Special Report on Teaching Children to Be Kind

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Recommended Citation
"Special Report on Teaching Children to Be Kind" (1974). Special Reports. 10. https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/sp_reps/10

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The Humane Society has placed major emphasis where it is most important, on development of humane attitudes in children.

Kindness to animals is not one of America's primary traits. Every autumn some 20 to 30 million hunters take to the nation's woods to make "sport" out of killing, injuring, and maiming America's wildlife, with little thought for the age or condition of the animals to be killed. Rodeos, drawing 25 million spectators a year, thrive on putting cruelty to animals in a carnival setting.

Every local humane society can relate dozens of stories of cruelty to individual animals, including cats, dogs, livestock, and wildlife. One of the most shocking examples of Americans' cruelty is the recent surge of attacks on fenced-in, defenseless zoo animals. Earlier this year, five fallow deer, one of the gentlest creatures in the world, were attacked and severely beaten in New York's Central Park Zoo.

Stopping these cruelties is the goal of The Humane Society of the United States and all other animal welfare organizations. Yet, progress toward the realization of that goal has not been as rapid as these organizations had hoped.

"For too long the humane movement in this country has been on the defensive," said Humane Society President John A. Hoyt. "We have so preoccupied ourselves with responding to the consequences of cruelty and abuse that we have neglected the more important task of building an ethical system in which kindness to animals is regarded as the norm rather than the exception."

In other words, humane organizations have been treating the symptoms instead of preventing the disease.

"Our only hope of making the United States a humane nation lies in preventing
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first years. The project staff is now reviewing response to the field tests, revising the materials where appropriate, and designing additional units for further testing during the 1974-75 school year.

HEDEP is an outgrowth of a study conducted for HSUS by the George Washington University, Washington, D.C., in 1964. That study, drawing on the experience of almost 2,000 teachers, administrators, and students, concluded that humane education in the schools was almost non-existent and that the incorporation of humane materials into the curriculum was feasible.

The key to getting the message of kindness into the classroom is to use the subject of animals as a vehicle for teaching the basic subjects of language arts, social science, and science.

"Studies have shown that children are highly interested in materials dealing with animals and that high interest subjects stimulate learning," said Eileen S. Whitlock, Ed.D., associate project director and a former University of Tulsa faculty member.

The materials developed by the HEDEP staff have taken advantage of this appeal. HEDEP units tested during the 1973-74 school year included ones on wildlife, zoo, farm animals, and pets. In the course of teaching language arts, social science, and science to second and third grade pupils, the units also teach respect for individual animals and the environment in general.

Response from teachers has been enthusiastic. "The students enjoyed this unit as much as I enjoyed teaching it," one teacher wrote. "Excellent, as it provides real opportunities to gain language arts skills with gaining information about humane issues and developing humane awareness," wrote another.

At the beginning of the 1974-75 school year, HEDEP will be ready for the entire country to try out.

Exploring the outdoors can be one of the most exciting educational experiences of childhood. Here, HSUS humane educator John J. Dommers shows two boys how to spot birds, squirrels, and other wildlife in the woods near their homes.

The minds of children provide fertile soil in which ideas and attitudes, good or bad, take root quickly and grow to enrich or impoverish the total adult personality. But, if children are to learn positive goals such as kindness, the concepts must be planted in them before conflicting concepts have had a chance to take root. Rodeo associations, for example, have children competing in Little Britches rodeos before they are out of elementary school. Gun clubs sanctioned by the National Rifle Association teach shooting skills to Cub Scouts as young as 8 or 9 years old, and many states issue hunting licenses to any child whose parents request them.

Children who are taught to abuse animals for the sake of sport may go through life looking upon animals as objects of pleasure, whose lives can be threatened and snuffed out at the will of man. In a study of persons found guilty of murder, armed robbery, serious assault, and forcible rape, many had tortured animals. The study data revealed that torture or killing of animals in childhood is a positive factor in forecasting adult criminal behavior.

