A Systemwide Program of Human Rights Education
Increasing staff members' and students' awareness of human rights is a districtwide commitment of the Shoreham-Wading River, New York, schools.

The Shoreham-Wading River School District (Long Island, New York) is deeply committed to staff development for human rights. By incorporating elements of training demonstrated effective in other districts, we have created a full-scale program designed to create a climate for action for human rights among teachers, students, support staff, and administrators.

**Origins of the Program**

A Title IX district self-study to review our efforts toward equity, completed in 1976, was the forerunner of our present human rights effort. A permanent Title IX compliance committee was formed, as was a curriculum committee devoted to issues of sexism. In 1982 this committee evolved into the Human Rights Curriculum Committee. The joint efforts of this strong committee and a consultant experienced in equity matters have assured teachers support and direction in changing curriculum, pedagogy, classroom interaction, and institutional policy to work toward an educational community respectful of the rights of all.

**Staff Development for Human Rights Education**

We recognize that ideas and knowledge are central to education in human rights, but no less important are the processes of human interaction. Therefore, the content of human rights and the processes involved in securing those rights are handled in tandem. The model we developed to raise staff members' awareness of human rights integrates development of personal power, group support, critical awareness of human rights issues, and action.

Staff workshops and courses include participatory activities in which teachers and support staff explore their own attitudes and values about race, sex, the aged, the disabled, and so on. For example, in small groups teachers recall and report early racial experiences, reflecting on how these influenced their later views. By sharing their socialization, teachers' own lives are validated as important sources of knowledge, increasing their sense of efficacy.

Workshops and courses also provide teachers group support, enabling them to share classroom problems (or successes) related to human rights issues and then to generate ideas, strategies, and resources for addressing those problems. In these settings teachers practice the skills for cooperative interaction; later, they teach them to their students, creating classrooms respectful of human rights and conducive to the productive exercise of personal power.

We have found supporting our teachers as they increase their critical awareness of human rights to be crucial. Teachers first read and discuss materials on racism, sexism, class bias, homophobia, and ageism. Then they use their "new pairs of glasses" to examine how their own school environments reflect human diversity, and to develop new initiatives accordingly. For example, they reassess the books they use for stereotypical images, develop strategies for dealing with discrimination and name-calling, use multicultural and nonsexist resources, and initiate cross-cultural exchange programs in which their students write letters and then visit students in schools throughout the United States and abroad.
Human Rights Educational Materials for Teachers


Human Rights Curriculums for Use with Students


Once having taken action to create change in their schools, teachers feel ready to share their efforts with others in subsequent workshops and courses districtwide and to implement new classroom strategies. Thus the cycle of change continues.

Human Rights Education with Students

Through planned human rights activities, students, too, develop personal power, group support, and critical awareness, and then act.

Teachers and administrators work to create classroom environments in which students know that they are valued, regardless of religion, race, class, sex, or sexual preference. Students thus become aware, by the way they are treated and by seeing people like themselves in the curriculum, that their life-experiences are valued. For example, Asian students notice that materials by and about Asians are part of the school-sanctioned program, and so on for others. Also, multiply handicapped students understand they are valued because the teachers have structured cooperative groups in which their contributions are an essential part.

Teachers help students develop perspectives and skills with which to provide each other collective support. For example, teachers instruct students in collaborative skills, then structure small groups cooperatively so that students give help to and receive help from each other. Students thus share responsibility for creating a learning environment that is supportive of all.

Students develop critical awareness of human rights issues in much the same way teachers and administrators do. They read, think, and talk about various forms of discrimination and stereotyping. For example, students read Child of Thunder, Hear My Cry, by Mildred Taylor, to learn about racism, and participate in activities from Facing History and Ourselves to examine anti-Semitism. Then they examine their own environment for ways it is fair or not so fair to different groups of people.

The outcome of students' increased critical awareness is action. For example, 4th graders respond assertively to put-downs directed against themselves or others. They confront classmates for racist or sexist remarks. Middle school art students analyze magazine pictures for racism and sexism, draw sex- and race-fair pictures, and present their findings and pictures to other students. Elementary students study various native American peoples and present information they have learned to other classes. Boys are even choosing books about women for their book reports. As students take action to guarantee human rights, they gain a sense of personal power with which they can create change.

Toward Respect for All

In Shoreham-Wading River School District our long-term goal continues to be to build awareness of human rights into all that teachers, students, and administrators do day-to-day in their schools. We want our students to develop the ability to function in and contribute to a multi-racial, nonsexist society that respects the human rights of all.

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