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WHAT DOES DRUG EDUCATION MEAN?

If you took a public opinion survey on the question, "Do you favor Drug Education in the schools?," probably a high percentage of people would answer yes. Most would infer that "Drug Education" means teaching children that they should NOT take illegal drugs.

It was with amazement, therefore, that I read the Drug Education Curriculum used in the public schools in one Illinois district. Of the 514 pages, only about 100 have anything to do with drugs at all, and those never tell the children NOT to take illegal drugs.

In kindergarten, the children are read depressing stories such as "The Hating Book" and "Angry." The children role-play how they behave when they feel angry ("scream, stomp feet, slam doors, throw things"). The children are told to complete "sentence stems" such as "I feel angry when--," "I feel afraid when--," "I feel worried when--."

In the first grade, children use puppets to act out reactions to situations in which they have "unpleasant feelings," such as a friend is unkind, a friend broke a toy, you are criticized by an adult. The first grader is confronted with a series of dilemmas and asked, "Do you think you should use your own judgment or follow your parent's rule?"

In the 2nd grade, the children are inflicted with more manipulations of their feelings instead of being given facts. They are required to tell what they do when they feel angry, sad, bored, or grumpy, and to talk about their "feeling changes."

In the 3rd grade, the children make a "Me Book." Each day for ten consecutive school days, the child writes a statement to answer a different question, such as "I feel angry when...," "My Mom thinks I'm...," "I feel my brother is..." Five hours of the 3rd grade are spent on stupid games about Fuzzies.

The 3rd graders role-play risk-taking situations such as "you and your friends found some old cans of spray paint and one of your friends wants to spray-paint the school doors." The 3rd graders are told to "be a frog, a bird, or a tree." They play a game called Fish Bowl in which they sit in a circle and discuss a problem such as cheating, stealing, or breaking rules without ever being told those things are wrong.

The 4th grade plays a game called Magic Circle. The children sit around in a circle

in the classroom and discuss such topics as, "What is the ugliest thing you know?", "How do you select your friends?", "If you could be an animal, what would you be?", "How many children make up an ideal family?", "What one day in your life did you enjoy the least?"

One 4th grade lesson is called "It's up to you." The children are presented with a specific situation, such as shoplifting or finding a wallet with money in it, and then, in groups of three or four, decide what do do. The criterion for the solution is not morality or legality, but what is "acceptable to all."

The 5th grade is given a list of the definition of drugs including vitamins, alcohol, laxatives, tranquilizers, beer, aspirin, cough drops, marijuana, allergy pills, sniffing gasoline, smoking. The 5th graders are led to believe that there are many good reasons for taking drugs, such as, it's fun, everyone does it, makes you feel better, helps you to forget your problems, helps you to relax.

The class discusses the idea that almost everyone in our society uses drugs for various reasons, including famous people such as Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe and Judy Garland. The child is encouraged to bring drug-peddling rock records to play in class.

The 6th grade discusses such questions as "How and why do parents and students feel differently?" and "Do you think marijuana should be legal or illegal?" They are taught to identify "double standards" such as "parents telling you not to do things that they do." They are taught to brainstorm things that make them angry or frustrated. Each student must complete a "mad report, a "mad chart," and a "mad check sheet."

The 7th grade is taught that experimentation means "trying pot," recreation means "smoking pot at a party," and abuse is "smoking pot to cope with school." They are taught "the good reasons for drinking alcohol in moderation": to escape problems, relieve nervousness, taste, celebration, feel mature, to relax, be sociable.

The 8th grade spends time discussing the reasons why people drink alcohol and use drugs. Drugs are constantly defined to include medicines, caffeine (including coca cola and chocolate) in the same listing as hard drugs.

By the end of the 8th grade, the child has spent 193 hours of classroom time, but no one has told him that taking illegal drugs is wrong. Indeed, the powerful message of the curriculum is that practically everybody is taking some kind of drugs, and that they have good reasons for doing it, even if there may be a few bad side effects.