

VALUES AND TEACHING: A HUMANE PROCESS

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FEW educators dispute the importance of doing something about values. Yet few have been able to identify something effective to do.

Moralizing does not seem to work. We can tell the students that they should be kind to small children, should not litter public places, should be prudent with personal finances, but a quick public survey gives such value-pushing a low grade.

After all, a child sees much that seems to give approval to the use of physical power to control those less strong (e.g., some of our actions in international affairs), that rewards socially irresponsible behavior (e.g., businesses that pollute air or misrepresent products), and that promotes anything but prudent personal finances (e.g., hard-sell installment plan advertising).

How is the child to take all the conflicting models and arguments and make sense out of them? All too often, he cannot. All too often, the child remains with buzzing confusion in his mind, unable to deal easily or effectively with value-type choices.

It is this observation which suggests an alternative to simple moralizing or modeling. Would it not be useful for teachers to develop classroom strategies that might help the child learn how to sort out for himself all the complex arguments and models that reach his perception? In short, can teachers productively help children learn to think their way through the value confusion that characterizes today's world?

We have been working on this for some time, inspired by the original work of Louis E. Raths, and have identified several classroom strategies that teachers seem to find useful.

One strategy simply requires a reduction in judgments and an increase in encouragement to students to think through value-related issues.

For example, a student says, "I'd like top grades this year in school." A teacher can smile and say, "That's nice, I hope you make it," but he can also say in a friendly and non-judgmental manner, "Will you work at grades even if you miss a lot of play time?" Or he can simply ask, "What's so good about top

grades?" The latter two responses are designed to stimulate productive value thinking.

Here are a few other responses often found to serve the same purposes. We recommend that teachers try using them more frequently when students express an attitude or aspiration or when something they do implies some value preference:

1. Is that something you are proud of?
2. Did you think through any alternatives?
3. Have you actually *done* something about that idea or is the issue only on the verbal level for you?
4. What are the arguments in favor and in opposition to that notion?
5. Is that very important to you?
6. How do you know that goal (or idea) is worthy or good?

Below are some other examples of the approach to value issues that we find helpful for children.

The Value Sheet

Imagine a teacher reading the following statement by Pastor Martin Niemöller to a group of students.

In Germany in the 1930's they first came for the Communists and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me—and by that time no one was left to speak up.¹

After the students get the gist of the paragraph, the teacher conducts a discussion by using such questions as:

¹ Martin Niemöller. *Newsletter*. American Civil Liberties Union, April 1964.

1. Would they have come for you? Are you in one of those categories?

2. What are some things going on in your world right now about which you would like to speak up? List them with me on the blackboard.

3. Just how does one go about "speaking up"? What are the ways people can do it? Which ways are comfortable and/or most productive to *you*?

4. But why stick your neck out? Why not?

5. If you are unable to speak up, who should do it?

6. Is there something in our school about which you would like to speak up?

7. Would you use a few moments of silence to work out a strategy by which you could, indeed, speak up about something important to you?

8. Some people say: "We need to value what we do and do something about what we value." Do you agree? If so, could you tell us something you have done about something you valued?

Here is another lesson that seems to us to give students experiences in thinking through value issues. Perhaps you could try it with your students. We believe a trial will show more than words the power of this idea.

Dog owners spent \$530 million on dog food last year, reports the *Wall Street Journal*, which adds that this is about 50 percent more than Americans spend on baby food.

Americans will spend \$1.5 billion to acquire pets this year and in addition to the initial investment and the food bill, about \$800 million will be spent this year on non-food items for pets. (For dogs: pajamas, cashmere sweaters, mink collars, Halloween costumes and Santa Claus suits; and cosmetics—color shampoo, creme rinses and hair dressing, perfumes, 11 shades of nail polish including lavender and green, a spray dentifrice, tranquilizers, etc.) Not to

mention millions spent on veterinarian fees and boarding kennels. Pets are big business.²

Again, the teacher reads this to the students or duplicates the passage on sheets of paper, permits each student to read it at his own speed, and then builds a reading lesson around it. Below the passage one prints a few questions, like the following:

1. If you have a dog, should you feel badly about that report? Why? Why not?

2. If you don't have a dog, do you perhaps spend your money on something which might be written up to sound equally as silly? Explain.

3. A person who teased a dog owner with the above quotation was found to drive a car with automatic transmission, automatic window lifters, power seat adjuster, power steering, and an automatic headlight dimmer. Comment.

4. Should I come close to starving myself so that others can eat? Discuss.

5. Some people say: "What we spend our money on tells what we value, respect, hold dear, and cherish. If we really valued something else, would we not spend our money on that?" Discuss.

It would be well to look back over the questions we have posed. We say that these are questions which "confront" a student. It is hard to remain uninvolved when such questions are asked. The questions in both the Pastor Niemöller quote and the statement on pets are what we call "you" questions. Actually, they produce a temporary discomfort which we think is not a bad thing in a learning situation. Students begin to think their way through the discomforting confrontation and begin the *process* of clarifying their values and finding out where they really stand on a series of issues.

²Charles A. Wells. "Between the Lines." *Newsletter*. American Civil Liberties Union, September 15, 1964.

That *process* of value clarification has many other techniques to it. Among the techniques, there is one which helps a teacher avoid grinding his own personal ax while raising controversial issues. It is called the value continuum.

The Value Continuum

In an age when we avoid controversy, when we are fed canned news put out by one or two wire agencies, and when conformity abounds, the provision of a full range of alternatives in some issues is particularly urgent.