Compassion toward other creatures is commonly accepted as basic to the intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual development of the child.

Of even greater concern is the way man treats his fellow man. It has become clear that the best schools in the nation can produce highly gifted people lacking in ethical standards and with little compassion toward their fellow man. It is obvious that the future of the United States depends on the development and fostering of humane attitudes, values, and behavior. And the lives of large numbers of its citizens will continue to be greatly affected by the presence or absence of humane ness.

It is imperative, therefore, that kindness to both fellow man and animals become an integral part of the curriculum of the nation's schools.

The HSUS of the United States has been committed to educating children about the humane ethic since its founding 20 years ago. But, in recent years, HSUS has steadily increased the amount of money and staff time allocated to the development and implementation of humane education projects. Efforts that have been in study and developmental stages for many years will be ready for implementation in 1974. The results of these efforts promise to provide innovative, professionally produced materials and techniques that will enable teachers and parents to teach kindness in exciting and effective ways.

HSUS has four major elements of humane education: one teaching kindness, another an integral part of the curriculum of the nation's schools. The third grade curriculum covers animals used for food, work, and recreation. The fourth grade curriculum deals with respect for animals and the environment. HSUS has been working on a new kindergarten through fifth grade curriculum to teach children the importance of every living creature.
to test units for all grades from kindergarten through sixth grade.

As offshoots of HEDEP, the University of Tulsa, where the project is based, has offered two three-credit courses in humane education for undergraduate and graduate students. Several graduate education students at Tulsa have selected aspects of humane education for their doctoral dissertations. And the first master's degree in humane education in the nation will be conferred by the university this spring.

While HEDEP is concentrating on the development of new techniques and materials for teaching kindness, another arm of HSUS is concentrating on assisting educators in incorporating specific aspects of humane education into their curricula.

The program was inaugurated last September with the opening of the HSUS Norma Terris Humane Education Center near East Haddam, Conn. It is being directed by John J. Dommers, a former teacher who has made a name for himself among educators because of his innovative means of bringing nature into the classroom and extending the classroom outdoors.

Elementary teachers learn how to use animals constructively and humanely in the classroom at an in-service training session at HSUS’s Norma Terris Humane Education Center near East Haddam, Conn. Few other places in the nation offer teachers an opportunity to discuss humane education concerns with fellow educators.

Without waiting for mass distribution of the HEDEP materials, Dommers is showing teachers and school administrators how they can incorporate the subjects of animals, pollution, and other aspects of the environment into their everyday classroom activities. Math, for example, can be brought to life by figuring how much it costs to feed a family pet for 1 year. Spelling can become more fun when new words describe the animals that were encountered on a field trip to the zoo.

Dommers has already conducted workshops for teachers and administrators from throughout New England. Many of the sessions have been cosponsored with state and national organizations. Last winter, for instance, Dommers conducted a series of workshops in conjunction with Project LEARN, a cooperative education project of 18 Connecticut school districts. Sessions were held on “Selection, Care, and Handling of Suitable Classroom Animals,” “Helping Children’s Senses Make Sense Outdoors,” “Curriculum-Integrated Programs and Activities Involving Animals,” and “Careers for Animal Lovers.”

Dr. Stuart R. Westerlund, director of the HSUS Humane Education Development and Evaluation Project (HEDEP), and Dr. Eileen S. Whitlock, associate project director, evaluate educators’ reactions to preliminary classroom units developed by the project. The units will be refined and retested during the 1974-75 school year.
A third aspect of HSUS's education program is the KIND (Kindness in Nature's Defense) program for children and youth 6 to 18. The program began in 1964 when HSUS agreed to administer the Kindness Club in the United States, an organization for children 6 to 10 founded in Canada. It was later expanded to include DEFENDERS, ages 11 to 14, and EcoLoKIND, 15 to 18.

