

# Can Human Relations Be Taught Through a Formalized Program?

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**E**DUCATIONAL philosophy has become increasingly concerned with formalized programs offering challenges to learning that lead to personal growth and development. It is clear from the literature that the formalized program increasingly has become the vehicle an individual uses to realize his or her full potential. Jersild (2) says beautifully and succinctly that the purpose of the formalized program is to help children and youth acquire realistic attitudes toward actualization of human potential. Such programs support the individual's search for an understanding of his or her needs and wants, his or her emotions, his or her strengths and weaknesses, and his or her behavior.

In *Self Renewal* John Gardner (1) suggests that the formalized program should allow for the development of skills, habits of mind, and the kinds of knowledge and understanding that will enable young people to be involved in a continuous process of change and growth. He points out that much education today is monumentally ineffective because learners are viewed as vessels to be filled instead of persons in process needing tools to facilitate the process. What is required are programs that will help individuals develop inner resources so that they can attain an independence in learning and be able to cope with the unforeseen and unpredictable challenges of a constantly changing world.

Two types of learning that take place in

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*A formalized program stressing supportive behavior and a continuing dialogue in the classroom will enhance both learning and human relations.*

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schools are conceptualized by Rogers in *Freedom To Learn* (9). One type is an insignificant, meaningless, rote learning in the form of curricular offerings that have little or no relationship to the background of the learner. This kind of learning involves the mind only and demands that the learner take on the task of memorizing much irrelevant material. The second type is significant, meaningful, experiential learning. This kind of learning is self-initiated and pervasive, involving both the affective and cognitive aspects of the learner. It makes real difference in the behavior, attitudes, and personality of the individual. The formalized program all too often supports the learner in the first type of learning discussed. It involves a prescribed curriculum, the same assignments for all students, lecturing as the most popular mode of instruction, predominantly teacher directed classroom activities, standard tests by which all children are externally evaluated, and instructor evaluation processes. If education is to be a viable, alive process which supports

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the growth of the learner, programs must change in ways that allow significant, meaningful learning to take place.

It is evident from Silberman's report in *Crisis in the Classroom* (10) that an effective formalized program encompasses several objectives; namely to enable students to: (a) learn basic skills of literacy and computation; (b) develop an independent learning style; (c) prepare to live a creative, humane, and sensitive life; and (d) experience life fully in the here and now.

### **The Most Effective Person**

My conviction is that the effective school program makes available curricular offerings that provide the avenue by which an individual travels while moving toward becoming the most effective person he or she can become. Clark Moustakas in his writings (4, 5, 6,) has indicated that educational pro-

grams should be organized and administered in such a way that both the teacher and the learner are valued and that each can come to new awareness and experience growth. A few years ago, Clark and I created a program designed to humanize learning in public schools.

Our program encourages children to use their own resources in learning to discover and develop their capacities and thus to become full, free, and unique persons. Adults are available to support and encourage the child's development, listening and taking their cues from children and offering guidance where it will facilitate fulfillment of the child's own objectives and goals. The program recognizes the vital facets of a healthy learning environment; emphasizes the importance of awareness in learning; presents the appropriate place of academic content in humanistic education; and points up the values of open and honest communication in the development of positive human relations in the school (7).

The development of awareness is a central concept in our program. It is necessary that children develop self awareness in order to experience learning as an alive and vital process. Awareness develops through concentrated attention and focusing; the individual is in touch with inner states; he is experiencing his real self (8).

Since self awareness is the first step toward genuine, enduring learning, we created projects and activities which recognized the immediate concerns and feelings of the child. Each child was beginning to become more sensitized and to learn special things about himself or herself, and also to develop an awareness of others. The total experience provided the foundation for the development of positive human relations.

Reading, writing, and arithmetic do have a place in our program. We put little or no emphasis on test scores, national norms, or the acquisition of knowledge to satisfy others, but we are interested in academic content and cognitive processes. The learners' objectives are more important than administrative and/or teacher objectives. The child is encouraged to present his or her unique ideas and ways of doing things. Academic content provides avenues through which children move toward the development of independent learning styles which satisfy them. The academic program provides opportunities for learners to actualize their creative potential, to be free enough to initiate and respond spontaneously, to develop a sense of responsibility and to experience courage.

## **Growth Through the Academic Program**

It was exciting to see reading and writing skills develop from an experience with art and music. Taking the children where they were and following their cues led us down some exciting learning pathways.

Since rock music was a real part of their lives this music was used as a background for finger painting and story telling. When the children completed their paintings, they wrote stories on the backs of their pictures. They sometimes asked for help with the

spelling of new words and they sometimes used the dictionary to get correct spellings. They read the completed stories to one another often enough to become familiar with the words they had written. The children expressed a great deal of satisfaction with self and satisfaction with others as they shared their paintings and stories.

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Another stimulating development related to reading was enlarging vocabulary through "feeling words." This activity was launched in response to the expression of some strong feelings in the classroom. Helping children accept the fact that it is desirable to express appropriately the total range of human emotions led to listing on the chalk board a number of "feeling words." Since contributions came from various children, many children learned new words.

These activities contributed greatly toward the attainment of some of the objectives of positive human relations; developing an understanding of self and others and valuing self and others.

Human relations through mathematics? We did find human ways of approaching mathematics; ways of helping children find fun and excitement as they developed the "expected" mathematical concepts. "*Music plus movement plus colors plus numerals*" is a great way for a child to learn to appreciate arithmetic "on its own account—just as an enjoyable experience." In this way a child finds that numbers and number concepts are consistent with the development of self.

As math activities are introduced certain principles remain in focus: (a) a pleasant success oriented program involving learning about numbers and developing skill in the use of number concepts enhances the

development of the child. (b) Content which is relevant to the life of the learner is self motivated and fosters a stimulating learning climate. (c) Encouraging different solutions to the same problem recognizes that each child has his or her own learning style and selects his or her own resources for effective learning (7).

## Growth Through Communication

In addition to the development of awareness and the use of academic content as an avenue to personal growth, the relationship between the student and the teacher strongly influences the degree to which human relations is taught through a formalized program. Haley in *Strategies of Psychotherapy* (3) discusses strategies of psychotherapists and patients as they maneuver each other in the process of treatment. Change is discussed in the framework of interpersonal theory. The use of different kinds of "treatment" in order to bring about change focuses on communicative behavior.

As I look at the teacher and his or her classroom, I see an analogy. The teacher who values significant, meaningful, experiential learning is interested in making it possible for students to effect desired changes. The desired change should take place within the student and the "treatment" should be by way of curriculum content.

The teacher needs to understand the significance of behavior to the development

of human relationships. Few teachers are aware that many of the struggles which they encounter in the classroom result from an attempt to define the relationship between student and teacher. Haley, in discussing the definition of a relationship, talks about the difficulties between two people: the classroom situation multiplies this by far. In the classroom, messages are exchanged that are verbal and nonverbal. These messages are often related to the definition of the relationship. The teacher who helps the child grow through the use of academic content will have some appreciation for the value of clearly defining the relationship.

The teacher must become aware of the wide range of behaviors exhibited by everyone in the classroom that indicate the attempt to establish a relationship. Along with defining and establishing the relationship the issue of control in the relationship is an essential one. A generally accepted dictum is that the teacher should always be in complete control of the class, but I agree with Haley's idea that in most successful relationships control shifts smoothly and continually between persons in the relationship. The teacher's awareness of relationship-related behaviors and his or her practice of encouraging control in a relationship to flow between the teacher and the learners would produce an alive, stimulating learning climate in which a great deal of permanent learning would occur and human relations would be fostered and enriched.

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