

Dennis Westell

HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY IN SCHOOLS



In the March issue of *Self and Society*, (Vol.1 No.1), I wrote an article about working with children in an LEA school in Central London.

The children quoted in the article were my class for the year 1971-1972. I had recently said goodbye to another class of children, that I worked with from Sept. 1972 until July of this year.

Having experienced my third year of being class teacher with eleven-year-olds and using humanistic psychology techniques I have been reviewing the work that has been done and especially comparing the differences between various children and how differently they have reacted to what I offered them.

This year the class was not very interested in doing the project 'Who Am I?'. It may be that my introduction to the subject differed from last time but I rather think it is simply a case of the children in this year's class having different views and different interests.

Soon after we had started the project some children objected and said they would rather get on with topics they had chosen for themselves. However, this year's class did have lots of enthusiasm for working on sensitivity and awareness activities and for using emotional discharge techniques.

At this point I would like to comment on the question of whether or not a teacher, even if he does have a considerable amount of training and experience in psychology and working with children, but is not a qualified therapist should attempt to work with children in this way.

I do not call my work therapy, it is education. I believe that most people associate therapy with an arrangement between a therapist and one or more people who may be mentally ill and that much of the therapy is concerned with looking inwardly. The main emphasis in education is concerned with the outward. My aim is to help children

to be free to bring into play their own resources so that they have the opportunity to live a richer life and so that they may learn in some way to control their environment rather than being controlled by it. To my mind the point of education is that that which is objective to the learner, namely the outside world, should become a meaningful part of his own inner experience. The teacher's task is not to feed children with information but to bring into play their own powers of dealing with and relating to that which is around them. The way I believe this can happen is by using children's inborn dynamic interest in the world about them.

So the question of being or not being a qualified therapist does not really arise. What I seem to be is a teacher whose work with children is found by them and others to be worthwhile.

What were the positive results of this year's work? In an area where reading ages have generally been lower than the national average, the class I worked with this year scored a reading age well above the national average and their academic attainment is of a good standard. A few of the children who in the past had poor attendance records now like to come to school and this year had many fewer absences. Children who had previously been considered as isolates have made friends. The class took to humanistic psychology activities with much enthusiasm and always looked forward to participating in them.

Having had three years worthwhile work with children using techniques from the field of humanistic psychology, I would like to see more people working in this way. Perhaps it is too much to hope that Colleges of Education would include training in humanistic psychology for teachers in their curriculum.

