

**THE DRUG PROBLEM AND YOUTH—THE NEED
FOR SCHOOL-BASED, HUMANISTIC APPROACHES
TO PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION***

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ABSTRACT

In order to ameliorate the drug problem as it is affecting school-age youth, school-based approaches to prevention and intervention need to be adopted. Such approaches also need to be responsive to the needs of those who have engaged in various forms of drug-taking behavior. They need to include appropriate counselling, care or referral to care, as well as efforts aimed at redirecting youthful energies along more personally fulfilling and socially beneficial lines.

The Drug Problem and Youth

The increasing seriousness of the drug problem among youth has heightened the urgency of answering certain questions: What can be done about the problem? and What particularly can schools do about the problem?

WHAT CAN BE DONE

The drug problem has the same root causes as many other social problems. In attempting to solve or ameliorate the drug problem among youth, similar far reaching remedial and developmental approaches are required. Above all, it would seem imperative—if significant inroads are to be made into the problem—that massive efforts be directed toward the humanization of all our societal

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institutions from the family to the school, from the world of work to government. This can be done by helping to redirect the growth and development of individuals along lines which are conducive to healthy human growth and development, conducive to psychological and social health, to the cultivation and enhancement of their intrinsic humanity. Only when efforts to deal with the drug problem have such a focus and direction can current unhealthy and destructive trends be reversed.

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

Of all social institutions, it is the school which would appear to offer the greatest immediate hope in solving the drug problem as it relates to youth. Because of the ever increasing fragmentation of family life, because of the difficulties in trying to help the family to quickly become a positive force in the development of healthy individuals, the school would appear to offer the best immediate hope for meaningful change. The school can be seen as being more flexible than the home as at least some elements of the school experience can be readily changed to begin to make that basic social institution more human and more responsive to human needs and aspirations.

THE NEED FOR HUMANIZING EDUCATION

If attempts to solve the drug problem are to prove successful, a whole hearted effort needs to be launched to bring about a basic humanization of education throughout the nation. The kind of reorientation required will be hastened greatly when there is a clarification of the long range goals of education.

Abraham Maslow discussed the need for such long range goals for education in his book *Eupsychian Management* [1]. His view was that as soon as we decide that the goal of education in our American democracy should be psychological and social health—healthy human and social development—that the ways and means of achieving that goal would fall into place. Because no such decision has yet been made, the overall status of American education has become less and less tolerable. Education in America has tended to become increasingly out of touch with basic human and social values, needs, problems, concerns, and goals. Education must begin to focus on how life is and how life can be. It must help to cultivate human understanding. It must encompass a concern for basic social, ethical, spiritual, and existential matters. It must begin to deal in a meaningful way with questions of meaning and purpose. And perhaps, most importantly, it must provide opportunities for students, for the young—to become meaningfully and responsibly involved in life.

Specific Approaches Which Can be Adopted

The following kinds of approaches can be adopted in attempting to achieve these broader goals designed to humanize education and help make it more responsive to human needs and concerns:

CLASSROOM REORIENTATION

*Classroom instruction can be made more active and less passive in its orientation, more human and responsive and less cold and anonymous—*Literature in the field of education reveals an increasing awareness of the need for such a change in orientation. Recent nationwide media coverage given to Skyline High School in Dallas, Texas focused on the importance of such an active and responsive orientation.

A MORE REALISTIC RELEVANT EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

*Education can be made more relevant to the realities of today's world—and to the world of work and adult responsibilities—*This can be done by providing opportunities at every grade level to learn by doing; to become acquainted with the real world; to meet, talk, and work with adults, and with youth and young adults of all ages; to become engaged in meaningful activities and enterprise and to thereby gain a sense of what it means to be a fully functioning human being capable of making a contribution to society and capable of being of some service to others, of relating to others in a meaningful way, and of assuming a responsible role in life. Recent efforts on the part of the U.S. Office of Education to promote "Education for Parenthood" and "Career Education" both would seem to reflect certain of these kinds of objectives.

