

How We Work on Developing Value Judgments

A staff evaluates its program continuously by observing the process of valuing which the students develop in trying to solve the problems of their daily living.

WHEN we of the teaching staff of University School refer to values—and the process of valuing—in our statements of purpose and evaluation, we are making assumptions which need conscious implementation in educational practice:

We believe that values refer to the esteem which a person feels for an object or for an individual, his attitudes, and his behavior. Although values are intrinsic, they also exist in relationship with other values and the judgment of esteem is then a matter of comparison and evaluation.

We believe that value patterns are consciously or unconsciously transmitted by all phases of all school programs.

We believe that education can be designed deliberately toward helping each child to make better and more consistent value judgments.

We believe that a happy and contributing citizen in a democratic society is one who purposefully selects experiences which will help him reach his value-centered goals in personal and group living.

We believe that a democratic society is one in which each individual is treated with the utmost respect and in which opportunity is provided for his optimal development.

We believe that a democratic society is one in which faith is placed in the intelligence of man to solve his personal problems and in which opportunity and responsibility are given him to participate in the solving of problems of common concern.

We believe that a democratic society denies the existence of permanent methods as the means of achieving its ends. It is as dynamic as life itself and demands that value judgments be constantly re-examined and modified in the light of the rapidly changing nature of society.

In a democratic culture we must learn to respect authority but, at the same time, to question it in terms of the bases on which it rests. Where teachers and children live in mutual respect and understanding, children are not afraid to question and disagree. Teachers are not afraid to admit they were wrong.

Much is done in the school to encourage the development of questioning as a value. The school does not depend on one textbook in a subject but uses a wide variety of books and other resources such as pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, films, trips, experiments and resource people. Children are encouraged to ask, "Who would know?" or "How can we find out?" When two authors disagree in their statements, students are encouraged to try to find out the writers' backgrounds, the dates the books were published, and any other data which might help to evaluate the writer as an authority.

In a fourth grade discussion the children were asking about the Cossacks. The teacher said they were horsemen of the Ukraine. She told how in one group a mother, whose parents had lived in the Ukraine, brought in a doll dressed as a Cossack and told the children about these people.

Tom and Jack, two very good readers, said, "We differ with you. The Cossacks are not from the Ukraine." The teacher said, "Oh, I thought Mrs. Brown should know since her parents lived there. But I know you two boys are good readers, so suppose you go to the library and look up this information for us." After some time the boys returned saying, "We were right. The Cossacks lived along the Black Sea." The teacher said, "Did you think to find out where the Ukraine is located?" They said, "No." She suggested that during the noon hour they try to locate the Ukraine. When the class again assembled the two boys said, "You were right. The Ukraine is along the Black Sea." The boys were beginning to learn the importance of checking on and comparing the statements of authorities.

In all grades from kindergarten through the 12th grade, classes work on certain common problems in which every child finds some personal involvement and to which each makes a unique

contribution, according to his ability, awareness and skills. In this respect the school is a microcosm of the democratic society. Units of work in the elementary school and core units in the high school have this quality, as do many other classroom projects and school activities.

Students know that the plans which they make cooperatively under the guidance of the teacher will be carried out and that the success of the enterprise depends upon how well each individual is able to carry his share of the load. Abler students will volunteer for more demanding tasks, but students at all levels of ability can make some unique contribution.

Don, in school from the kindergarten till graduation, tested at the very bottom of the dull normal range. He was constantly encouraged to assume roles where industry, sincerity, and dependability counted for more than abstract intelligence. In his senior year, Don was a self-assured, personable individual who volunteered to join a student group which had been invited to explain the school's program to a graduate class in education. When the question was raised concerning motivation in the absence of grades, Don explained the complex matter in a very simple way. "Mary (pointing to the girl next to him) is lots smarter than I am so she is way up here (he held one hand high to indicate her level of achievement). I am down here (he held the other hand lower to indicate his achievement). Now it wouldn't make sense for me to try to catch up with Mary. The important thing is that she goes on up here (he moved "her" hand higher) and that I go on up here (he moved "his" hand up)." His ease of speaking and his obvious feeling of respect and security in the group

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almost concealed the fact that he was telling the truth about his own capabilities.

A more complex statement of the multiple values in a situation was made by a junior girl when she was asked to evaluate her participation in the related arts program.

Well, I've always gone to school here so I didn't know it was unusual for a girl to work in wood and metal. That sounds silly to me since they are my favorite materials. I should think all girls would like to work with them. Anyway, it's good for you because every time you work with a new material, you have a whole new set of problems to solve. This forces you to really think and to look for all the possible relationships between all the things you do. For example, it is very valuable, I think, to work on similar things which are very different in scale. When I carved my large wooden mask for a wall-hanging, the whole problem was different from making a silver mask for a pendant like I'm doing now. I think that the values in a course like this increase as the opportunities to work with a variety of materials and processes increase. Of course, the whole thing is good for me because I—well, my whole family—have always put so much value on the academic stuff in books. I need lots of experiences actually selecting and planning a project which is all mine and which I can work through in my own way.

Mastery of the basic skills helps an individual to find himself and to grow in self-assurance. Jimmy, an eight year old boy, came to school each morning with a scowl on his face. He seldom spoke in response to an adult's greeting and usually had a temper tantrum before the morning was well under way.

Although Jimmy was a bright boy, he had been slow in learning to read. The teacher decided that if Jimmy could have more friendly individual attention and at the same time be helped in the reading skill, he might become better adjusted. For

at least three mornings each week he and another child who had similar reading difficulties were taken out of their group by another teacher who had some time available to consult with him about his reading. At first she tried to have fun with them, playing reading games and developing interest through reading about things in which they were interested. The consultant also expressed an interest in his room activities and the dog bed he was constructing in the shop. At the same time the room teacher was giving him recognition whenever possible for desirable behavior but also setting limits on his undesirable behavior. Jimmy was soon enjoying children's small paper-backed books which he checked out of the library and he was recording them on his reading record.

