Role of Values in Child Guidance

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Values decisively influence children's attitudes and behavior. The role of values from a guidance point of view is discussed by W. M. Wise, Dean of Student Personnel, University of Florida, Gainesville.

RECENTLY a teacher of fourth-grade children in a public school said, "I don't understand why Arthur persists in doing things which antagonize me and which make the rest of the class unfriendly toward him." This teacher was describing the reactions of a child in her class who seemed deliberately to attempt to express hostile feelings toward the teacher and the rest of the class.

Study of Arthur reveals that he comes from a well-to-do home. Both his father and mother are members of old established families in the community. When Arthur was seven years of age his parents were separated. He now lives with his mother and maternal grandmother. What the teacher failed to recognize was that Arthur's actions were based in part upon a set of values which have been fostered by his home and by the community. That his values should be different from those of other children in the classroom and different from those of the teacher seems inevitable. He has been impressed with the importance of the families of his mother and father and with the privileges to which they have been accustomed in the community. On the other hand, at the present time he is living in an atmosphere of recrimination and blame because of the attitude of his mother toward his father.

Thus, Arthur has developed a system of values which is unacceptable to many children in the classroom. If the teacher fails to recognize this, she can do little to help Arthur in his present predicament. His expressions of hostility and aggression will continue.

Values a Major Concern in Guidance

The work of Hollingshead1 and others has emphasized the differences in value systems among classes in our society. They have pointed out that while all of our children hold some values in common arising out of the traditions of the American society, there is likely to be a wide divergence in values held by children in any classroom. For example, there are likely to be children who do not value law and order but who consider all rules of conduct unfair restraints and who consider adults to be their life-long enemies. On the other hand, there are likely to be children who value law and order and who consider all rules of conduct necessary for the common good. The problem of recognizing these differential values among school children and of using this understanding in working with them is increasingly recognized as a major function of child guidance.

Thomas has said, "By a social value we understand any datum having . . .

a meaning (for members of a social group) with regard to which it is or may be an object of activity. Thus, a foodstuff, an instrument, a coin, a piece of poetry, a university, a myth, a scientific theory, are social values. ... By attitude we understand a process of individual consciousness which determines real or possible activity of the individual in the social world. ... The attitude is thus the individual counterpart of the social value; activity, in whatever form, is the bond between them.2

Thus, the relationship of attitudes among school children to the values of society, both in the larger sense and in the restricted sense of their homes and neighborhood, becomes increasingly clear as an important determinant of the actions of school children. Hollingshead, in his book *Elmstown's Youth*, has drawn a clear picture of the effect of the characteristics of social classes upon the value systems of youth.

**Some Sources of Children's Values**

There are among American school children certain values commonly held. In our search for differences among school children, we may forget that the American society has unity which is, also, extremely important as a basis for child guidance.

Briefly stated, the following values which are prevalent in western civilization seem to be important in structuring our guidance of children:

- We proclaim a deep respect for individual personality. We are more interested in encouraging the person to grow and mature than we are in giving orders and driving the person toward a goal which we establish for him.
- We have a love for our fellow man: each of us is “his brother's keeper.” We do not believe that the strong shall survive at the expense of the weak; but rather that the strong shall help the weak.
- The importance of freedom in living is stressed. We do not seek efficiency in decision at the expense of individual choices. We do not wish the individual to be sacrificed to the state or to the social institutions of our society. Rather we conceive that the state and the social institutions function for the individual. Thus, the school functions for the child and is the child's servant.
- In the American culture a sense of independence and of progress from one generation to the next is emphasized. Thus, most children can be helped by retaining some feeling of “doing for themselves.”

There is a strong sense that son must have more advantages and accomplish more than father. This creates pressures on children sometimes out of proportion to their abilities to perform.

While these values may seem to be understood by everyone, they are often neglected in the training of child-guidance workers. Only within the framework of these values can child guidance as we know it develop and flourish. To the extent that our society adopts other values we must modify our concepts of child guidance.

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Social Forces Affect Values

Superimposed upon these common values are differential values which are produced by the wide diversity of social forces in communities, neighborhoods and homes of America. Warner, Hollingshead and others have made clear that these forces are very diverse in American communities. The following table indicates some of these forces which produce divergent values among children. Data used in this table is derived from various sources, yet serves the purpose of illustration.

Many other factors than those described in the table above influence values prevalent among children. However, it can be seen from this simple table that children in Class I have different social forces acting on them than do children in Class V. Thus, many of their attitudes and values vary widely.

Considering the fact that practically no fathers in Social Classes I and II have been convicted for law violations (this is, of course, not the same as saying they have never violated the law) and that fathers in Social Class V have a high average of convictions for violations of the law, it can be readily understood that these children will differ widely in their feelings about law enforcement and about the importance of supporting our laws. These differential values are easily discerned by teachers and guidance workers, but are often erroneously interpreted as deliberate misbehavior on the part of children.

It requires little imagination to find sufficient reason for the difficulty which children from Class V families have in schools and in almost every contact with adult society. Contacts with their fathers and mothers are likely to be somewhat cursory and they are likely to form value judgments about adult society on the basis of their casual experiences with transient adults associated with neighborhoods and homes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social class</th>
<th>% of families which own homes</th>
<th>% of broken homes</th>
<th>% of fathers who have been convicted of law violations</th>
<th>Source of financial support for family</th>
<th>% of mothers who contribute to family income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>11-14</td>
<td>Less than 1</td>
<td>Family-owned property and large businesses.</td>
<td>Less than 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>11-14</td>
<td>Less than 1</td>
<td>Professional and family-owned business or salaried executive.</td>
<td>Less than 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Small business and wages from permanent jobs.</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>*35</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Wages earned in daily work, usually by father.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>*19</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Odd jobs and short-time work by day.</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This includes those who own their homes and those who have large mortgages on the homes which they are buying.

