



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1995 Volume III: The Constitution and Criminal Justice

Living to Avoid The Criminal Justice System

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When the Pilgrims came to America their primary purpose was to start a new life with new laws on new territory. Things went well during the first couple of months because everyone was happy and spent much of their time adjusting to this new country. Therefore, they did not have time to create problems. However, as time passed some of the problems of the English began to surface. Groups began to segregate themselves and created disturbance for the settlers. That was 375 years ago. We are still moving to create change. Although there were positive action as a result of these moves, there was still a conflict of interest as separation occurred.

It is only natural that when a group of people get together there must be a set of rules and regulations to keep order and peace. It took the lawmakers of the early settlers 170 years to come up with the document known as the Bill of Rights which were used to guarantee us to freedom of speech, or religion, or the press, and the right of assembly. They also protect a person's rights to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'. This document describes the fundamental liberties of the people. It also forbids the government to violate these rights.

Many changes have occurred since this document was written. More amendments have been added as our population of the United States has become more diverse. However, the amendments to the constitution do not address the problems that we face today. This action naturally causes the same types of conflicts that occurred 375 years ago. If we could not solve problems then with less people and less complex situation, why do we feel that we can solve the problems today?

This unit will remind the readers of some of the problems that our young children are faced with today and will also provide activities which can be used to help the teachers and students develop strategies which would keep our students from becoming a part of the negative stereotype which plagues our African-American children.

When the unit is completed, the students will be able to:

1. develop strategies to eliminate or decrease their chances of living in poverty.
2. develop ways to decrease their chances of becoming a part of crime statistics.
3. improve their academic performances in school.
4. develop a better relationship with their family members especially their parents or legal

guardians.

5. develop a respect for a better school climate and environment.
6. resist the temptation of becoming a substance abuser.
7. utilize problem solving skills in developing life saving skills.
8. attach situations using critical thinking skills.

Although this unit is written for grades K-5, it can easily be adapted for all grades K-12.

This unit could be completed during a marking period of 10 weeks. However, I strongly suggest that some parts of the unit be reviews once or twice a month during the school year for the purpose of strengthening the children personal values and positive conflict resolution skills.

The diversity of the population across the nation has created problems which are the same for all communities.

When you open your newspapers, read educational magazines and listen to the nightly news the headlines about education are all the same: 'POVERTY', 'CRIME', 'ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE', 'SCHOOL SAFETY', 'SUBSTANCE ABUSE' AND 'PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT'. These issues are not confined to any particular community nor ethnic group. These communities can be inner city or suburban, large or small, rich or poor the same questions prevail: 'What can we do for our children?' and 'What are the parents doing for their children?'

The major difference involving all communities is that inner city schools receive more space in these publications for the negative things that are happening in their communities, while the suburban communities receive space for the positive things they are doing. When negative things do happen in the affluent neighborhoods, if possible, it is the minorities who are blamed for the action.

We live in a democratic society where interested citizens must put forth every effort to produce an educational system that nurtures the respect of the public. We as professional educators, parents, community leaders, and entrepreneurs must come together to foster the type of environment that we will feel comfortable to retire after so many long years of work.

VALUES

Value is defined as the relative worth, importance, or usefulness of a person or thing. Values are the beliefs, standards, principles, or ideas of a person or persons.

Children should learn at a very early age that they must share everything, play fair, don't hit people, and don't take things that aren't theirs. As these students enter kindergarten, those behaviors are enforced over and over again.

The real cause for many of today's social problems is a lack of shared values. We would not have laws, corruption, violence, crime, child neglect, and many other maladies, if we had a true sense of community. We can't have a sense of community except by having a sense of shared values.

Many societies are held together by religion which provides a built in set of ethical values. Our country made the wise decision to allow freedom of religion as a part of the laws by which we are governed. This precluded a ready-made set of common values. Merely sustaining life required hard work and dependence on the support of the community. Apart from patriotism, it was the ethic or truly valuing work that became a shared value. In finding ways to praise an individual, 'hard working' was the highest accolade. There are some individuals who still associate hard work with success.

As the international role of our country became more secure and as our lives were made easier by applied technology, we became sufficiently affluent and our belief in both patriotism and the work ethic diminished. Our lack of shared values started to become painfully obvious. Instead of becoming a united society we began to divide ourselves into our own cultural setting. There was a distinct difference in each ethnic group and mixing was almost inevitable.

Today, one of the few values we share is a belief in education. Even in our increasingly diverse society, almost all of us value learning and education. Even with these thoughts we ask ourselves, 'Is there equity in education?'; 'To what extent is there equality in education?'; and 'Shouldn't education be the tool that instills values in our society?' Unfortunately, we have come to accept the model of 'value free' educational would assert that such education is 'valueless'. The noted educator Robert Maynard Hutchins wrote that any system of education which is without values is a contradiction in terms, a system that seeks bad values is bad. A system that denies the existence of values denies the possibility of education.