REEVALUATION OF VALUES

*Values and ideals must be emphasized and not in a mechanical way and not in a sterile, value neutral vacuum, devoid of love, humour, human feeling, and purpose—*Youth need to be helped to cultivate healthy and positive values and ideals; they need to be helped to grow into whole, psychologically healthy human beings.

CHANGES IN GRADING AND ASSESSING

*Current practices in grading and assessing cognitive knowledge and skills need to be radically changed—*Grading and assessment practices need to be changed because of their present tendency to psychologically entrap students in a failure syndrome, a syndrome which is particularly pertinent to those involved in drug-taking behavior. They also need to be changed because of their tendency to nurture cut-throat competitive instincts and to encourage narrow self-centeredness. By adopting any number of approaches to grading and evaluation suggested by William Glasser in his *Schools Without Failure*, it would be possible to avoid such negative tendencies and to avoid perpetuation of a failure syndrome [2]. Approaches which seek to individualize the assessment process also need to be considered. If a primary purpose of education is to help each individual progress to the fullest extent of his or her capabilities,

then senseless roadblocks must not be put in the way. There is absolutely no point or purpose in using the same criteria to measure and compare the achievement of two persons with vastly different intellectual capabilities, experiential backgrounds, talents, etc.

AID IN DEVELOPMENT OF INNER RESOURCES

*A response must be made to one of the primary complaints voiced by many youth today: a lack of any place to go or anything to do—*This, of course, reflects a failure of the family, the school, and society, to help individuals develop their own inner resources so that they are able to make good use of time, to engage in recreational and social activities, to relax, to find fulfilment in educational, cultural, artistic and service-oriented pursuits. Many schools and more formalized community school programs have provided these sorts of activities for youth. Facilities and resources have also increasingly been made available by communities, church and religious organizations, civic groups and the like. Schools as well as other facilities in a community can be used to fulfil a remedial as well as a developmental function by providing a gathering place which can be used for after school hours activities—weekday afternoons and evenings and portions of the weekend, and during vacation periods. Supervision would need to be provided in the form of adequately trained personnel who could be professionals, paraprofessionals, volunteers or paid—or a mixture of all of these.

In all of these suggested approaches mentioned above it would seem that the most important things that need to be done in reorienting the educational experience and the development process generally are to help nurture in youth a value in life, a sense of personal striving and fulfilment, and a concern for the welfare of others. Youth need to be provided every opportunity to express such attitudes and concerns and thereby develop a sense of personal worth and a feel for what it means to be meaningfully, purposefully, and responsibly involved in life.

The Need for Approaches Designed Specifically to Deal with Drug-Taking Behavior

The adoption or adaption of the kinds of approaches just enumerated would most certainly lead to a reduction in drug-taking behavior because they would be addressing many of the unmet needs and unfulfilled aspirations which have given rise to such behavior in the first place. In order to deal with the symptoms arising from drug-taking behavior and in order to intervene in an effective manner after drug use or experimentation has begun, schools also need to adopt other approaches in addition to those already mentioned. These approaches include the following innovations and reforms:

POSITIVE, CONSTRUCTIVE APPROACHES TO REPLACE LEGALISTIC ACTION

*Non-punitive policies and approaches need to be adopted in schools to supplant purely legalistic actions such as expulsion and suspension—*Alternatives to such actions need to be provided which focus most importantly on helping the individual to break out of the cycle of drug-taking behavior or cease experimenting with drugs or other harmful substances. In lieu of prosecution, in lieu of being remanded to the juvenile authority, in lieu of suspension or expulsion, the young person can be remanded to counselling, to other forms of care or guidance that may be appropriate, and to special programs and activities designed to help direct the young person's energies and attentions along more constructive lines. (Descriptions of various alternative approaches of this kind can be found in a *Guide* published by the Committee on Alternatives to Drugs—formerly the Committee for Psychedelic Drug Information, Berkeley, California [3].) Parents can be asked or even required to take part in counselling programs, or the like, as a condition of waiving more typical legalistic approaches. Examples of approaches which seek to divert juvenile users (and in some cases, dealers) from the justice system are found in the Clark County High School District, Las Vegas, Nevada; in a probation department sponsored program in San Diego County, California; and in the youth services division of the justice system in Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan and several adjacent suburban communities which have adopted a counselling oriented approach to dealing with juvenile offenders. Information concerning these and other approaches can be found in *Alternatives Programs—A Grapevine Survey* [4].

