A creative and systematic approach to helping students respect themselves and others.
Introduction

The Human Dignity Curriculum (HDC) is a program of the World Youth Alliance (WYA) to promote a healthy and integrated understanding of sexuality among young people. An organization of young people around the world, WYA promotes the respect of human dignity—the intrinsic value of every human person—as key to human flourishing. Human dignity is the basis for our curriculum, which fosters a holistic understanding of the person to nurture personal development rather than simply prevent sexual activity or its consequences. Through the program, students understand themselves as integrated persons capable of healthy decisions and the attainment of human excellence—and learn to respect, in their personal behavior, themselves, their friends, their own dignity and the dignity of others.
The Need for a New Model

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines sexuality as “a central aspect of being human throughout life and encompasses sex, gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction. Sexuality is experienced and expressed in thoughts, fantasies, desires, beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviours, practices, roles and relationships.” This definition informs WHO programs as well as others intended to meet sexual education needs in the U.S. and abroad. WYA’s position is that standards for sexual education must respect human dignity and help individuals make healthy choices regarding themselves and the relationships in which they engage, thus contributing to the formation of healthy persons and societies. The existing status quo in the U.S. and abroad manifests that these standards are unmet by current programs. In the U.S., the average young person has sex for the first time around age 17. This early sexual debut among youth negatively impacts life plans by effects on health, education, earning power, and marriage. Additionally, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) found that, of nearly 20 million new sexually transmitted infections in the U.S. in 2008, half were acquired by young people aged 15-24. The total cost of these infections among Americans is $16 billion, an intense financial burden for U.S. healthcare, and dashed hopes and dreams for many young people.

Additionally, many programs are confused and inadequate. For example, WHO Europe, working with the Federal Centre for Health Education, published a set of guidelines for sexuality education in Europe. These include the introduction of a number of concepts that many would find objectionable or offensive as subject matter for children. These standards promote teaching children from 0-4 years old about early childhood masturbation. Children from 4-6 learn the basics of human reproduction and the idea that they can create their own gender and identity. Children aged 6-9 learn about contraceptive methods, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and self-stimulation. Effective condom and contraceptive use and sexual rights are part of the curriculum for 9-12 year olds. Children from 12-15 are supposed to develop skills in negotiating sexual experiences, and from age 15 and up children should “be empowered to claim sexual rights.” These guidelines were designed to provide standards for children’s education in Europe and have informed curricula and content currently being implemented.

No current program addresses fully the needs of children and their families for the lifetime healthy integration of sexuality. Most sexual education programs, whether comprehensive or abstinence-exclusive, either lack efficacy entirely or have limited, short-term effects. The HDC has been created in response to existing deficiencies as a holistic human development program, in order to educate youth about human sexuality in context of their person and life.

“... through our actions we reveal our character, and this influences how others treat us; if we’re good people, we inspire others to be better to us.”
- 5th grade student, Mexico
Best Practices in Character Formation & Sexual Education Programs

Research indicates best practices for supporting healthy decision-making and behavior choices. A clear personal identity needs to be developed as a meaningful part of an individual's worldview consistent with reason and human experience, in line with the primary human competencies (social, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and moral), and with the opportunity for future- and goal-oriented thinking. The application of this framework to the teaching of biology and body-specific behaviors is the basis for the groundbreaking approach of the HDC, which brings together best practices from character formation and sexual education programs.

Additionally, research shows that effective programs involve parents, civic and religious values, and after school programs. Programs that incorporate these elements show a strong correlation with high levels of personal and academic achievement, as well as high rates of delayed sexual debut through high school and even college.

These best practices all inform the development of the HDC. The curriculum helps children forge a strong personal identity, grounded in a proper understanding of human dignity as well as the unique place of the human person in the world. Each grade level examines this concept and applies it to children's lives in developmentally appropriate ways. The sexual education module is introduced with the sixth grade (ages 11-12) but follows seven hours of classroom instruction in personal identity, worldview, and commitments to achieving human excellence in our own behaviors and choices within which sexual education content is integrated.

The HDC focuses on the development of the entire human person. This involves learning how to act in ways that respect the dignity of each human person, including ourselves, as the means by which we become excellent. Discussions of human sexuality are presented in the context of its integration with the full human person. This integrated approach also helps HDC students articulate goals for human excellence, for their health and wellbeing, and for long-term achievements and pursuits.

“Plants grow because they can, animals feel and we should treat them well, but humans can be excellent.”
- 3rd grade student, Mexico
What are the key elements of the HDC?

