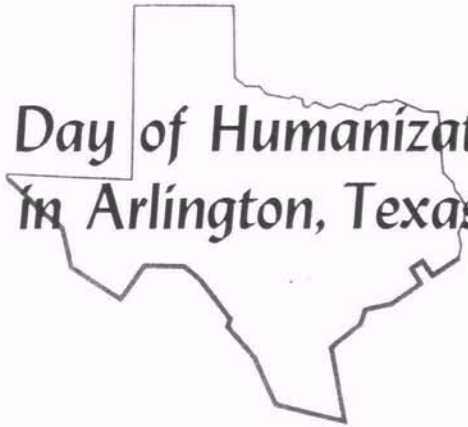
A Day of Humanization in Arlington, Texas



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As OUR society becomes increasingly crowded, we inevitably face problems that focus on two interrelated issues: (a) helping people to relate to each other facilitatively, and (b) creating thrusts which are large enough to deal with the problems. Within the educational community, these issues become translated into such a question as, "How can we develop an effective program which will humanize our classrooms?" Perhaps it is appropriate that these big problems were recently confronted in Texas, and a big thrust toward their solutions was initiated.

One of the suburban towns between Dallas and Fort Worth is named Arlington. This community is justifiably proud of its schools; however, as with all its effective enterprises, the town is looking for ways to improve its school program. With the assistance of the Region XI Educational Service Center, a survey of educational needs was conducted among the entire staff. Results indicated clearly that the most important need was that of improving the quality of human relationships throughout the system. This realization became the cornerstone for a significant effort to enhance the interpersonal functioning of all the staff members.

As always, the desire to humanize classrooms had a rather general appeal; and yet, it presented specific questions for which answers had to be created. Some of those questions were:

Can a significant impact be made? That is, how can most of the people in the system become involved?

Can the cost be made economically feasible?

Can the program be specific enough to deal with the "nitty gritty," everyday problems of the school?

Will the program be accepted by the staff?

Can a follow-up program for sustaining the thrust be created?

Finally, out of all the available programs, it was necessary to formulate a specific one which was appropriate for the Arlington schools.

Toward Humanization

1. *A Significant Impact.* The administrative staff, using the responses to the survey, decided to devote one of its in-service training days to the thrust of humanizing their classrooms. This made it possible to invite all staff members to a meeting dealing with the issue. The heart of this decision was a recognition that humane or humanely nurturing classrooms are the result of a total interaction in the system. This meant that

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the group was not "hung-up" in pointing accusing fingers at each other. It was a group problem, and the group attempted to resolve it.

2. *Economic Feasibility.* As always, the need for money reared its ugly head, and the reality of limited funds created boundaries for the program. Since personnel costs are usually the highest ones in educational projects, the maximum use of local personnel became obvious; so our thinking became oriented around this concept. This meant that all personnel whose schedules could be reorganized were asked to attend a one-day workshop prior to the in-service training day.

A second feasible source of trained personnel was found in some of the local teachers colleges where both graduate students and professors had been trained to use the procedures selected for the workshop. They volunteered their services and became members of the team.

A third feasible source of trained personnel was the Region XI Service Center under the direction of Eldon Busby. This entire staff had undergone training with the scales to be used for the in-service training day, and they were not only able to be trainers, but they also filled a host of other roles which arose as the day progressed.

A fourth available source of trained personnel was the Waco Independent School District, which had previously trained a number of its staff with the same instruments we had selected for the in-service training day. They had had extensive experience in working with teachers in both small and large groups.

As these sources of training personnel emerged, it became apparent that we had two levels of trainers: Group I, which had had some extended experience with the training scales, and Group II, which had had only limited and recent experience with them. Thus, we labeled them Team A (25 experienced members) and Team B (50 relatively inexperienced local members). As will be

seen later, we devised tasks appropriate to each group's level of readiness.

Our training teams had been discovered after we set out to accomplish our task. This was another example of creating an appropriate solution after getting into the problem with the local staff. Because of this approach, the trainers fitted the needs and the budget of the local situation. That is, the task could be done because of the cooperative efforts of those available to do the job.

3. *Specificity.* Is the program tangible enough to be "seen" by those involved? The almost universal appeal of being kind to children makes it rather easy to get people to agree with that stance; however, the more difficult aspect of the problem is that of translating our beliefs into daily behavior. The statement, "It's nice to be nice, but you've got to teach them something," reflects the contradiction we often feel. Therefore, there was a need for specific feedback to help teachers discern when they were behaving facilitatively, and a program with tangible components was set as our goal.