One afternoon he burst out of the Cub-Scout meeting when he saw the consultant in the hall, to announce that he had been able to put two screws in the dog bed that afternoon. His enthusiasm was significant because he so seldom completed his work and because his attitude toward teachers had been antagonistic. During the year Jimmy's temper tantrums became less frequent, he would talk to teachers, his cooperation in group games improved and the reading test showed a growth from beginning second grade to beginning fourth.

We attempt to make our program practices demonstrate our respect for the individual student. Grades have been replaced by a well developed program which makes use of parent-teacher conferences, continuous self-evaluation, and teacher-written statements of progress for each individual. The traditional graduation diploma has also been replaced by a statement which summarizes the growth made by each person during his years with us. As individuals differ in their tastes, interests, maturity, and reading skills, the books which will make a contribution to their development also differ. A program of individual

guided reading begins very early in the primary grades and continues throughout the upper grades and high school. The program in all areas makes wide provision for individual differences and varied levels of achievement. In general, children progress with their age group but there is always a possibility of acceleration or retardation if the best interests of the child demand it.

It is obvious, however, that if all students are progressing at their own best rate the differences in specific skills and in subject matter learnings will increase rather than decrease from year to year. Sometimes early graduation seems a promising solution for students who are very far advanced and who are college bound, but this is a question which must be decided for each individual case. The student and his parents must want it and the faculty must agree. This is a situation involving a complex of values.

A boy two years ago chose to graduate at the end of his junior year, having had the experience of being junior class president and having practically exhausted the advanced courses offered in high school. He is now making an excellent record at Harvard. One member of the present junior class, recommended for early graduation by the faculty, has refused to consider it. Ohio State is now permitting high school students, recommended by their principals and accepted by a particular department, to take courses on the campus without credit. This boy is taking college courses in zoology this year and will have one or two college courses next. The chances are good that the institution he enters will give him credit for these courses and that he will be able to graduate from college in three years. Meanwhile he is enjoying playing football, handling student offices, and sharing the social life of his age group.

In an atmosphere where respect for

each individual is highly valued and nurtured, faith in the method of intelligence as a way of working together necessarily follows. Many opportunities are provided for constructive participation. Through discussing and formulating plans, putting them into action and later evaluating the total experience, teachers and children share values and arrive at a working solution for common problems. This method can be effective only in an environment where freedom for making choices is provided. There must be enough time to make choices, to live with these choices, whether good or bad, and to evaluate them. Choices which are proved by experience to be wrong, can be very educative in helping to understand failure and to avoid repeating our mistakes.

The second grade was painting a large "mural" to be used as a backdrop for a play which they were going to present for other members of the elementary school. Bobby was painting a tree trunk with several other children but he had mixed his paint without checking with the rest of the committee. His color did not go with that which the others were using and an argument quickly developed. Rather than being forced to admit he was wrong, Bobby was given the choice of working on another part of the painting and he accepted eagerly. Bobby was then in a position to correct his former mistake without losing face and he quickly consulted with his new group before mixing his color. He was delighted to find that the group was willing to accept his choice of color when he was willing to ask for their guidance.

In the choosing of units or group studies the students are given opportunities to participate in making the major decision of selecting a worthwhile study for their group. Teacher and children together think through the past

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How Good

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working with teachers on the improvement of classroom programs, and teachers are increasingly being involved in developing policy and program. Superintendents are clearer about their responsibilities to boards of education, and boards of education are clarifying their roles as the formulators of policy and are leaving the execution of this policy to their trusted superintendents. This latter move has been materially aided by the rapid development at state and national levels of the National School Boards Association.

Schools are learning to live more comfortably with their communities, and administrators are learning to provide the community with a kind of leadership which will help the people to gain a clear insight into the appropriate directions for educational endeavor.

These, then, represent the conditions necessary for educational progress. While it must be frankly admitted that many of the above advances remain to be widely adopted, the growing edge of practice clearly indicates that much has already been done. If the studies of "educational lag" may be believed—that it takes from 50 to 75 years for a pregnant idea or theory to be generally accepted in practice—the next 25 years should represent giant strides forward in the improvement in our schools.

As one reviews the impressive evidence of promising movements in the total field of education, one cannot help but be proud of the progress made. But this feeling will be dwarfed by the greater pride in achievement if we can adapt all of these promising movements to the practical level. Only then will we be able to answer the question, "How good are our schools?"

How We Work

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units the group has studied and make a short joint appraisal of them. Suggestions are listed and are weighed for values against cooperatively developed criteria. Teachers who work with the group in other related areas are often called in for consultation. Throughout the development of the unit there are many choice-making and evaluating experiences. Every area in the curriculum offers some opportunity for choice-making. Dances, parties, assemblies and, in the secondary grades, money-making experiences are considered a part of the school's curriculum and are given time in the program.

One of the beliefs which run through the life of the school is that work is dignified and respectable. Responsibilities in the classrooms begin in the kindergarten and continue through the school. Students are able as they mature to accept with increasing understanding and good grace the hard or monotonous phases which are involved in any large project. These phases are accepted, not because the difficulty and monotony in and of themselves build character, but because the long-range objective is desirable and the hard work is a necessary stage.

One of the practical problems of a value-oriented program is continuous and unavoidable—the fact referred to above that values occur in clusters. Teachers must constantly examine their handling of situations to see that some important values are not being sacrificed in their eagerness to develop others. We continuously evaluate our program by observing the process of valuing which our students develop in their attempts to solve the problems of their daily living.

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