
Pressures of today's events are forcing education to deal more adequately with improving human relations. Man's hope for survival depends greatly upon the quality of his relations with his fellow man.

Designing a Human Relations Curriculum

CAROL FLERES*
VIRGINIA BENMAMAN

NEW programs in today's schools seem to have provided better and more efficient ways of developing cognitive skills, yet education generally is still hovering about the perimeters of affective learning. However, affective learning is of great importance in preparing children to meet their world. The academic areas, therefore, must deal with the internal forces of Man and must teach the skills needed for understanding one's self and relating successfully to others.



Every person needs to feel loved, to feel important, and to belong.

The foundations of good citizenship are laid in the early school years. As the child moves from a predominately egocentric position to a more sociocentric one, active involvement in the study of human relations will sensitize him or her to the needs of others. If such involvement is not encouraged, then it becomes increasingly difficult to understand the nature of the partnership between the individual and society. For, as the child begins to understand how his or her own feelings shape his or her behavior, he or she also comes to appreciate the relationship between the motives and actions of others.

Involvement with the study of human relations extends beyond any specific content area to the social context of classroom living. Crucial in such study, is a non-threatening classroom environment in which students are encouraged to discuss their feelings rather than to repress them. Verbalizing their inner world may leave personal conflicts, inconsistencies of thought, and inconsistencies between stated beliefs and subsequent actions open to scrutiny. At the same time, such an approach gives students an opportunity to see that their own problems

** Carol Fleres, Assistant Professor of Education, Baptist College at Charleston, South Carolina; and Virginia Benmaman, Assistant Professor of Spanish, College of Charleston, South Carolina*

are not unique. Such an environment allows children to grow in their ability to accept themselves, to tolerate alternative points of view, and to empathize with others.

Structuring the Curriculum

The authors feel that a cookbook approach to the teaching of human relations is inadequate. Such an approach denies the teacher the opportunity to view the uniqueness of his or her classroom situation, and to develop his or her own teaching style. The teacher's active role as well as that of the student in structuring a program becomes truly meaningful only when it is created from the current needs felt in the life situation of the classroom. Instead of a ready-made set of procedures, then, the authors wish to share a series of suggestions gleaned from their own years of experience in dealing with human relations in the classroom.

Following are some concepts essential to any program for improving the quality of interpersonal relationships.

Key Concepts

1. Every person needs to feel loved, to feel important, and to belong. These needs are fulfilled by interacting with others.

2. Man's perception of his own worth is influenced by the way others treat him. In turn, he tends to act according to the way he believes others see him.

3. Feelings are neither right nor wrong. A sign of maturity is a growing awareness that different feelings exist, though they need not always be directly translated into action.

4. Individuals and groups tend to avoid or discriminate against persons who are different from themselves.

5. Individuals act according to their own unique perception of reality. They are prompted to act, not on facts alone, but by their beliefs and feelings about these facts.

6. Attitudes, values, and behavior are shaped by many interacting forces. Though seemingly fixed, all three can be modified.

Suggested Activities

Classroom Living

Consider those problems which occur daily in the classroom: John takes Mary's pencil. Sam kicks Joe for no apparent reason. A new child is excluded from a game. Such common incidents are choice sources on which to build a human relations curriculum. Take examples directly from your classroom and utilize the following techniques to study the dynamics of human interaction.

1. Interviews
2. Questionnaires
3. Stories
4. Recordings
5. Open-ended stories and sentences
6. Role playing situations
7. Photographs.

The Community

Often the study of human relations is but one aspect of an interdisciplinary approach to learning. The community is an endless resource which provides a multitude of channels for human expression. To illustrate:

Plan a field trip to a cemetery. Explore the following dimensions:

1. Who are the people that may be involved with the death and burial of the persons there? What are their roles? Are their services free?

2. Who attends a funeral? How are the people dressed? What can you learn about the dead person by observing the funeral party?