The HDC examines several themes that build on each other grade by grade. The first theme develops an understanding of the dignity of the human person, the intrinsic value of the person, which is marked by the uniquely human capacities for thinking and choosing (intellect and will). With that understanding in mind, students study human agency, human freedom, and the ability to make choices that enable human excellence. This integration of human dignity and human freedom establishes the basis for examining secondary themes, such as human sexuality and its integration into our lives.

Themes (Grades K-12):

- Human Dignity
- The Hierarchy of Living Beings / Powers of Living Things:
  - vegetative (nutrition, growth, reproduction: basic physical existence)
  - sensitive (senses and emotions: relation with the world)
  - rational (intellect and will: self-awareness and determination)
- Intentional Actions
- Human Freedom
- Persons as Subjects vs. Objects
- Friendship and Heroes
- Human Excellence

Sexual Education Module (Optional for Grades 6+):

- Health-Hormone Connection
- Emotion-Hormone Connection
- Human Dignity & Health Integration

The HDC incorporates several key support elements. It includes a teacher training program, as well as teacher support in lesson plans, materials, and assessments (K-12). A web-based delivery of the curriculum for teachers, a web-based parent portal for support and involvement, and a student website are currently under development. These materials conform to local educational standards and outcomes. These aspects and components help teachers, families, and students to derive the most benefit from the program.
Status of the Program

WYA is piloting the HDC at schools in both New York and Mexico. Grades K-8 are being piloted in Mexico City and New York City and a pilot program for grades 9-12 is underway at a high school in the Bronx, New York City. Each week students from every grade level as well as classroom teachers are interviewed for feedback on the program.

In Mexico, after the first class, one 5th grade student described human dignity as the “worth that we have inside and that makes us special,” and something that “no one can take away because if they did, they would be taking away you.” Some 6th graders in New York initially defined dignity as something that one “achieves” or “earns,” but by the end of the introductory session were won over by the example of Nick Vujicic, an inspirational speaker born without limbs, who they now know possesses the same dignity as they do.

Older students in New York learned the distinctions between subjects and objects, with subjects defined as living beings capable of self-determination (only humans), and the difference between intentional and non-intentional actions. One student said, “[this] lesson will influence how I will allow myself to be treated, because now I am more confident that I have dignity
and that I’m a subject that shouldn’t be treated like an object.” Another stated, “I’m beginning to understand that through our actions we reveal our character, and this influences how others treat us; if we’re good people, we inspire others to be better to us.”

These same students also learned about building virtue in order to grow in human excellence, respecting one’s own dignity and the dignity of others, and taking small steps to prepare for bigger decisions and more heroic actions in the future. “I liked learning about the steps to human excellence...they teach me how to help myself, my family members, and others,” one student remarked. According to another, “I liked learning about what I can do now to reach my goals in the future.” “I liked learning about the virtues and vices because they show you what you need to do in order to be a better person,” said a third. The students almost universally grasped the core of the curriculum: that human beings, due to their unique powers to think and choose, possess the special capacity to determine their own characters, and to grow in excellence.

Finally, the students responded powerfully to the underlying relevance of the course when asked to compare it with other classes. One said, “[in] science we study to understand volcanoes and earthquakes, but in HDC class we learn about ourselves.” Similarly, another student stated, “[in] other classes we just learn definitions, but in HDC we learn about big ideas. HDC teaches us that nobody can give or take away human dignity.” According to the principal at the school in Mexico, the “program is important because it is 100% human development. Complex philosophical ideas are articulated with a clarity that children can understand.” The curriculum builds from basic philosophical concepts to practical application in a short span of time, and it gives students an immediate context in which to understand human existence, the operations of their minds and bodies, and the choices they make about both.

The pilots are conducted as preparation for a summative evaluation and longitudinal study. Grades 3-8 will be ready for broad-based implementation in September 2015, at which point WYA will begin larger school-based evaluation of these programs in New York City.

**How to Participate**

WYA is currently inviting interested schools to participate in the HDC project. WYA is seeking in particular 10 schools in the New York City area to commit by April 2015, for summative evaluation for the curricula for grades 3-8 and 9-12. The target participation numbers for each grade are 500 students participating in the HDC, and 500 students per grade in the control group. Teacher training and program preparation will take place in July for a September start date.

