

Implications of

CHANGING CULTURAL VALUES

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SEVERAL recent articles in the area of secondary school social studies have focused attention upon the study of values within the social studies curriculum.¹ Most of these writings have developed out of an admitted inadequacy to deal effectively with social values. Ballinger has suggested that a clue to this inadequacy may be attributable to a lack of communication between those whose concern is with social studies methods and those whose concern is with philosophy of education.²

An additional factor may be the traditional hesitancy for the social studies to incorporate the subject matter of sociology and anthropology into their curriculum; certainly the study of values has long been a part of social and cultural analysis by these disciplines. Students need to develop an understanding of the structure and functioning of our society; to do this, the teacher has the obligation to incorporate within the curriculum the study of values, their function, significance and transformation.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest some ways in which the study of values, as viewed from a sociological and anthropological perspective, might have relevance for the social studies. Specifically, the focus is upon tracing changing values and their educational implications.

Values represent ideals or goals that people in a society strive to achieve. Values also select the means that are used to achieve the goals or ideals. In the primitive society, which is primarily regulated by tradition and custom, the value structure is relatively well-integrated and commonly agreed upon. Within a multifarious society, such as our own, there is considerable diversity, and often contradictions, within the value system.

¹ Bernard S. Miller, "The Quest for Values in a Changing World," *Social Education* 29:69-73; February 1965. Thomas F. Powell, "Teaching American Values," *Social Education* 29:272-74; May 1965. Bernice Goldmark, "Another Look at Inquiry," *Social Education* 29:349-51; October 1965. Byron G. Massialas, "Examining Values: A Response to Bernice Goldmark," *Social Education* 29: 352-55; October 1965.

² Stanley E. Ballinger, "The Social Studies and Social Controversy," *The School Review* 71: 107-108; Spring 1963.

For individuals within a society, values are internalized and become an integral part of their behavior tendencies, including the possible contradictions. Externally, from the standpoint of the society, values function as ideals that orient the activities within and between the social institutions. Thus, to properly understand the functioning of the family, or political, religious, economic, and educational institutions within a society requires an analysis of social values.

A number of sociological and anthropological studies of the American society might serve as a starting point for the study of values and their function upon social relations and institutions within our society. Robert S. Lynd's *Knowledge for What?* is a classic analysis of the American values system.³ Robin M. Williams in his *American Society* analyzes "Values and Beliefs in American Society."⁴ Another classic study that emphasizes the contradictory nature of our values is Read Bain's essay, "Our Schizoid Culture."⁵ Additional suggestions include studies by Kluckhohn,⁶ Mead,⁷ and Riesman.⁸

A Transformation in American Values

Basic to the understanding of values in our society is the notion of social and cultural change. As a society undergoes transformation, e.g., rural to urban, some changes will eventually take place in the value system, though the values will not necessarily be influenced equally by this change. To gain the perspective of changing social values is important to a more realistic understanding of the structure and functioning of a society. To study the values of a society at a given moment in time is similar to a still-life photograph. To sense the movement and change, along with the implications for the institutional structure of a society, requires a focusing upon the shifts of values.

The anthropologist, George D. Spindler, has very convincingly characterized the American core values as undergoing a shift from traditional to emergent values.⁹ The traditional values (as adopted) include:

- (a) Puritan morality (thrift, self-denial, and sexual constraint)
- (b) Work success ethic (success comes with hard work, anyone can get to the top if he works hard enough, people who are not successful are lazy or stupid or both)
- (c) Individualism (the importance and worth of the individual)
- (d) Future-time orientation (time is valuable, denial of present wants for future satisfactions).

³ Robert S. Lynd. *Knowledge for What?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939.

⁴ Robin M. Williams. *American Society*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961. Chapter XI.

⁵ Read Bain. "Our Schizoid Culture." *Sociology and Social Research* 19: 266-76; January-February 1935.

⁶ Clyde Kluckhohn. *Mirror for Man*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1949.

⁷ Margaret Mead. *And Keep Your Powder Dry*. New York: William Morrow and Company, 1942.

⁸ David Riesman, Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney. *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950.

⁹ George D. Spindler. *Education and Culture*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Copyright © 1963, p. 136-37.

The emergent values are:

- (a) Sociability (the well-adjusted individual gets along well with others, there is a suspicion of those who prefer solitary activities)
- (b) Relativistic moral attitude (there are no absolutes in right and wrong, what is moral depends upon the rights of others)
- (c) Conformity to the group (everything should be done with regard for others and for group harmony, one's behavior is determined by observing others)
- (d) Hedonistic, present-time orientation (one should enjoy the present).