Certainly education can teach us to do things. Just as technology destroyed our common work ethic, technology and other things we learn are only as good as what they produce or the values they produce. Whatever our activities, whatever we learn to do we generate outcomes. It is critically important that those outcomes serve the common good of society. They must support our shared values. Unfortunately, we don't know what those values are. It appears that we seem unwilling to work together to formulate common values.

I believe there is one value that should be cherished by every one of us as the cornerstone for an ethically based society. That value is honesty. How can we have a society, a human institution, an educational system this is not based on personal honesty? With honest, we can accomplish much. We can truly know ourselves to find out our strengths and our weaknesses. We should capitalize on our strengths and correct our weaknesses. We should also do the same for those around us because trust, cooperation, team work, and leadership cannot exist without honesty.

We must remember that without honesty, we can do little to correct our own failure or those of others. Children will emulate what they see and hear. If a family has good morals and values, chances are great that these values will be passed onto their children. Children from violent families have been shown to exhibit a variety of internal and external behavior problems. We as educators must do all that we can to ensure that these students change their behavior so as to pass a positive or more appropriate behavior down to the next generation.

VIOLENCE

Violence in our society is pervasive. If we are not careful this negative behavior spills over into the schools, where tension builds up and conflicts go unresolved, assaults on children, teachers and property are commonplace. There is evidence from studies that the younger we can reach a child to change a negative behavior into a positive, better the chances are that this goal is achieved. Educational institutions which should provide a positive environment for resisting the drift toward violence are seldom effective in dealing with the causes of antisocial behavior. The big question is why? One reason is because the students don't have a positive role model to follow at home. Children see their parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, and others doing wrong and are not caught or punished for their action. Therefore, they feel that they too can do the same thing and walk away clean. Even the school environment is not consistent in the punishments which are administered to children for inappropriate behavior.

There is much being done to stamp out violence by methods which are themselves violent toward children in conflict. These methods only confirm the notion that violence is an acceptable, if not preferable, method of solving problems. Such methods are dehumanizing and fail to provide children with positive alternatives to violent patterns of behavior. Children should learn how to confront situation without being aggressive.

What are the roots of violence? The roots of conflict lie deep in our culture and are reflected in the kinds of behavior our society promotes: competition, hostility in response to aggression or fear, and the put-downs we hear daily in the classrooms, corridors and playgrounds of our schools. We should teach our children to deal with the roots of conflicts and not merely the symptoms. It should be the goal of the teachers, parents and the community to move beyond the treatment of isolated crisis situations by developing a positive dynamic which motivates children to respond to conflict constructively. If we focus our attention exclusively on the immediate crisis, whether it is in the classroom or the community, is like cutting off a weed at the soil line, while underground the hidden roots continue to send up new and vigorous shoots.

We find that children develop positive self-esteem and learn to be open, sharing and cooperative much more effectively when they become part of a community in which these attributes are the norm. In such an atmosphere they discover better ways to relate to one another as well as to themselves. It is not enough to talk about these ideas. In order for them to be effective they must be reflected in the organization of the classroom. Instead of telling children that violence is wrong or evil, we need a positive classroom environment where violence seems totally out of place and our actions are examples of constructive approaches to problem solving.

We must present our children with enjoyable tools that encourage them to discover for themselves solutions to problems and conflicts arising out of their own real-life experiences. They are the ones who decide which of these will be most beneficial to them in terms of their own personal goals. Keep in mind that the best way to

understand the action is to practice it, correctly of course.

CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS

Various forms of popular culture serve to educate and socialize as well as influence human behavior. In a discipline such as criminal justice, little is known by the general public about the individuals involved with the system: the law enforcer, the victim, and the offender. Therefore, the construction of reality for most is likely to come from media representations. Depending on the city, state, and reporter, the message can be damaging to individuals. Our children need to be taught at a very early age the appropriate behavior which would keep them from the criminal menaces of society. Teaching them this behavior is not enough, we must make sure that they are constantly utilizing the appropriate behavior.

Problem solving techniques are an intricate part of our daily lives. They can provide children with a focus for learning through play especially if they are done during group time activities. It is a way teachers introduce children to the world of creative and critical thinking, both as individuals and as part of a group. Problem solving can create and encourage cooperation because it teaches children to learn to hear and support each other's ideas.

Problem solving is a process of identifying a problem or goal, generating ideas to solve or reach it, then testing out the ideas. Listed below are several steps to guide children through the process, though not every problem follows these steps exactly or has a definite solution.

