

The Humane School Is the Human Relations Curriculum

Elliot W. Eisner

Concern with affective aspects of education is still peripheral or absent in most schools, while state mandated testing programs and the pressures they generate are very much in the ascendancy.

IT IS significant that, in a period in which schools and teachers are being asked to be accountable for educational skills defined largely in terms of achievement in academic areas, *Educational Leadership* should devote its pages to the quality of human relationships fostered by the school. This topic, it would seem, swims against the tide. Yet it is precisely when the pressures to industrialize schooling are greatest that the need to reemphasize the human and humane aspects of educational life becomes increasingly important. Make no mistake, concern with affective aspects of education are still peripheral or absent in most schools, while state mandated testing programs and the pressures they generate are very much in the ascendancy. California alone has allocated \$800,000 for statewide assessment and the humane or affective aspects of education—for good or for ill—find no place in the assessment program.

In a way, the rise of national and statewide assessment, the preoccupation with measurable results, the growing pressure to routinize educational practice through pre-packaged, prescribed materials and tech-

niques is antithetical to two of the major lessons learned from the curriculum reform movement of the sixties. One lesson is that educational reform will not be achieved by attending to only the curriculum piecemeal. Educational reform is wider and more complex than curriculum reform. The other lesson is that what children learn in school is not determined solely by the content of the curriculum. The organization of the school, the value code that pervades it, the expectations that exist within it for both teachers and students, the rewards and sanctions that it employs; these teach as surely as the formally defined content of the formally adopted curriculum. These two lessons—the complex character of educational reform and the multidimensional nature of learning and experience—have much to say to those concerned with improving the quality of life in the school. They suggest that one is not likely to improve human relations within a school by injecting a human relations curriculum into it. One can teach the westward movement by including it as a content of the social studies curriculum, but human relations (by which I mean *humane* relations) cannot be allocated to Monday through Friday from 9:00 to 10:15. The seductiveness of such an approach is worth resisting. What we are concerned with, I assume, is the creation of an environment that develops competencies of mind while recognizing that such competencies may take form in different areas, in different modalities, and are

expressible through different means. Furthermore, the actualization of different competencies is not hierarchical in value. Children should have the opportunity to achieve in a variety of realms without feeling less able if those realms do not employ the use of linguistic or numerical symbols.

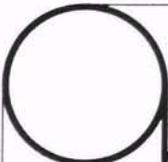
Now this is easy for me to say but very difficult to put into practice. Our schools have a history, we are all creatures of habit, and the public has expectations that are operationalized in standardized testing both local and statewide. That history, these habits of mind, and the public's expectations continue to shape what we reward in school. These expectations influence what receives attention and support by teachers, what will count as good teaching, and what will be regarded as evidence of educational growth. The humane aspects of development are difficult to measure and simply fail to show up for serious consideration at school board meetings. The public takes a tough and a narrow view of what counts. And why not? Savvy parents understand full well what counts is college board exam scores; they understand clearly that qualities of kindness, integrity, compassion, and honesty count for next to nothing in getting into the college of their choice for their children. The public—the knowledgeable public—recognizes what counts and wants the schools to focus on those things that do.

Thus, what I believe we need to realize is that the creation of a truly humane environment in the school is not going to be the consequence of adopting the new as against

the old math; ESS science as against AAAS science. What we are talking about is, at the minimum, a three-dimensional approach to the creation of a humane school.

● First, we need to conceptualize the features that define such an environment. What does such a school—say at the elementary level serving a particular school population—require with regard to what students shall study? What role should students play in making decisions about school life? How should rewards in the school be secured? Can a school, for example, continue to have an honors program for students who are by a particular set of criteria academically able? What does such an accolade say to students whose aptitudes reside in other areas? What type of interpersonal life is relevant to the goals of such a school? What kinds of opportunities should be provided for students to pursue private educational interests? In what ways should students determine the collective good of the school or classroom? In short, the development of a humane school requires a vision of educational possibilities consonant with the overall image of the school itself.

The task of creating such an institution requires at the same time becoming sensitive to the ways in which the present school violates such an image. Honors classes pay homage to but one segment of the school population. Does that group alone define educational virtue? But we must go beyond honors classes and see through the values embedded in other aspects of school life as



bservational
methods
in the
classroom

Edited by
Charles W. Beegle
Richard M. Brandt

Stock No.: 611-17948 96 pp. \$3.50

Order from
Association for Supervision
and Curriculum Development
Suite 1100
1701 K Street, N.W.
Washington, D. C. 20006

it now exists. This will not be easy, and certainly will not develop unless the administration of the school and the teaching staff jointly do some soul searching in an atmosphere pervaded by a sense of trust. In writing these lines I know they appear like simple homilies representing virtues of an older age. But what is better?—the more modern negotiating stance of the management and labor model which converts educational planning into labor arbitration? That direction, as far as I can tell, will lead only to continued strife and ill will.

● The second dimension to be considered in building such a school deals with the support that must come from the parents who send their children to the school. It is in this arena that the principal and the superintendent play a crucial role. If they are committed to the importance of these aspects of learning it behooves them to remove their wet finger from the wind and become people whose educational activities focus upon the community. Administrators must see their clients not only as the students attending the schools, they must also see them as those adults in the community without whose support such a school cannot come into existence. The scope of the administrator's educational responsibility in such a model must expand. Their role must be both one of support for teachers and interpreter to the community. Their role is demanding, risky and they will, in turn, need to have the support of their teachers. Over several years the image that gave direction to the school should be closer to realization in the day to day operations of the school. It might even take a school generation to accomplish.

● The third dimension deals with the problems of evaluating the school, the teaching, and the quality of life and learning that exists there. For this to occur we will need to use not only those achievement tests appropriate to the content that is formally taught, we will also need to rely upon new approaches to evaluation that are more consistent with the phenomena we wish to describe. These new approaches will make use of descriptive narratives of school activities,

One can teach the westward movement by including it as a content of the social studies curriculum, but human relations (by which I mean humane relations) cannot be allocated to Monday through Friday from 9:00 to 10:15. The seductiveness of such an approach is worth resisting.

logs kept by teachers and students, film clips in the form of cinema verité, slides, and samples of children's work, interview tapes with children, and other devices that will give the public and the teaching staff a more comprehensive and balanced view of the culture in which children are spending a major portion of their childhood. One reason that the public uses such a parochial criterion for assessing schools at present is because those of us in education have provided no competing alternatives. I am not arguing for an alternative as much as for a broader, more generous conception of what is educationally significant and for devices and procedures that will capture it for all to see. Educational evaluation in the humane school must not violate what the creators of such a school hope it to be. On the contrary, educational evaluation appropriately conceived and sensitively employed should enhance the achievement of the goals of the school.

The aspiration to help children learn how to see, feel, and relate, I have argued, cannot be successfully realized by single-minded attention to a single curriculum; the problem resides in the ubiquitous character of the school itself. Serious attention to the problem of creating such a school will demand nothing less than the best we have to offer. Unless we are willing to make a commitment to the comprehensive reappraisal of what we do in school our time will be better spent making decisions about the westward movement.

—ELLIOT W. EISNER, *Professor of Education and Art, Stanford University, Stanford, California.*

Copyright © 1974 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.