Spindler feels that many of the conflicts and disjunctions within the American culture can be traced to the shift from traditional to emergent values. This shift is far from complete and we still have a strong orientation to the traditional values, but with urbanization, wars, depressions, external and internal threats, the "tendencies in the emergent direction have gathered strength and appear to be on the way towards becoming the dominant value system of American culture."¹⁰

The traditional-emergent values might be thought of as extremes on a continuum; and individuals, groups and institutions hold both value systems concomitantly, yet they vary in their location on the transformation continuum. Some individuals embrace with few reservations the traditional values, others wholeheartedly accept the emergent values, but most people probably find themselves holding to segments of both value systems, including the possible contradictions. Perhaps the distribution of people on the continuum line might be thought of as a frequency curve, though the shape of the curve at the present time is open to speculation. Presumably the shape is changing with increased frequency moving toward the emergent values.

If the above description represents the general population, sub-populations and groups would form smaller and overlapping curves along the continuum line. Within institutions the modal tendency for subgroups would also vary along the transformation line. For example, Spindler has suggested that the groups of people concerned with the activities and policies within a school might be distributed as follows (adapted):¹¹

<i>Traditional Values</i>						<i>Emergent Values</i>
General Public and Parents	School Administrators				Some Students	
School Boards	Some Students	Older Teachers	Younger Teachers	Some Students		

A similar transformation line might also be useful in considering the value orientation of different generations within the extended family. For example,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

as students analyze the changes in the American family they may find it useful to locate on the continuum the value orientation that they feel would best represent grandparents, parents, and their own generation. Perhaps the values of the present adolescent society could be better understood in this context. A similar method of analysis could be used to study changing values and ideologies in the political, economic and religious institutions of our society.

Some Educational Implications

To focus upon the transformation of American cultural values does not mean that these changes need to be evaluated as desirable or undesirable. On occasion teachers have been subjected to undue criticism for teaching controversial subjects. Probably there are those in some communities who would be critical of the teacher who points out that our culture and its values are changing. Usually these criticisms have been leveled at teachers because it was inferred that the teacher was supporting a particular controversial point of view.

In studying the changes in values the teacher is not necessarily supporting what is taking place. To pretend these changes are not taking place is, on the other hand, a disservice to students who are soon to join the ranks of adult citizens. Our value structure is undergoing change; social analysts have given us ample evidence of this fact. Students must, with due respect to their maturity level, be given the opportunity to evaluate ideas and values. This capacity to evaluate ideas is not developed in students by concealing differing points of view from them.

Probably the most useful teaching situation is one in which competing points of view are present. Hunt and Metcalf have indicated that, "the most effective learning emerges from situations where cherished beliefs or attitudes are felt to be at stake."¹² In the lifetime of our students we can expect the cultural changes to increase at a progressive rate. Decision making in the future will depend less upon tradition and more upon an intellectual approach.

To avoid social controversy and changing social values in the classroom is a distortion of reality that may present students with a perspective that they later find unreconcilable and thus become retreatist, apathetic, extreme conformists, unduly cynical, or extremist. In summary, if we do not equip students with the capacity to examine value differences intellectually, they fail to develop a rationale for intellectual decision making.

Thus far, the author has emphasized the need for students to understand values, their function, and changes, for eventual responsible adult decision making. Actually, students are already involved in behavior that necessitates decision making based on conflicting values. Parent-youth relations require the consideration of differing value systems. Students may need to analyze the literary worth, or the pornographic worthlessness of a novel.

They also must decide how to respond toward members of minority groups.

¹² Maurice P. Hunt and Lawrence E. Metcalf. *Teaching High School Social Studies*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1955. p. 45.

Whatever their manner of behaving toward members of differing cultural or ethnic groups, conflicting values will be involved. Likewise, they are faced with deciding the nature of the supernatural. Finally, every adolescent must make decisions concerning his relationships with the opposite sex. Family sociologists have pointed out that nearly every adolescent today is faced with choices in the sexual realm that would startle most adults, who in their youth, were faced with such choices infrequently.¹³

Decision making by adolescents in the above areas is a serious business. As adults we are aware of this fact, yet we have often counseled youth by rules of "shalls" and "shall nots" that have resulted in a failure to handle problems insightfully in a changing world.

Adolescents today and the adults of tomorrow need a capacity for self-determination. They need the autonomy to transcend pure tradition and the pressures of the crowd to make meaningful decisions that require the evaluation of competing values. Students need opportunity to study the significance of changing cultural values. Such perspective allows the individual to rise above the parochialism of the immediate. With instruction of this type, the adolescent can develop the intellectual muscle to grapple better with his problems. 

¹³ Lester A. Kirkendall and Deryck Calderwood. "Changing Sex Mores and Moral Instruction." *Phi Delta Kappan* 46: 63-68; October 1964; see also Isadore Rubin. "Transition in Sex Values—Implications for the Education of Adolescents." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 27: 185-89; May 1965.



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