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The high proportion of mothers who work and the haphazard employment of the fathers in Class V make it likely that children of this social class shall express values toward the importance of money and care of property quite unlike Class I children. Stealing and other undesirable attitudes toward property are almost inevitable results of these value determinants for many children.

Research relative to the formation of values and attitudes\(^3\) indicates the deep involvement of the child's ego in these processes. To assume that he can shed old values and gain new ones at will is to ignore the nature of these forces. Yet new values are continually being formed by the child through his social contacts. The challenge to the guidance worker is to develop these contacts and to capitalize on the opportunities which they present.

**The Guidance Worker Expresses Values**

Child-guidance literature emphasizes that the personality of the worker is an important determinant of the level of guidance work which can be performed. There may be an implicit assumption in this point of view that some of the values which the guidance worker holds will be transmitted to the client.

Some guidance literature has, however, emphasized the importance of guidance workers' restraining and subduing their value expressions so that the child is left perfectly free. Proponents of this concept argue that no

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Techniques of Guidance

No attempt will be made to analyze the various points of view concerning techniques which are available to guidance workers. These are far too numerous to discuss in this article. It seems important, however, to discuss briefly some relationships of techniques to values.

Much of the earlier literature on techniques, especially that which deals with counseling, has stressed the verbal nature of the interview. Phrases and words have been proposed as valuable clues, even indispensable clues, to the feelings and needs of the client.

More recently there appears to be a growing awareness of the importance of the non-verbal contact between guidance worker and client. New developments in the field of play therapy emphasize that the guidance worker may serve the child in many ways other than by verbal discussion of the problems of the child.

There remains, however, an implied assumption in most of the guidance literature that problems of people are soluble through reason. It is emphasized that this reason must, of course, take cognizance of the emotional needs of the client. Nevertheless, the assumption remains that if enough rational thought is brought to bear upon the problem a solution can be reached.

The importance of non-rational, non-verbal activity in value changes has not been adequately explored. Suggestions are available, however, which indicate the importance of feeling and of physical activity to these processes. Practically all infants have formed value patterns before language ability is developed to the point of being an important factor. Social identification, which appears to be of paramount importance, is only partly verbal in nature.

The studies of value formation have clearly challenged the domination of verbal reasoning as a technique in value and attitude re-formation.

Recent literature⁴ which attempts to describe the importance of peer groups among children in value and attitude changes has suggested new approaches to child guidance. No adequate description of the use of these groups as guidance devices has been developed. It is already clear, however, that they offer possibilities to the teacher and the guidance worker which can supplement the individual approach of counseling.

Implications of Value Studies

Some implications of studies in value and attitude formation for teachers and guidance workers are:

- Common values arise from the broad social forces of western civilization within which our children live. Integrated with these are differential values which result from the immediate environment of home, neighborhood and school. Each child develops a system of values which, although common in some respects with those of other children, is unique to him. These values are an important factor in shaping his behavior in social situations.

- While the system of values held by a child has been formulated in preschool years, it is continually being

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modified by his contacts with individuals and groups.
- A child cannot assume new values at will. Instead he must have opportunities to interact with individuals and groups who represent new social norms. This interaction is not entirely rational in nature but involves feeling as well.
- Adults who work with children must recognize and accept the fact that children have differential systems of values. Some of these are bound to conflict with the values of adults and other children. Most teachers and guidance workers express middle-class values. Unless they understand and appreciate differential values of our society, they are likely to attempt to impress their values on all children.
- A value system and individual attitudes which are compatible with these values are indispensable to a healthy personality. Reorganization or modification of values creates tensions in the child which the guidance worker must recognize.
- While the values of a child are defined in a general way by the communal, class and family cultures, they are defined explicitly by the peer group in which the child plays and works. The attitudes expressed by his close friends are of primary importance to the child.

ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDHOOD EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL

REGISTRANTS at the ACEI Study Conference in Seattle, Washington, March 26-30, numbered 1,348. Living with Children in Today’s World was the theme of the conference.

Adoption of the Association’s 1951-1953 Plan of Action was an important part of the conference program. Branches and international members began work on this plan in September 1950. Six areas were developed:

Children need school buildings in which there is space—
Children need school experiences that will help them solve their individual and group problems—
Children need more and better teachers—
Children need parents and teachers who work as partners—
Children need neighborhoods that provide enriching experiences—
Children need a world in which people respect one another—

These areas of need as a basis for action were adopted at the first general session of the conference. On the following day in six forums registrants formulated suggested action steps under each resolution. These were presented at the Wednesday evening session following an address by Winifred E. Bain of Wheelock College, Boston, on “Action for Children.” Dr. Bain said in part:

“We need to capture the vision, the purpose, the will to work for an enlightened world and to stimulate action—strong, vigorous and good—for children. The best wish I can make is that the branches and the international members of ACEI may approach our plan of action with understanding minds and hearts in the next biennium. How good to think that no group need work alone—that we, the people, may form the more perfect union by action for children!”

Educational Leadership