NEED FOR SPECIAL COUNSELLING PROGRAMS

*It is essential that special counselling programs be set up within schools to help in prevention efforts and to provide for earliest possible intervention in drug-taking behavior—*Those providing the counselling in most instances will require specialized training whether they are professionals or paraprofessionals. They need to have basic counselling skills and to understand the symptoms and motivations involved with drug-taking behavior. They must possess maturity and be psychologically healthy, and they must not be current users or promoters of drug-taking behavior themselves. It is especially important that counselors not use or implicitly or explicitly condone the so-called "responsible" or "sensible" use of marijuana, hashish, pills, or other drugs and substances used for non-medical purposes [5, 6]. The use of counselors in school settings who do condone or implicitly encourage such behavior has the obvious effect of contributing to the continuance and spread of drug-taking behavior. The counselor must be able and inclined to motivate those counselled along beneficial and constructive lines, and able to refer the individual to specialized treatment or care when required.

The emphasis of counselling as well as of educational and guidance efforts needs to be geared to the needs and level of those being counselled, educated, or provided guidance—While in many cases, it is important to spend some time in helping young persons understand the implications and the effects of drug use, it is typically far more important that attention be focussed on personal motivations, on helping individuals gain a better understanding of themselves, of others, and of life generally. The past emphasis on a primarily or solely cognitive or informational approach has not only proved lacking, but in some cases has actually been shown to be counterproductive, actually contributing to drug-taking behavior, rather than leading to its decrease. Swisher and others have drawn such a conclusion from their studies. They write, “An approach (to drug education and prevention) that relies on information alone may not be sufficient to reduce or prevent the use of drugs, and in fact, may have the opposite effect [7].”

NEED FOR CONFIDENTIALITY AND IMMUNITY FROM PROSECUTION

Because of the increasingly criminogenic and pathological character of the drug culture and of drug taking, provision for various forms of confidentiality and immunity from prosecution will be required to make sure that users are able to receive the counselling, guidance, care, etc. that they need—Such policies are needed to protect those who provide the services as well as those who partake of them. Policies providing for pre- or post-parental permission (before or after the fact of use has been admitted, recognized, or established) provide one way of handling such matters. Discussion of the need for such approaches and information concerning implementation of such policies can be found in various places in the literature [8, 9].

REFOCUS OF VALUES

There is a need to focus on attitudes and values and on increasing self worth and motivation, and on meaningful pursuits—There is a need for helping individuals gain a better sense of themselves and to find satisfaction in being of service to others, of being contributing members of society. One of the most noteworthy studies on this subject is a preliminary report on “Operation Future,” a drug control project of Kings-Tulare County based in Visalia, California [10]. In this project, data has been gathered which shows that “a definite relationship exists between the abuse of drugs and the lack of values on the part of today’s young people.” An increasing number of schools have focussed on values in their efforts to ameliorate the drug problem. The Coronado School District in San Diego County in California, a pioneer in this area, has been particularly successful in this regard. Schools in North Dakota have also been engaged in implementing a self enhancement approach to education which serves to address many

of the unmet needs and unfulfilled aspirations which give rise to drug-taking behavior. Further information concerning these approaches is contained in the *Grapevine Survey* mentioned above [4].

NATIONAL HUMANISTIC APPROACH

A nationwide movement designed to promote humanistic approaches to the drug problem—A nationwide movement has recently been launched to help contribute to the solution of the drug problem by promoting adoption or adaption of many of the same kind of humanistic alternatives, reforms, approaches, and policies discussed here. ALFY, an organization incorporated in 1973 in Davis, California, was established with such a goal in mind. Publications, produced at different stages in its formation, focus on school-based, community-based, and criminal justice system-based approaches and policies—all of which are humanistic in orientation and all of which are designed to be responsive to human needs and to take positive steps to prevent drug use and to help deal with the problems reflected in and arising from drug-taking behavior [4, 8].