1. Define the problem. Use open-ended questions to encourage children to talk about what they are doing, thinking or feeling. When children can't verbalize the problem clearly, they should be helped to find a few key words, and build from there.
2. Brainstorm solutions. Instead of finding one 'right' answer to a question or problem, it is important for children to think of several options. Open-ended questions such as, 'What's another way you can do this?' or 'What would happen if we tried a different way?' encourage children to expand their thinking. Remember brainstorming is to be used for coming up with many possible solutions, not to evaluate the solutions.
3. Decide where to start. After brainstorming, choose which ideas to test. It's important to remember that problem solving is a fluid process. We often think of one thing to try, then reshape it, modify it, or abandon it altogether in order to try something new. It's not important to stick to the original plan.
4. Select or create tools. During this step it is important to decide what is needed in order to try out the solutions. If the problem is a conflict between people, words can be carefully used as the best tools to solve the conflict.
5. Experiment with solutions. This step in the problem solving process teaches the students a sense of independent that they will gain from testing their ideas. When acknowledging all ideas as experiments, it reinforces the idea that problem solving is a process.

These five steps to successful problem solving skills should be used as frequently as possible whenever a conflict arises so that they become a part of the students' daily routine. These techniques are the right avenue to avoid becoming a part of the criminal justice system.

School Environment

Things are changing. There are more and more children from various cultural backgrounds entering early childhood programs. During the 1990's it is expected that more than 8.5 million immigrants will enter this country. They are coming primarily from Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean Islands. Immigration from Eastern Europe and the countries that were once part of the Soviet Union is also increasing. What does this diversity mean to our children?

All of our children will grow up in a world in which people from many different cultures live and work together. Early childhood is the best time to prepare children for this world by helping them learn in positive ways about difference in language, appearance, customs, and abilities. This understanding helps children build an appreciation of others, and support social and communication skills that will be important to them later in life.

When there is a diverse microcosm of the world in the classroom, we can readily foster respect and appreciation for many kinds of people by exploring each child's language and culture.

We must always seek to give all young children the best start in life. We must establish goals that will help build an appreciation of diversity. Listed below are some basic goals that good childhood programs can strive for.

1. foster positive self-concept
2. enhance language development
3. support social, emotional, cognitive, and motor development
4. develop creative expression
5. foster respect for cultural, family, and economic diversity, and individual differences.
6. enhance language development in children's home language and lay the foundation for the development of a second language.

Our young children are vulnerable and victims to some of the negative actions of our society. While they are in the process of discovering who they are, we must do all that we can to make them feel good about themselves. In the process of giving all children the benefits of diversity, we must also let them know about CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AROUND THE WORLD. We must let them know about the international legal standards for children's rights which include: 1) the right to food, shelter, and essential health care; 2) the right to a free and compulsory primary education; 3) the right to leisure, play, and participation in cultural and artistic activities, and 4) the right to special care if disabilities exist.

These basic rights allow the student to begin to process what is to be expected later in life as they are presented with the amendments of the constitution. Teaching students the GOLDEN RULE, 'Do unto others as you would have them to do unto you', is most important early in life. Perhaps this would reduce their chances of becoming a part of the statistics of the criminal justice system.

Parental Involvement

Parents are the links to the community. The community is an essential component in the lives of parents and young children; therefore, can and should play a vital role in the life of any program dealing with the development of students. It is important to learn about the communities that the school serves and visa versa. Parents can provide the link to understanding the community and helping to access its resources.

Every community is different because each reflects the ethnic and cultural traditions of its families. It's important to talk with parents and children about their experiences in relationship to the community. This enables you as the teacher to see through their eyes and draw on community resources that are meaningful to them.

Exploration of people and places within the community can provide excellent learning experiences for children, and opportunities to create curriculum with parents as partners. The big question is 'How can we get parents and the community involved in the educational development of our children. Below are some ideas for working with parents and families to expand the role of community in the schools and classrooms.

Thinking about themes together: Keep parents informed of curriculum themes as soon as they develop so they have a chance to help gather information and contact related resources.

Parents as tour guides: Invite parents to accompany your group on community walks and serve as guides, sharing their knowledge of the area.

Finding Field Trips: Poll parents for suggested places in the community that children might visit on field trips. Invite interested parents to help make arrangements and accompany you on the trips.

The community in pictures: Seek parents to volunteer to photograph important places in the community and create a class community book. Place this book on display and allow other parents to add to it over time.

The way it used to be: Seek parents or other family members who grew up in the community to share pictures and stories with children about what it was like there when they were children.

Comparing communities: Invite parents and grandparents to share with children what it was like to grow up in very different communities. Discuss with children the similarities and differences to their own community.

The way we work: Encourage parents to bring in materials or to that they use in their jobs. Allow the students to interview parents about their work in the community. Be sure to be respectful of parents who work at home or may be unemployed.

Community prop boxes: Work with parents to collect props that represent important places and people in the community to use in the creative arts and dramatic play centers of the room.

Children's community workers: Parents can invite their child's pediatrician, dentist, favorite grocer, barber, etc. to come and talk with the class about their professions.