To contact us about this program, please email education@wya.net.
Endnotes

3 See, e.g., Robert E. Rector et al., The Heritage Foundation, The Harmful Effects of Early Sexual Activity and Multiple Sexual Partners Among Women: A Book of Charts (2003); Anthony Paik, Adolescent Sexuality and Risk of Marital Dissolution, 73 J. Marriage & Family 472, 483 (2011); Nicole M. Else-Quest et al., Context counts: Long-term sequelae of premarital intercourse or abstinence, 42 J. Sex Research 102 (2005); Robert F. Valois et al., Relationship between number of sexual intercourse partners and selected health risk behaviors among public high school adolescents 25 J. Adolescent Health 328 (1999); Jonathan G. Tubman et al., The Onset and Cross-Temporal Patterning of Sexual Intercourse in Middle Adolescence: Prospective Relations with Behavioral and Emotional Problems, 67 Child Development 327 (1996).
5 Id.
7 Id. at 40.
8 Id. at 42-43.
9 Id. at 44-45.
10 Id. at 46.
11 Id. at 50.
15 Catalano et al., supra note 12, at 103.
16 Id. at 107.
17 The teaching of human biology in context of character formation and/or sexuality education programs is inherently oriented to assisting in the student’s behavioral competence, which “refers to effective action … [including] taking action (helping others, walking away from negative situations, participating in positive activities)” (i.e., to making certain healthy sexual choices in various circumstances). See id. at 105. For most effective youth development, behavioral competencies must be acknowledged by the student in context of his entire person, including his other competencies, as well as the identity and worldview in which he assimilates knowledge of self, others, and the world. The HDC is the first program to acknowledge the necessity of teaching human sexuality as an indication of the whole person.
20 See, e.g., Daniel Wight & Deirdre Fullerton, A Review of Interventions With Parents to Promote the Sexual Health of their Children, 52 J. Adolescent Health 4 (2013); Kirby & Lepore, supra note 15.
PURPOSE

Introduce the concepts of subject and object as they apply to the human person.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson students will:
1. Be able to define the terms subject and object.
2. Be able to discuss how to treat subjects vs. objects in the actions they take.

MATERIALS & RESOURCES

- Subjects & Object worksheet (see Materials)
- Respecting Other Subjects worksheet (see Materials)

VOCABULARY

- subject: a person, possessing human dignity, with powers necessary for free choices and self-determination
- object: a being without rational powers

PROCEDURE

Review & Anticipatory Set (3 mins.)

“Why do animals and humans feel emotions?” (we have sensitive powers and need to know how to interact with the world around us) “Are we responsible for which emotions we feel?” (no – they are automatic responses in the body) “But can we choose how we respond to and act on our emotions?” (most of the time) “If we choose how we react, are we responsible for our reaction?” (yes)

“In our last lesson on human action we learned about the difference between intentional actions and non-intentional actions.” Ask for volunteers to provide a definition in their own words and give an example of each. “While we have no control over our non-intentional actions, we are responsible for our intentional actions. Why is this?” (they involve the intellect and will) “What is it about our intellect and will that makes us responsible for our actions?” (we are free, and we can choose actions that didn’t have to happen) “Does our freedom mean that we can do whatever we want?” (no, our freedom means that we have
the ability to choose our actions and have the capacity for excellence) “Are we free when there are restraints placed upon us?” (yes) “Why is this?” (we can still make choices)

Direct Instruction (10 mins.)

“When we make intentional actions, we are responsible for them and their effects because they come from our will – they don’t have to happen, but we choose to make them happen. This is why we said that some of our non-intentional actions are done more by our bodies than by us. As a result, we have to make sure that the actions we take treat ourselves and others in the right way. How do we know how to treat each other? We need to know if we are subjects or objects.

“Subjects are people – beings who possess human dignity and rational powers, the intellect and will, which are those powers necessary to make choices. A subject, therefore, has the powers that are necessary for intentional actions. He is a subject because he has these powers, and he remains a subject even when he doesn’t use them. This is why babies, who can’t make their own decisions yet, or older people who have become sick, or people who have been in severe accidents, are subjects just like the rest of us. We care about our rational powers because using them to make choices about ourselves and our lives is the way we show the dignity we possess. Every subject, because of his intellect and will, is free to make choices – and he is individually responsible for making choices that respect his dignity and the dignity of others, as well as lead to or make possible his own human excellence, which we will learn about next. When we recognize others as subjects, we recognize their dignity and our own dignity, as well as our mutual responsibility to make the right choices.