Conclusion

Much can be done within the domain of the school to help in ameliorating the drug problem as it is affecting youth. Through generous application of common sense, initiative, understanding and humanity, those in education can contribute immeasurably to the quality of the lives of the nation's youth. They can do much to ameliorate the drug problem among youth by adopting much needed approaches and policies designed to help extricate those involved in drug use from such entrapment. What schools do or fail to do with respect to the drug problem and its root causes cannot help but have a critical bearing on the future of the rising generation, and hence on the future of society and of the nation as well.

REFERENCES

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2. W. Glasser, *Schools Without Failure*, New York: Harper and Row, 1969.
3. P. D. Gordon, compiler, *Guide to Ideas on Drug Abuse Programs and Policies*, Committee for Alternatives to Drugs (formerly the Committee for Psychedelic Drug Information), Berkeley, California, 1970. Available through ERIC Document Reproduction Service Drawer O, Bethesda, Maryland, 20014. Also see P. D. Gordon, "'Alternatives to Drugs' as a Part of Comprehensive Efforts to Ameliorate the Drug Abuse Problem," *J. Drug Education*, 2(3):289-296, 1972 for a theoretical basis for alternatives approaches.

4. C. D. Knowles, compiler, *Alternatives Programs—A Grapevine Survey*, National Justice Reference Service, Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, U.S. Dept. of Justice, Washington, D.C., 1973.
5. P. D. Gordon, "Untoward Social Health Implications of the 'Responsible' Use of Drugs Philosophy" (unpublished paper).
6. P. D. Gordon, "Toward the Resolution of the Controversy Surrounding the Effects and Social Health Implications of Marijuana Use," *J. Drug Education*, 4(1):13-24, 1974.
7. J. Swisher and R. Horman, "Drug Abuse Prevention," *J. College Student Personnel*, 11, 337-344, 1970.
8. Drug Enforcement Administration (formerly Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs), U.S. Department of Justice, *Proc. Alternatives to Drugs Conference*, May 16-18, 1972, Santa Barbara, Ca. and *Proc. Alternatives to Drugs Conference*, Jan. 9-12, 1973, Airlie, Virginia.
9. P. D. Gordon, "The Promulgation of Promising Approaches to Prevention and Early Intervention," *Drug Forum*, 2(3):82-90, 1972.
10. "Operation Future—A Kings-Tulare County Drug Abuse Control Project: Lack of Values Related to Drugs," Preliminary Report, Sept. 26, 1972 (Jay Clark, Director, Room 304, Courthouse, Visalia, Ca. 93277).

APPENDIX 1

Addresses of Programs and Information Sources

1. Skyline High School—Principal, Skyline Center, 7777 Forney Road, Dallas, Texas 75227
2. Career Education and Education for Parenthood Programs—U.S. Office of Education, U.S. Dept. of H.E.W., Washington, D.C. 20202
Committee on Alternatives to Drugs—Lori Granit, Administrative Coordinator, Box 851, Berkeley, California 94701
3. School-Based Intervention/Diversion Program—Robert Hirsch, State Drug Abuse Education Coordinator, Room 213, State Office Building, P.O. Box 390, Las Vegas, Nevada 89101
4. Community/Juvenile Justice System-Based Diversion Program—Thomas F. Murphy, San Diego County Probation Department, 2901 Meadow Lark Drive, San Diego, California 92123
5. Juvenile Justice System-Based Diversion Program—Grosse Pointe Youth Service Division, Donald B. Coates, Director, Grosse Pointe Woods Public Safety Department, Grosse Pointe Woods, Michigan 48236
6. Operation Future—Jay Clark, Director, Room 304, Courthouse, Visalia, California 93277
7. Coronado Plan for Drug Abuse Education—Dr. Clifford Jordan, Superintendent of Schools, Coronado Unified School District, 706 Sixth Street, Coronado, California 92118
8. Self-Enhancing Education Program—Glenn R. Dolan, Director of Guidance Services, Department of Public Instruction, Bismarck, North Dakota 58501
9. ALFY—Robert Emrich, Ph.D., Executive Director, c/o National Council on Crime and Delinquency Research Center, 609 2nd St., Suite D, Brinley Bldg., Davis, California 95616.