

Attitudes and Values: Tools or Chains?

RECENT efforts to improve programs for teaching international understanding have tended to shift emphasis away from the information-about and love-thy-neighbor approaches and to focus, instead, on developing understanding based on inquiry into the why and meaning of people's behaviors. These efforts are founded on the notion that "real" international understanding derives from knowing that the behavior of an individual or a group can only be understood in terms of the cultural frame of reference within which a person or group acts, and of knowing that interpersonal or intergroup relations are determined by the characteristics of the cultural frames involved. The goal is to turn out pupils who have some relativistic commitments, who are inquiring, open-minded and tolerant, and who use these attributes to develop broader and more insightful relationships with others.

If we think about it, we quickly realize that this approach seeks not only to develop the student's intellectual commitments but, through these, a configuration of beliefs, attitudes and values which orients his view of himself and the world. This is a very tall order, indeed, for it raises numerous problems, one of which

is that of obtaining teachers who are capable of implementing such a program. Certainly, if the goal is to turn out open-minded, inquiring students who can tolerate a degree of ambiguity, it would seem reasonable to assume that we need teachers who themselves possess these characteristics.

Insight Needed

Undoubtedly we already have some teachers who have, or can easily gain, insight into their own characters and cultural backgrounds. These teachers can help their students to gain similar insights and then to use these insights to build bridges of understanding to other peoples with other cultures. For such teachers, insight into one's self and culture is an important "tool" to be used in understanding the world. Many teachers (perhaps most of us) are, on the other hand, not able to be so analytic of themselves and their culture. They see their own attitudes, values, beliefs and behaviors, and those of their neighbors, as being normal or natural, as being a

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standard to which others conform or from which they differ. These teachers are much more closely bound to personal and cultural factors. Insofar as these bounds inhibit insight, they are like "chains" which prevent the teachers from making open inquiry into the world about them.

The question we face is, can we help teachers confront their own attitudes, beliefs, values, and gain insights into their own culture as a basis for developing a more relativistic approach to international understanding? The answer depends partly upon the nature of American culture and partly upon the characteristics of the teachers who bear it.

Kluckhohn, DuBois, Spindler and other writers note that the particular view of the world now fostered by the American middle-class, to which teachers presumably belong, is based on at least four basic premises (beliefs): (a) the universe is mechanistically conceived; (b) man can master the universe through the use of his rational powers; (c) men are equal; (d) men are perfectible.

These premises lead in turn to five dominant value patterns by which Americans orient their behaviors and their judgments of themselves and of others: (a) work and knowledge, as both values in themselves and as *means* to mastery over the universe, power and success; (b) material well being, as *evidence* of mastery over the universe, power and success, and as a source of comfort and pleasure; (c) achievement and perfection of self, through work and knowledge; (d) conformity, expressed partly in terms of cooperative efforts to gain greater mastery, power, etc., and partly in terms of the innate equality of men; (e) change, as the result of work and the development and application of knowl-

edge, and as the means to greater achievements.

Studying Our Values

The Warner studies demonstrate how these "significant principles" operate in the American social system. Warner and his associates point out that the ranking of men in terms of their occupations, wealth, schooling, knowledge, etc., and the system of social interaction and mobility based upon evaluation of an individual's effort and achievement, are the social results of our functioning value and belief system. These results, however, extend beyond the limits of America, for we structure our relations with other peoples according to these same principles. We rate people and countries as civilized or underdeveloped according to their mastery and power over the universe, the extent of their knowledge and their "standard of living." We feel benevolent toward those who have less than we, but if we think someone has more than we do, we get very upset (as in the "space race" with Russia) and react with competitive/aggressive behaviors.

The American values and belief system is relatively consistent and is highly self-sustaining. Embodying, as it does, characteristics of "practicalism" and absolutism, there is some question as to its appropriateness as a basis for the development of an international understanding including elements of relativism and idealism. Teachers who strongly identify with, and are deeply committed to, the American value-belief system may not be able to compare their own commitments with other systems deriving from different basic premises. For many persons, analysis of other peoples' values and beliefs implies question of one's own and jeopardizes the secure knowledge of self

in the world. To go so far as to admit that other systems have as much internal validity as does ours, and that there are as many "truths" as there are cultures, may be very threatening, indeed, to teachers reared under the doctrines of natural law, reasoned knowledge, and absolute truth.

There is a good deal of recent research which is relevant to the problem of helping teachers to gain insight into their own attitude-value-belief systems. Rokeach, Martin, Powell and others group individuals into two broad categories according to whether they possess personality characteristics which facilitate or inhibit such insight. Those who possess the characteristics which facilitate insight are identified as being "open-minded" or "tolerant." (It is the teacher from this group who can gain and use an understanding of himself and his own culture as "tools" to understanding other peoples and their cultures.)