Resources for all: Ask parents to help create a master list of resources that includes what the community has to offer young children while in school and on the weekends or vacations. Be sure to include resources that are inexpensive or free. Share this information with all the families in the school.

Although this list is short, it is powerful. Children like to know that their parents are interested in what they are doing at school. Parents like to be asked to do things for their children as well as the school. The key action for all is building self-esteem as well as bridging the gap between parents, students, teachers, and school. This action has a large impact on the behavior of students. As we all know, a positive self-esteem does lower the tendency of negative behavior.

Activity # 1

What do I do about Fighting?

In a whole group setting, talk to the students about fighting. Define discipline: Discipline is a slow, bit-by-bit, time consuming task of helping children see the sense in acting a certain way. Though it might seem easier and faster to scold, threaten, or punish children for fighting, your real goal is to develop abilities for students to solve their own problems.

Actions to look for and a possible recommendation for a positive solution to the action.

1. Anticipate problems that might occur.
2. Hesitation to tell who initiated the conflict. (Stand back for a moment and watch the persons involved.)
3. Investigate what led to the conflict. (Be careful not to put the blame on either child.)
4. Communicate with the students involved. (Talk about what happened and ask what could have been done to avoid the conflict.)

NOTE; Use your creativity to constantly search for other ways to help children express their feelings verbally.

Activity # 2

What do I do about Racial Slurs?

1. Look at your environment.
 - A. Do you have multi-cultural books?

- B. Does your bulletin boards reflect different races?
- 2. Things to do:
 - A. Find a variety of ways to reinforce how each child is special.
 - B. Invite guests into the classroom to help children learn about one another's families, customs, and heroes.
 - C. Read and discuss passages from Carla and Annie.

NOTE: You cannot eliminate racism in the world, but you can work within your own environment to make things better.

Activity # 3

What do I do about children Rejecting Others?

It's hard for children to understand why some children get angry or start fighting. They can't comprehend the frustration of a child who cannot communicate his feelings or needs, nor the confusion and fear of a child who appears to be completely different from others in the class.

What to do?

1. Have a group discussion about why people are different. (Talk about size, color, hair, eyes, height, etc.)
2. Discuss the word friends, honesty, respect, different, alike.
3. Put students in small groups for various activities in the class and rotate them about every 3 to 4 days for the purpose of encouraging students to work together on projects to get to know one another.

NOTE: Use the book, Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters to discuss how people are different even within the same family.

Related Activities:

1. Create a family portrait bulletin board for the purpose of noting likes and differences in people. Change pictures every two weeks.
2. Invite members of the community to talk about to the students about friendship and honesty.
3. Play the decision dial game in small group settings.

Activity # 4

Affirmative Action: Race and Rage

Scenario:

All Janice Cararena wanted was to attend English at the local college. She was a young student working to pay for her college tuition and the only time she could attend class was at 11 a.m.. There was a problem. She was white and the class was reserved for African-Americans. The class was for writing, career counseling and mentoring. She couldn't sign up.

After a week Janice sued. Now she is a test case for those who want to remove any trace of racial preference in the community college system. She felt that everyone should have an equal chance to attend any class they chose regardless of the color of their skin.

Let's Discuss The Situation

1. Define and discuss the underlined words in the situation.
2. What is affirmative action?
3. How does affirmative action help or hinder ethnic groups?
4. What would you have done if you were Janice?
5. Write a 100 word essay to explain your action.

Related Activities:

Invite some one from the community who is familiar with the rules governing affirmative action to discuss local situations such as: school choice, equal employment opportunity.

Choose a current event, investigate background information and have the students to debate their findings.

Read passages from, *Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years 1954-1965*. for discussion.

Activity # 5

Changes in Attitude

Scenario:

As students move from elementary to middle school, they too often lose interest in their studies. Research shows that a positive school environment can help smooth the bumpy transition. It has been argued that middle schools are a lot more ability-focused than elementary schools. What are your feelings.

1. Define and discuss the underlined words.
2. Divide the students into groups of 4 or 5 to generate a list of concerns that students would have as they prepare to enter middle school.
3. Compile the list from the groups and come to a consensus as to their priority.
4. Choose a concern to discuss during weekly class meetings.

Related Activities:

1. Invite students from middle schools to share their positive experiences with the students.
2. Build a relationship with a class or students at the middle school level and become pen pals. (Pen pals could be local or a neighboring town.)
3. Build a relationship with a middle school to set up visitation privileges at least twice a year.

NOTE: Read passages from, 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People' for the purpose of making students aware of the actions they need to take in order to become successful in their endeavors.

Decision Dial

Draw and cut a circle out of poster board. Tack on a cardboard dial from the center. Here are two different decision dials to start. Make additional decision making statements as students encounter other problems.(figure available in print form)

(figure available in print form)

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