“Objects, on the other hand, are those beings without rational powers. Because they do not have an intellect or will, they cannot make choices. They themselves are, therefore, not free in the way humans are, and this means that they can be used or taken advantage of by us subjects without us causing them any disrespect. For example, we use tools to build a house, or we take a bus to school: these are objects used for our benefit. We also use pets for our pleasure. Our pets don’t choose to be our pets — when we buy one, we choose it. Just because animals or other objects cannot choose, however, does not mean that we can treat them with violence. Even though our pets don’t have a will and cannot make choices, they are living, and their lives should be respected.

“It is also important to remember that objects help subjects live their lives. For example, we have to grow food in order to have it to eat and survive. Unnecessarily destroying food, then, is an inappropriate way to handle it — even though the food is an object.

“So are human persons subjects or objects?” (subjects) “Is the table an object?” (yes) “What do I use it for?” (to sit at) “Is it appropriate for me to treat it as an object?” (yes) “Is it possible to treat a human per-
son as an object?” (yes, but students may struggle – an example would be making friends with the smartest person in the class only to get help on homework) “Is it wrong to treat a human person as an object?” (yes) “Why?” (they have human dignity, and we need to use our rational powers to respect their dignity)

“Should I treat my friend as an object?” (no) “Ok, great.”

**Worksheet** (15 mins.)

“Let’s see how well we understand this distinction.”

- **Subject & Object worksheet.** Students will answer a series of conceptual and example-based questions about the distinctions between subjects and objects.
- **Respecting Other Subjects worksheet.** Students will apply their understanding of subjects and objects to different situations and behaviors from their own lives.

**Conclusion** (2 mins.)

“Tell me what you know!

“Are we subjects or objects?” (subjects)
“Do we have responsibility for intentional or non-intentional actions?” (intentional)
“Why?” (intentional actions use our rational powers, using our intellect and will)
“Do we have human dignity?” (yes) “Can anyone ever take it away from us?” (no)
“Can we act in ways that violate our human dignity?” (yes) “This week are we going to practice acting in ways that reflect our dignity and the dignity of others?” (yes)

**FOLLOW-UP & HOMEWORK**

No homework.
SENSING THINGS INTERNALLY

Directions: Use a line to connect the internal sense with its definition, then answers the questions below.

- the ability to organize the knowledge gained by the senses
- the ability to recognize the appropriate response to a particular situation
- the ability to remember knowledge gained through the senses
- the ability to picture things in the mind that are not immediately before a person

1. Is it possible to have memories if the external senses have never sensed anything? Why or why not?

2. Is it possible to experience the same object, i.e., a banana, through different external senses? Can you give an example? Which internal sense helps organize the sense knowledge?

3. How can someone imagine what a dragon looks like though they have never seen one before? (Where does the image come from?)

4. Which other internal senses do you thing work with instinct in order to make it more accurate over time? How?

5. What is the major difference between the external senses and the internal senses?

Bonus: The external senses and internal senses often work together. However, one of them has to work before the other can begin. Which one works first and how do you know?
Senses Put Together

Directions: For the following scenarios, identify which senses are used (clues for the number of senses are in parentheses) and how.

1. A girl burns her hand on the stove and doesn’t forget the pain until she’s much older. (1 external, 2 internal)

2. A toddler waves at her mother every time she sees her. (1 external, 1 internal)

3. A boy starts to sweat the moment he comes inside from sledding. (1 external, 1 internal)

4. A cat sees a dog and immediately runs away. (1 external, 1 or 2 internal)

5. A daycare provider watches her toddlers and knows what each one needs when they cry. (2 external, 1 or 2 internal)

6. After soccer practice, a boy’s mouth begins to water when he thinks about what his mom prepared for dinner. (1 external, 2 or 3 internal)

7. A woman feels raindrops and immediately steps under her roof. (1 external, 1 internal)
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**FOLLOW-UP & HOMEWORK**

No homework.
SUBJECTS & OBJECTS

Directions: Answer the questions below.

1. Define subject. ________________________________

Are subjects free? yes no

2. Define object. ________________________________

Are objects free? yes no

3. Why can human beings be considered both subjects and objects?

4. How can we use our powers to identify whether beings and things should be treated as subjects or objects?

5. A water reservoir in upstate New York supplies water in Manhattan. A factory owner wants to use the reservoir as a dump site for his factory. Is the water a subject or an object? subject object

Should the owner be allowed to do whatever he wants to the water? yes no

Explain why the importance of objects to the lives of subjects might mean that objects should not be mistreated. Give another example.

6. This same factory owner hires children to work in a sweatshop in India, and he pays them less than $1 for 12 hours of work a day. Is the factory owner a subject or an object? subject object

Are the children he hires subjects or objects? subjects objects

Does the owner treat them as subjects or objects? subjects objects How do you know?