Using the constructs of empathy, congruence, and positive regard formulated by Carl R. Rogers, previous research had indicated that classrooms which were high in these conditions had specific behaviors which could be assessed by other scales. Specifically, the research found that "high facilitative," as compared to "low facilitative," classrooms tended to have (a) more student talk, (b) more student thinking, (c) more student involvement, and (d) more teacher use of facilitative interpersonal responses. Since each of these components can be assessed by a specific instrument, the training phase of the in-service day was devoted to four questions and four instruments:

a. *Question:* How much do students talk in your classroom? *Instrument:* Flanders' Interaction Analysis.[1]

b. *Question:* How much do students think in your classroom? *Instrument:* Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.[2]

c. *Question:* How involved are students in your classroom? *Instrument:* Student Involvement Scale.[3]

d. *Question:* How often do you respond to your students' feelings? *Instrument:* Carkhuff's Scale for Empathic Understanding.[4]

These four questions and instruments are couched in language which teachers understand and constitute a tangible reasonable core of concerns for teachers who want to be more humane in their classrooms. Thus, the criterion of specificity was satisfied.

4. *Acceptability to Staff.* Will the program be seen as important by the staff members? To be seen as important by the local staff, the program presented during the in-service day had to be related to the significant aspects of their world. This criterion was met by a series of nearly fortuitous events. First, the program was developed in response to the teachers' replies to a survey of the system's needs by the Region XI Service Center. Second, as the program was formulated, members from all levels of the staff were included, and their suggestions were incorporated. The whole atmosphere was one of creating answers to a mutual problem. Third, the actual training of staff members was done by their colleagues who were assisted by Team A members; and since the training of the local trainers preceded the in-service day, they were able to communicate the general ideas of the meeting to their colleagues prior to the large meeting. Fourth, the local leaders' (Team B) motivation to develop proficiency with the scales was enhanced by their desire to perform effectively

[1] Ned A. Flanders and Edmund J. Amidon. *The Role of the Teacher in the Classroom, A Manual for Understanding and Improving Teachers' Classroom Behavior.* Minneapolis, Minnesota: Paul S. Amidon & Associates, Inc., 1963.

[2] John DeCecco. *Human Learning in the School: Readings in Educational Psychology.* New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1963. Especially see chapter by: Benjamin Bloom. "Educational Objectives and Curriculum Development." pp. 569-75.

[3] David N. Aspy. "A Scale for the Measurement of Student Involvement." *Contemporary Education* 42: 268-71; May 1971.

[4] Robert R. Carkhuff. *Helping and Human Relations.* Volume 2. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1969.

with their colleagues. This was clearly evidenced by their attendance at "voluntary" training sessions the evening before the in-service training day.

Of course, no program is accepted by everyone, and certainly each has a variety of meanings for all the participants. However, this in-service day enjoyed widespread acceptance as evidenced by the staff's written evaluation of it, and also the high level of attendance at the final afternoon session.

5. *Follow-up Program.* By combining the skills of the trainers with the available electric technology, it was possible to offer the staff five types of follow-up activities:

a. Each teacher received training with specific scales which he could apply to his own teaching by audiotape recording it and rating it at some later time.

b. Each teacher could ask his colleagues to evaluate his teaching according to the rating scales.

c. Each teacher could train one or more of his students to apply the scales to his teaching.

d. Each teacher could tape record his teaching and send it to the College of Education at Northeast Louisiana University, where it would be evaluated by experienced raters. The results and the audio recordings would be returned to the teacher. This service was offered at no charge.

e. Each teacher could attend a follow-up in-service training session conducted by one of the local administrators.

Thus, various follow-up procedures were made available to the staff members, and each procedure was designed to permit individual participation. That is, each teacher could become involved to the degree that he desired. Since one of our basic assumptions was that effective teaching is a growing process, the follow-up procedures were designed to be available to teachers for an extended period of time—hopefully, as long as they proved beneficial to the teachers.

The Day

Perhaps the most difficult phase of any program is its organization, but the following sequence seemed effective:

1. *First Hour:* A general presentation of the ideas relating to humanizing our classrooms to all of the staff members (1,200).

2. *Second Hour:* The staff subdivided into groups of about 50 according to subject matter area, and the experienced leaders (Team A) explained and demonstrated each of the scales. This was modified to meet the various needs of different groups.

3. *Third Hour:* The group divided into subgroups of 25, each of which was led by one of the "Team B" members. During this hour each teacher had an opportunity to apply the scales to standard samples of audio tape recordings of classroom interaction. This was the laboratory phase of the program.

4. *Fourth Hour:* The entire staff reassembled in the auditorium, where the ideas and concepts of humane classrooms were reiterated. Additionally, the follow-up procedures were explained.

Each staff member was asked to evaluate each phase of the program, and the assessments were generally very favorable. The majority of the negative reactions were related to the feeling that even the small groups were too large for optimal learning, and that specialty areas, such as physical education and shop, were not represented in the standard tapes evaluated in the small groups.

In a sense, this amounted to a favorable reaction, because staff members thus were asking for more direct application to their classroom teaching.

In summary, Arlington took a big step in leading the way toward organizing an effective workshop for humanizing education. This system developed a model which is being applied in many other school systems. These systems are also finding it productive. In a real sense, Arlington has provided a courageous example of what can be done when a school wishes to enhance the interpersonal relationships within its own walls. This was a difficult but rewarding effort, and the people involved have helped many other schools conduct a similar thrust.

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