

Members of ASCD's Working Group on Humanistic Education report on a study involving "humane" characteristics of schools as noted by children and young people.

Schools Children Like: What Do They Say About Them?

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What do children say about schools they like? This is the question that the ASCD Working Group on Humanistic Education (WGHE) sought to answer. The answers to this query, the Working Group believed, would contribute to its concern for identifying humanistic characteristics of schools and would provide some pertinent data to draw on in outlining and implementing procedures for assessing and evaluating further the humanistic dimensions in schools.

Since schools are social institutions established primarily to influence and facilitate pupil behavior and learnings that maximize human effectiveness, the manner in which children perceive their schools can assist in predicting the impact of the opportunities for learning experiences that are provided for them. Impressive data support the assumptions that conditions of humaneness make a significant difference in how

children learn (Aspy, 1972, 1974, 1975; Carkhuff, 1971; Combs, 1962, 1963; Hicks, 1975; and Rogers, 1967).

Identifying Schools Children Like

It was assumed that children show their liking for a school in tangible ways. When compared with other schools in a district, the favored school should have one of the higher attendance rates, lower vandalism rates, fewer dropouts, and fewer teacher turnovers. Letters accompanied by information forms were sent to each state superintendent and other key persons in ASCD describing the project and requesting: (a) names of three schools perceived to be those that children like; (b) the identification of a contact person within each school to conduct interviews of selected children; and (c) demographic data re-

quested on the information form, to be supplied before the end of November 1975.

Tremendous cooperation was received from all individuals contacted in the follow-through phase regarding the above requests. Within three weeks of the first mailing date, responses had been received from 24 states and the District of Columbia and some 84 schools. Most of the schools identified as "schools children liked" were at the elementary level.

Contact persons were sent congratulatory letters for their schools being identified as schools children liked and were asked to assist further by: (a) providing more information about the school, and (b) interviewing or arranging for interviews of 20 or more enrollees for the purpose of collecting statements that indicated why they liked these schools.

Contact persons also were provided a brief description of procedures to follow when interviewing enrollees. They were to: (a) tell the pupil that the school had been described as a "school children like," and then, pause a while to see what interviewee comment or reaction followed; (b) encourage the student to talk by asking whether he/she felt that this accurately described their school. If the pupil seemed to like the school, the interviewer would ask why he/she liked the school. If the pupil seemed to indicate that while he/she did not necessarily like the school other pupils did like it, the interviewer would ascertain why the pupil's schoolmates liked the school. The comments to the last two questions were to be listed as accurately as possible.

By January 1, 1976, according to Table 1, contact persons (from 18 states and the District of Columbia, representing 42 schools, distributed in the four regions of the United States) had returned student interview notes that totaled 1,025 comments by students about why they liked their schools.

What Do Children Say?

Children gave a variety of reasons for liking their schools. The most frequent comments made by the pupils questioned (elementary in the main), and summarized in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5, were about: (a) people; (b) the school's uniqueness, climate, facilities, and resources; (c) specific aspects that contribute to personal worth and self-

enhancement; and (d) the curriculum, the organizational structure, and methodology.

Each of these categories of responses will be described in greater detail with a summary of pupil comments included.

People: The people in a school are key determinants in a child's liking or disliking the school. Comments that pupils made about key school people are summarized in Table 2. Five-hundred-ten pupil comments designated people in the school as being major contributing factors in shaping student attitudes toward the school. Teachers were mentioned most often (53.5 percent) in those comments about people who make schools likable. These comments about teachers were followed by comments about people generally, including the principal, friends, and others. The general comment about these people is that they are "nice" or "good to students."

Table 1. Regional Distribution of Schools Participating in Interview Phase of Study

Region	State N = 19	School N = 42	Student Interview N = 1,025
Northeastern	3	7	124
Southern	6	16	367
North Central	5	8	194
Western	5	11	340

Table 2. A Distribution of Children's Comments About the People in Their Schools

Teachers N/Pct.	The Principal N/Pct.	Friends N/Pct.	People (Generally) N/Pct.	Total Number
273/53.5	60/11.8	79/15.5	98/19.2	510

Some typical comments follow. "I like my school because my teachers are: *themselves*—nice—interesting—not mean—friendly—con-

cerned—good and fun to be with—happy—smart—proud of their work—‘out of sight’—understanding—well educated—and considerate.” “The parents who work in the classroom are nice and they always help too.” “People at the lunch center are nice.” “The secretaries are nice.” “The nurse and counselor are friendly.” “We have a custodian who is pleasant and likes kids.” “The principal will talk with you.” “I like the principal ‘cuz she’s not too mean—she’s nice and comes into the room often.”

The School—Uniqueness and Climate, Facilities, and Resources: The school—its uniqueness, its climate, facilities, and resources are mentioned frequently when young people talk about why they like their school. (See Table 3.) Over one-half (54.5 percent) of the total responses in this area alluded to the school climate and slightly less than half (45.5 percent) intimated the importance of the facilities and resources in making the school desirable to students.