Is the factory owner’s treatment appropriate? yes no

If you could write him a letter to explain your answer, what would you tell him?
RESPECTING OTHER SUBJECTS

Directions: From the list below, choose two actions you have committed (or come up with your own similar examples), explain why they are are instances of treating other people as objects versus subjects, and identify more appropriate treatment.

a. not looking away from the T.V. when my parents are talking to me
b. agreeing to help a classmate on a project only because she’ll invite me to her house for a pool party
c. not holding the door open for the older person behind me
d. telling my friend about something embarrassing another classmate did
e. complaining about my teacher behind his or her back
f. plastering magazine covers of my favorite actor or actress all over my bedroom walls
g. lying to my piano teacher about the time I spent practicing
h. always sitting on the other side of the classroom from a classmate I don’t like
i. never looking or smiling at the homeless person who begs for money outside the grocery store
j. forgetting to thank my mom for making lunch and dinner for me every day

One of your classmates bullies another classmate. How would you act in order to make sure the bullied classmate is treated as a subject?

All your best friend ever talks about is how much he or she loves their favorite band — and only wants to know all the details about the band members’ lives and to go to all their concerts. How would you explain that this “obsession” with other people and their lives makes them into objects?

You are working on an important project for school, and your dad interrupts to ask for help clearing the driveway of snow. How should you respond, in order to be a good student and to treat your dad as a subject?
Puberty

the time when your body begins to develop and change as you move from kid to adult

During puberty, your brain triggers special hormones.

Depending on whether you’re a boy or a girl, these hormones affect different parts of your body.

Hormone Effects on The Body

The hormones FSH and LH from the brain signal

IN GIRLS: the ovaries to develop an egg and produce the main female hormones.

IN BOYS: the testes to produce sperm and the main male hormone.

Estrogen & progesterone influence the reproductive system and general health.

Testosterone influences the reproductive system and general health.
Every day you make choices about:

- what food you will eat
- how much exercise you will get
- when you will sleep
- what you will do to manage your stress

Adequate nutrition, exercise & sleep are essential for hormonal & overall health.
**The brain controls hormones each ovulation cycle**

**Hormones** from the brain signal a girl’s ovaries to

1. develop an egg, and
2. produce the **hormones** estrogen and progesterone.
Parts of the Female Reproductive System

Uterus

Front Side

Estrogen & progesterone influence the uterus & cervix

What happens inside can be observed on the outside

- menses
- dry
- mucus
- mucus
- dry

- estrogen low
- progesterone low
- estrogen rising
- estrogen high
- progesterone high
COURAGE PROFILE
PIER GIORGIO FRASSATI

PIER GIORGIO FRASSATI was born in Turin, Italy, on April 6, 1901, and from the earliest age, he lived his life with very much courage.

At the age of 17, in 1918, he joined a group that served the sick and needy, caring for orphans, and assisting hurt servicemen returning from World War I. He decided to become an engineer, and although he considered his studies his first duty, they did not keep him from social and political activism—he actively defended his belief in the importance of good working conditions for laborers, among other things. Mountain climbing was one of his favorite sports. He organized hikes with his friends, and courageously climbed to their peaks, to maintain his health and to see more of the world around him. He often went to the theater, to the opera, and to museums. He loved art and music.

What little money he had, Pier Giorgio gave to help the poor, generously, kindly, courageously, even using his bus fare for charity and then running home to be on time for meals. The poor and the suffering were his masters, and he was literally their servant, which he considered a privilege. His charity did not simply involve giving something to others, but giving completely of himself. He lived the same way toward all the women especially in his life, including one who was very special to him; but he chose not to pursue a relationship with her because it would have caused problems in both of their families, and he wanted to respect his parents, an action that required much courage, purity, and humility.

Just before receiving his university degree, Pier Giorgio contracted poliomyelitis, which doctors later speculated he caught from the sick whom he tended. Neglecting his own health because his grandmother was dying, after six days of terrible suffering Pier Giorgio died at the age of 24. The evening of his death, with a paralyzed hand he scribbled a message to a friend, asking him to take the medicine needed for injections to be given to Converso, a poor sick man he had been visiting. This too required courage and self-control.

Pier Giorgio’s funeral was a triumph. The streets of the city were lined with a multitude of mourners who were unknown to his family—the poor and the needy whom he had served so unselfishly for seven years.

Choose one way that Pier Giorgio showed courage that you can and will practice in your own life.