Changing Beliefs

Those who possess the characteristics which inhibit this insight are identified as being "closed-minded" or "intolerant." Individuals in this category are described as being strongly nationalistic, very ethnocentric, highly competitive and achievement oriented, and as having strong religious and ethical commitments which support these; as being, in effect, strongly identified with the traditional American value-belief-attitude system. (It is the teacher in this group who is "chained" by his own cultural frame and least able to understand and relate to others.)

Most of the pertinent literature centers on the task of turning the closed-minded person into an open-minded, tolerant and inquiring one. Rokeach and

Scott point out that the task is compounded by the fact that we are dealing with a complex of interrelated attitudes, values and beliefs which structure a person's perceptions and behaviors. They suggest that attempts to change one aspect of this interrelated system involves the other related aspects. Scott found that where there is "cognitive consistency" in a belief-attitude-value structure, i.e., where a person is aware of its interrelatedness, there is greatest resistance to change. Sylvester pointed to the difficulty in trying to change such a person when he demonstrated that we assimilate new information from our environment, including efforts to produce change, according to our already existing cognitive map or "frame of reference."

Still other factors have been identified as complicating the task of helping closed-minded persons gain sufficient insight into self and culture to become open-minded and tolerant. It has been shown (Bachman, Byrme, Hartley, Kemp, Maehr) that the attitudes, values and beliefs one has are related to his needs for group affiliation and social approval. Bachman, for example, found that these factors were highly resistant to change when the individual perceives that his characteristics are similar to those of persons he admires or who are members of groups in which he is desirous of keeping membership. Martin described the individual with a closed mind and an intolerant personality as being ego-involved, competitive and defensive. Katz found that such people are very resistant to efforts to produce changes in their attitudes and values, even when the efforts border on psychotherapy.

Lecture and discussion have been the methods commonly employed in both pre- and in-service teacher training pro-

grams designed to help teachers gain some insights into their attitude-value-belief systems and into American culture. Where these programs have been aimed at producing change, they have not been notably successful. In his report on a three year study to determine the differential effects of the traditional versus "participation" methods of influencing attitude and value change in college students, Somit concludes that no *significant* changes are produced by training courses of any type.

Gaining Self Insight

From his rather extensive review of the research on educational efforts to produce attitude change, Marcson came up with these conclusions: (a) the assumption that the individual can be pushed in some particular direction through emphasis on communication, content and delivery is not broadly warranted by the evidence; (b) fear and ego arousing communications produce little or no changes; (c) efforts to produce attitude and value changes are ineffective if the perceptive systems of the individual are structured in opposition to them; (d) significant changes in the individual's attitudes and values imply a restructuring of his perceptive structure. A recent study by Harvey reaffirms many of Somit's conclusions and also demonstrates that it is only weak attitudes and beliefs that are susceptible to change, strong ones being very resistant.

Several researchers have had some considerable success in helping people confront and change their attitudes, values and beliefs. The methods used, however, are almost clinical in nature and are thus not generally feasible for teacher training programs. Katz has shown that affect-laden attitudes and

values could be effectively influenced through helping the individual gain insight into self; but Katz worked in a small group-therapy type situation. Brock found that by restructuring beliefs, he could produce some changes in attitudes. The method he used was to bring about a degree of cognitive dissonance and to work from this point through a variation of role-playing. The most notable results have been achieved by the rather drastic alteration of the individual's social situation and experiences. This has usually meant a change in role expectations, significant others, and social environment.

The studies by Sylvester, Carlson and Lieberman indicate that a person's fundamental conceptions of life affect his attitudes toward everyday affairs, that his fundamental cognitive maps can be altered by the method of role reversal (moving the individual into appropriate role relationships for a time), and that role reversal can therefore alter an individual's attitudes toward everyday life.

Summary

In summary, it seems evident that creation of new culturally oriented programs for teaching international understanding will require securing teachers who themselves possess the intellectual and personal characteristics which the programs seek to foster in students. Development of these characteristics will involve the individual in analysis of his own system of attitudes, values and beliefs and its relation to the broader fabric of his culture. Through this analysis one can build bridges of understanding to other persons in other cultures, thereby progressing toward the relativistic point of view upon which "genuine" international understanding must

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be based. Core features of American culture itself may function to inhibit or prevent this process.

Further constraints may be found within the personality of the individual and his relationships to his immediate social environment. Efforts to obtain the necessary insight and relativistic viewpoint must account for these powerful inhibiting factors and must extend beyond traditional training methods. The forging of chains into tools often means extensive reshaping of the basic materials. We must ask first *should* this be done, then, *can* it be done.

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