The KIND program is designed to be used by schools, as well as individuals. Entire classes of students and even entire schools actively participate in learning to be kind and in undertaking projects to help others and to relieve animal suffering.

KIND sponsors an annual photo contest and reports successful projects undertaken by individual members or branch clubs through its membership newsletters, published monthly except in July and August. A national award is presented to the branch club that has demonstrated the most successful efforts for the protection of animals during the year.

A former managing editor of children's publications for Xerox Education Publications, Charles C. Herrmann, is directing the redesigning of all KIND publications. Herrmann, a former teacher and college instructor, is working with HSUS Youth Div. Director Dale R. Hylton to give the publications a more exciting look and a clearer style. Extensive promotion, especially to schools and educators, is aimed at significantly increasing membership in the program. Further information will be announced in a special four-page insert in the September issue of News of HSUS.

When a KIND member turns 19, he is invited to become a member of HSUS. Through his participation in KIND activities, he has already become a knowledgeable humanitarian, fully acquainted with national efforts for the prevention of cruelty to animals.

Dommers and Herrmann are working together to develop multi-media programs for the classroom. Working with the Connecticut Dept. of Environmental Protection, they have already produced a slide-sound series on the mammals, snakes, and turtles native to Connecticut. They are also developing filmstrips on animal-related careers, a poster series on pet care, and records on a variety of topics.

To keep educators and humanitarians informed of new developments in humane education techniques and materials, HSUS has founded the National Assn. for the Advancement of Humane Education (NAAHE). Members will receive newsletters and a quarterly journal of articles and information on various aspects of humaneness. The first issue is scheduled for publication in September. In addition, NAAHE will publish materials and manuals and will sponsor symposia, workshops, and seminars.

As a tax-exempt organization, NAAHE will generate resources for research and development activities. For example, projects such as HEDEP will be conducted within the NAAHE framework. It is also expected that NAAHE will become the monitoring agency from which producers of humane education materials will seek a stamp of approval.

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Members of the Nacogdoches, Texas, branch of the Kindness Club, part of the HSUS KIND program, raised the money to buy the above outdoor advertisement. A local bank donated billboard space in the community. This is one of many projects suggested by HSUS to local kind members.
"We are limited only by the amount of staff time and money available to us."

Dr. Westerlund and Dr. Whitlock have been appointed executive secretary and assistant executive secretary, respectively. Serving as advisors are: Marin County, Calif., Superintendent of Schools Virgil S. Hollis; Dean Victor O. Hornbostel of the University of Tulsa College of Education; Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent D. Bruce Howell; Dean Donald J. Leu of the College of Education, San Jose State University; and Staff Director Harold J. Rosengren of the National Society of Professional Engineers.

With the advent of these new educational emphases and the extension of other educational efforts, The National Humane Education Center, under the direction of Miss Phyllis Wright, has refocused its objectives and activities in the areas of animal control, shelter management and its practices, and the training of animal-handling personnel. Numerous seminars covering these areas are presently being conducted throughout the country.

"The Humane Society has now placed major emphasis where it is most important, on the development of humane attitudes in children," Hoyt said. "Never before has there been such a deep commitment to this goal. We now look to our members and supporters to back us every step of the way on this vitally important undertaking."

You Can Help!

1. Enroll your children and the children of friends and neighbors in the HSUS KIND program. Write to HSUS for a free brochure on KIND.

2. Convince teachers and school administrators in your community to use the KIND materials in their classrooms. Write to HSUS for free a brochure on KIND teaching units.

3. Give copies of HSUS's "Guiding Principles for Use of Animals in Elementary and Secondary Schools" to biology teachers and school administrators in your community. Write to HSUS for free copies of "Guiding Principles."


5. HSUS needs your financial help in order to continue this major thrust in humane education. Your tax-deductible contribution of any amount will bring major dividends in the development of humane attitudes in children and youth.

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Additional copies of this report are available at 3¢ each from The Humane Society of the United States, 1604 K St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20006.