Table 3. A Distribution of Children's Comments About the School's Uniqueness, Its Climate, Facilities and Resources

School Climate		Facilities and Resources		Total Number
N	Pct.	N	Pct.	
267	54.5	223	45.5	490

Uniqueness and Climate

- I like the friendly atmosphere of the students.
- I like the unity among faculty and students. We have real school spirit.
- The students cooperate with each other.
- There are special things I can do.
- Hardly anyone gets in a fight.
- Other schools are strict.
- I like this school because the students regardless of race truly seem to care, and respect each other.
- The school is fair to everyone.
- I can find a quiet place when I want it.
- It's like a big family!
- You don't get a lot of hassle—this is a fun school.
- You don't have to be popular to make it.
- Sometimes during each day, this school tries to make each child feel ten feet tall!

Facilities and Resources

- The classrooms aren't separate.
- The kitchen has good food.
- The school has central air and heating.
- We have a clean and beautiful campus with trash cans around the school.
- I like the way the library is set up.
- I like the movable furniture—when dad went to school, the desks were nailed down.
- I love it—it has no doors!
- We have clean restrooms.
- I like the media center because it's bigger, has lots more machines, books, films, and stuff.
- Hardly anyone gets in a fight here, 'cuz we have a lot of other things to do like playing ball, playing on the bars, basketball, and the media center.

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Table 4. A Distribution of Children's Comments Related to Self-Enhancement Factors

Individualized Attention N/Pct.	Learning (Liked and Wanted)		Self-Expression Involvement Responsibility		Total Number
	N/Pct.	N/Pct.	N/Pct.	N/Pct.	
126/22.0	132/23.0	216/37.6	100/17.4	574	

Freedom and Independence

- It is easier for me when I can work on my own without the teacher telling me what to do every minute.
- You learn in a fun way—like the free time I get when I finish my work.
- There is no pressure on you as a student—you can do the work without worrying about strict deadlines.
- You don't have to be quiet all of the time.
- I can work at my own speed.

Learning

- My teachers make math fun.
- We have fun doing math and reading and we like to do work and learn new things.
- I learn lots because the work is just right for us.

Individualized Attention

- The teachers are willing to help students and give extra help.
- If I have a problem any teacher or the principal will try to do something about it.
- My teacher really cares about me.
- When I walk in school I am happy because my teacher makes me laugh.
- The school counselor will help you.

Self Expression, Involvement, and Responsibility

- We get to go on field trips like the Bicentennial trip to Disneyland.
- Teachers let us do different things like putting up our own bulletin boards.
- The school provides something for me to do every day.
- Teachers let you have lots of choices and freedom but you still learn.

- I like being teacher's aide and tutor for other students.
- Teachers treat you like young men and women.
- It makes you feel like you are growing up.

Curriculum

- Experiments—the projects we are doing for Bicentennial—the band—the wide variety of subjects—our fun activities—the Book Fair—the performing arts where students interested in art, music, and/or drama get the opportunity to do their thing.
- We have physical education during classroom work time so we can build up our physical fitness skills.
- Girls get to learn everything the boys learn.

Table 5. Distribution of Children's Comments About Curriculum, Organization, and Methodology

Flexible and Varied Curriculum N/Pct.	Special, Creative Extra-Curricular Leisure Time Activities N/Pct.	Flexible Scheduling N/Pct.	Methodology N/Pct.	Total Number
232/40.3	163/28.3	78/13.6	102/17.7	575

Organization

- The unscheduled library system—the organization of class presidents and the way the wings are organized—having no report cards—having 4th and 5th and 6th all together so I can be with my friends.
- We have more privileges—longer physical education periods and interesting things to do—students may leave the lunchroom anytime.
- Here you don't have to do everything that everyone else has to do.

Methodology

- I like my school because teachers: teach their classes and show individual help—keep order in class—let us choose when

the others are working—explain work so it's not too hard for us—let you work questions before you take tests—explain work well—plan things for us—give more independent work.

Summary

The ASCD Working Group on Humanistic Education (WGHE) sought answers to the question: "What do children say about schools liked by them?" These answers would assist the group in identifying characteristics of humane schools, thus providing baseline data to be drawn on in assessing humanistic dimensions of schools.

One-thousand-twenty-five pupils representing schools throughout the United States were interviewed by January 1, 1976. Their reasons for liking their schools centered about four areas: the people; the school climate, facilities, and resources; opportunity for self-expression, involvement, and responsibility; and the flexibility of the curriculum and organizational structure.

The study represents a preliminary phase to

a variety of other studies that could assist the Working Group in defining characteristics of schools purported to be humane (those that children like). The Working Group's subcommittee on assessment might assess the classroom interaction at these schools to gain supportive data regarding the learning climate. Carkhuff's scales and Aspy's adaptations to classroom teacher interaction seem appropriate for this kind of research.

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