

THE VALUE OF HUMANE EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS
An Address by Allen Keim, Principal Marin Grammar School, Albany, California
Delivered at the Preview of the International Poster Contest

I am very happy to have the privilege of speaking to you this afternoon on “The Value of Humane Education in the Public Schools.”

This subject is of great interest to me and of vital importance to the public school child.

There are two types of societies, which promote humane treatment of animals. One type, and one which is familiar to all, is the Humane Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. This society was put into effective legislation in England in 1822, in the State of New York in 1866. Since that time it has grown into a world-wide movement, doing much good towards the humane treatment of animals.

Another type of humane education and the one, which I shall speak about today, was founded in California in 1918 by the Latham Foundation. This type deals directly with the education of public school children in order that they may grow into men and women whose characters contain the essence of kindness for every living creature, human as well as animal.

At the present time Humane Education as correlated with the elementary school subjects is gaining much favor as new schools add it to their curriculum.

It is the Foundation’s hope that in the near future humane education will be a required part of the state school curriculum. I feel that it is only a question of time when it will become a part of every school’s work. And why shouldn’t it? Since the child is a social being, a part of the various social institutions, and subject to their laws and customs, one of the chief aims of education is to make the child familiar with social usages. What subjects, then, could better fulfill this aim than humane education in its broad sense when correlated with the school curriculum?

We know that the child’s reactions are determined not merely by what he knows, but also by what he feels and does. Every normal child experiences a great love for and interest in animals. This is well illustrated in the story of Frederick, who was sitting on the curb crying when Billy came along and asked what the matter was.

“Oh, I feel so bad cause my nice old collie died,” he sobbed.

“Shucks,” said Billy, “my grandmother’s only been dead a week and you don’t catch me crying.”

Frederick gave his eyes and nose a swipe with his hand and said, “Yes, but you didn’t raise your grandmother from a pup.”

The study of birds and animals, their usefulness to society, their value and care as pets, will appeal to the innate interest and feelings of the child.

Perhaps this question arises in your minds: Suppose humane education should become a part of the school curriculum, in what way can it be taught in public schools?

In answer I would say that it should not be taught as a limited subject, but correlated with various courses of study. It can be successfully correlated with school subjects and can also be used as an extra-curricular activity through the formation of clubs.

As an illustration, take the study of geography; an effective method of arousing the child's interest in the study of any country is to introduce the subject through the study of its animals. For instance, let us take Holland. The Dutch child with his dog cart presents an interesting introduction to the country. Here the child is shown the value of the animal and the care it should receive from its owner. In the study of Switzerland we find an abundance of material concerning the Saint Bernard dogs and their usefulness to society in aiding the lost and snowbound travelers on the Swiss Alps. And so on with each country with which the child is required to become familiar.

Reading adapts itself very readily to correlation with Humane Education. Our elementary readers contain many animal stories which serve as a fine opportunity to present the thought of kindness to every living creature. A reading list of books and stories relating to animals prepared for classroom reference is extremely valuable. This can be applied to each subject, especially art and nature study.

Humane Education in the elementary schools should be taught in three distinct steps:

The first step should include kindergarten, first and second grades. Here the work may include the collection and study of pictures, the making of "pet books" or the pasting of cut-out pictures of birds and animals into little scrap books; the reading and telling of stories by the teacher about birds and animals, including their care, protection and their benefit to society.

The second step will include the third and fourth grades. In these grades is to be found the real work of correlation with the school subjects previously mentioned. The building of bird houses, the study of bird and animal life, the making of books such as "California Birds" or "Dogs of Service" and the formation of clubs are all worth while.

The third step includes the fifth and sixth grades. Here the work is more advanced. Humane Education is carried on through the writing of essays, short stories and plays which are later dramatized. Art includes the making of posters and the study of famous animal painters and their masterpieces.

In the Junior and Senior High Schools the work is developed mainly through essays, poster projects and the study of literature.

Do not be misled into believing that humane education seeks only to develop a love for and kindlier treatment of animals. Of course we hope to attain this, but in so doing to achieve more far-reaching results.

The Honorable L. T. Dashiell, Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives, states that, “the lack of humane education is the principle cause of crime.” This statement quite forcefully brings out one of the ultimate aims of humane education. We are all too well aware of the ever increasing crime among the youth of our nation. At the present time 75 per cent of the inmates of San Quentin prison are 24 years of age or younger. This forms one of our most serious national problems, and it is the business of the school to help solve it.

In my opinion, the method which is fundamentally sound in accomplishing this, is that one which is *constructive*; that one which builds up the finer instincts of the child. Humane education takes as its working basis the fact that every child possesses innately an interest in animals. By directing this interest the character of the child may be developed in the right direction. In other words, the child’s interest in animals may be utilized in the following ways: 1st, in teaching him to be kind to animals; 2nd, in extending this kindness to other associates. If a feeling of responsibility is created in the child toward animals, the first step has been successfully taken in establishing a feeling of responsibility towards society. The fostering of such a feeling towards society at large is an effective method of reducing juvenile crime.

Another problem, but one which is international in scope, and one in which Humane Education can be very beneficial, is the problem in securing international understanding and good will, which will ultimately lead to the preservation of peace.

At the present time the Latham Foundation has in progress an international poster contest which, it is hoped, will create among the children of the world not only a love for animals, but a spirit of interest and friendship toward one another. This is only a part of the international program the Foundation hopes to carry on.

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