learn more about themselves. Traits such as eye color, arm length, or ring size might be compared for unique and similar features.

Mirrors are important tools for all children in learning to know their bodies, as, for example, they make facial expressions or twist into unusual positions.

Pets in the classroom can be a source of great joy, as well as heartbreak and work. Guinea pigs, hamsters, or gerbils can soon capture the attention and love of a child, often before s/he can express similar feelings toward people. Yet the pets can be used to study animal and human behavior, as science explorations, or as mathematical projects.

● Feelings are often communicated through **ART**. Providing a wealth of beautiful junk can extend children's imaginations, create group working situations, make it

possible to make and wrap a birthday present, or provide the freedom for the sensory experience of just messing. Finger painting may be done quietly or with music, and need not be limited to fingers or even arms. Clay might be smashed in anger, providing a safe vent for the child's feelings, while happier moments may bring about the creation of beautiful sculpture.

Using these activities in addition to those individual teachers feel most comfortable with can, when combined with a loving personality, create an atmosphere of love and understanding in the classroom. However, only when the results are evident will teachers know just how much influence their behavior has exerted. Evaluating a child's progress in the ability to express love can probably best be done with written records based on close observation. Children can be observed on the playground, as they arrive or leave, or in everyday group situations. Discussion with parents, sometimes during home visits, may lead to a better understanding of the ways the child functions at home. All record keeping must be done regularly so that changes can be noted in the child's behavior.

Children who are given many opportunities to love and feel loved when they are young will have an excellent foundation for continuing that growth process as adults. All the activities which a child engages in will be of little value, however, unless adults in the classroom and at home provide loving, understanding role models for children. Only in an atmosphere of love and understanding can planned activities be most effective in helping children grow to love both themselves and others.

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