3. Compare the different tombstones. How are tombstones selected? Notice the dates and epitaphs. Who composes the messages on the tombstones?

Other community resources that are frequently overlooked exist for the study of human relations. Consider the following and develop guidelines for inquiry as in the previous example:



1. What can be learned on a bus trip?
2. What can be learned at a family services center?
3. What can be learned at a ball game?
4. What can you learn from a teacher of special education?
5. What can you learn from an elderly person?
6. What can you learn from a disabled veteran?

Current Events

Today's news may be tomorrow's history, to be sure, but facts alone do little to foster interpersonal and intergroup understanding especially when one considers how much the portrayal of facts is colored by the perception of those reporting the news. Some suggestions for increasing children's understanding of news events follow:

Focus on the problems of the aged, the crisis at Wounded Knee, or Watergate.

1. Develop a situation for role playing to help children get the "feel" of what is happening from various points of view.



Human relations extends beyond the confines of the classroom. The community is an endless resource which provides a multitude of channels for human expression.

2. What concepts might be developed in discussing the issues that have arisen in these situations?

Be creative! Develop innovative activities for viewing current events and controversial issues in light of human relations.

Activity Cards

Activity cards help a child to learn by doing in a personal manner. They are especially useful for eliciting meaningful responses, provided that they afford the student sufficient latitude in shaping his or her answers. The following is an example of what might appear on a card.

1. Cut out pictures of people from magazines. Paste them in a notebook.
2. Write, dictate, or tape ideas to show what each person might be thinking or feeling. (You might like to work with a friend.)
3. Describe similar experiences that you have had. How did you feel at the time?

Activity cards might also be geared to a bulletin board display. To illustrate: On a bulletin board a number of faces are pictured around a large mirror. The faces represent a full range of ages and expressions. The activity card might ask:

1. Which are the happy faces? Why do you think they are happy?

2. What kinds of things do you do when you want to make someone happy?

3. What things make people feel sad? What kinds of expressions show sadness?

4. Look into the mirror and think about the face you see. How do you think you look?

5. Do you believe your friends think about you in the same way you think about yourself?

Develop activity cards around the following concepts:

1. All too often children as well as adults confuse the part with the whole. For example, they will view a person as being bad when he or she displays a "bad" trait. Yet tolerance of one's own weaknesses as well as those of others is a fundamental skill to be learned.

2. Emotions do not occur in isolation. Many contingencies are brought to bear on a momentary emotional reaction.

In a world where the volume of knowledge increases tenfold yearly, where technology makes last year's innovations seem dated, where civilian uprisings, assassinations, and monetary fluctuations affect every part of the globe, education is urgently pressed to deal with human relations. Man's hope for survival depends on how well he is able to relate with his fellow man.

References

- Alfred Aarons, Barbara Gordon, and William Stewart, editors. "Linguistic and Cultural Differences and American Education." Miami, Florida: *Florida Foreign Language Reporter* 7 (1); 1969.
- Edmund Bullis. *Human Relations in the Classroom*. Vols. I, II, and III. Wilmington, Delaware: State Society for Mental Hygiene, 1951.
- Sir Alec Clegg. *Revolution in the British Primary Schools*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1971.
- William Glasser. *Schools Without Failure*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1971.
- William Glasser. *The Effect of School Failure on the Life of the Child*. Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1971.
- Earl Kelley. *Education for What Is Real*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1947.
- Ronald Lippitt and Robert Fox. *Elementary Social Science Program*. Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1969.
- Ashley Montagu. *On Being Human*. New York: Hawthorn Book Company, 1966.
- Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner. *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*. New York: Delta Books, 1969.
- Charles Silberman. *Crisis in the Classroom*. New York: Vintage Books, 1970.
- Alvin Toffler. *Future Shock*. New York: Bantam Books, 1970.
- Richard Wurman. *Yellow Pages of Learning Resources*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: M.I.T. Press, 1972. □

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