With the values continuum, the class or the teacher identifies an issue to be discussed in class. It could be freedom in the classroom, racial segregation in the lunchroom, TV idols, sex, Communism, religious tolerance, censorship, socialized medicine, birth control, or any controversial issue.

The teacher draws a horizontal line on the board. At both ends he identifies a polar position, e.g., children should be permitted to do anything they want; children should ask permission before they do anything. These two positions, sometimes captured in argument from two newspapers or magazines, one reactionary and one radical, are seen as the two ends of the values continuum. The task of the class, then, is to identify different positions in the issue and to place them on the continuum, both in relationship to the extremes and to positions already placed.

Here are a few quick "polarized" positions you may want to try to work with. Take the issue of seat belts. One position, at one end of the values continuum says, "No one should even sit in a car to listen to the radio, even while it is parked, without putting on his seat

belt." At the other end, "if I get into a car with seat belts, I take scissors and cut them right out." The class has fun thinking through other positions and finding the best places for them on the continuum.

Here is a values continuum which is often very highly charged and emotional about military service. At the one end you have, "I would rather go to jail than have anything to do with the draft." Way at the far end of the line is the statement, "I would lie about my age and enlist the minute I looked old enough to get away with it."

Or consider asking children to find some points between, "I would never tell the truth" and "I would never tell a falsehood." It's an interesting way to stimulate thinking on such an issue.

The advantages should be apparent. One thing the value continuum, or "value line" as younger children like to call it, does well is to permit the teacher to introduce *alternatives* into a discussion without having to appear to favor one or the other. It affords an effective way to get alternatives opened up before heated discussion closes minds. We also think it minimizes our ever-present instinct to moralize.

We believe the values continuum is a useful tool to the teacher who would advance this process of value clarification. It demonstrates the complexity of thinking that most issues deserve and offers a method of systematically identifying alternatives. It helps overcome simplistic "either-or" thinking. Finally it helps the teacher deal with the most controversial issues without opening himself up to the criticism of trying to sell his point of view to young, formative minds.

Thought Sheets

When we enter into value clarification, we need always to be on the lookout for ways to elicit values in an accepting, convenient way. One of the most effective techniques involves giving students the opportunity to write freely about anything that has occupied their attention during the week. Unlike the preceding strategies, this gets directly at the concerns of the students. It does not rely upon topics initiated by the teacher.

It works this way. Each week a student turns in a single sheet or perhaps an index card upon which he has written some thought of importance to *him*. It is written after due reflection and indicates something of the quality of living or thinking in the preceding week. These are called "thought sheets." To introduce them, the teacher may announce something like this:

1. A thought sheet is due every Monday. It is to be your ticket of admission to class on that day.

2. Thought sheets may be of any length, any style, any form. Prose, poetry, skit, drawing, etc.—all are acceptable. However, a few words are enough. Long statements are not necessary.

3. A thought sheet may be on any topic as long as it represents your thoughts.

4. Your thought sheets will not be graded or "corrected" in any way. They are treated as sincere expressions of some of your thinking and are not to be written as "compositions" to impress the teacher. They are yours.

5. Although usually I prefer to have one thought on each sheet each week, this first week, to get us started, you may include on your sheet three thoughts or ideas or observations, or anything else that came to your attention.

Students are also told that from time to time excerpts from the thought sheets will be read to the class anonymously. And the first week the teacher is careful to read a selection of them to illustrate the different forms and styles and kinds of topics that are possible. This is healthy stimulation to those students who wait cautiously to see if the teacher is kidding when he says that students are to write what is important to them.

Here are some excerpts from thought sheets written by fourth grade students:

"I feel frightened when I win a game sometimes. I don't know why. Would some people rather lose?"

"Here's a riddle. I'll tell you the answer next week. What's under the water but over land?"

"Why do we have to study arithmetic? I see no use for it."

"War
is not for fun
is not for happiness
is not for security
is not for anything I can think of
human."

A Final Word

Our concern with values must be clear by now.³ Essentially we see the *process* of valuing as holding the key. Children must learn this process if they are to learn to deal with the confusion and conflicts of our changing and very complex society. Thus, it seems of utmost importance to us that we encourage students to think about value related issues, to learn to find in them the path that is

³See *Values and Teaching* by Louis E. Raths, Merrill Harmin, and Sidney B. Simon (Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, 1966) for an elaboration of the theory behind this approach and for many more examples of its use in the classroom.

most reasonable and most compatible with their growing sense of selfhood.

This does not mean that teachers must always conceal their own values and avoid arguing for them. But it does mean that moralizing and setting "good" examples are not enough. Children must learn to deal with the conflict choices that all too soon come tumbling down upon them. We hope that the examples in this article point to an approach that will help teachers who care about this problem. ☞

Learning Our Difference—Clark

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quantification will build the effectiveness of teachers and learners the more it clearly increases the flow of feedback to learners.

In summary, the deep, pervasive, intrinsic learnings that are the very self-concept of the learner, are unique and private to the learner. They cannot be compared or quantified externally. Teachers can facilitate this learning by increasing the significance of the learner's experiences and the quality of his evaluations of experience.

Teachers will truly facilitate learning only when they accept that the learner chooses his own becoming. Each child, adolescent, adult, culturally disadvantaged, delinquent, neurotic, non-reader, or otherwise handicapped learner knows more about what he is doing than does the teacher. We cannot measure the learner. We can measure things external to him in order to increase the usefulness of data for his evaluations. ☞

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