

A Curriculum of Value

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QUESTIONS that are raised and fears that are expressed by young people who seek their own identities apparently are similar, whether in Harlem, Haight-Ashbury, or in Hobbs, New Mexico. Forms of questioning may differ between the hip urbanite and his country cousin, but the underlying problems of teens and pre-teens are much alike regardless of geographic, ethnic, or cultural differences.

The young have increased in numbers, but have not felt a corresponding increase in self-identity, security, and power. A growing technocracy continues to tell young people that there is little they can contribute to themselves or to man. Many young respond to a frustratingly complex society by "dropping out" in various ways. Perhaps they are only emulating their elders who drop out of confrontations and into escapism, out of cities and into suburbs. The young say: "Down with sham. Lead us to that which is of value."

When their elders, through the law, tell the young to attend schools, the expected and deserved experience to be gained in school is a serious exposure to reality through an honest curriculum of immediate and high value. Yet, the curriculum actually found in the school is too often a planned exercise in inertia instead of a confrontation with

reality. One major part of the problem is the dilemma of the middle class syndrome that is described by Professor Broudy:

We are to redeem the disadvantaged but not presumably by imposing middle-class values and demands upon them. But if one asks in what way the disadvantaged are disadvantaged, we are told they lack the means to achieve what seems suspiciously like middle-class values.¹

As Dr. Broudy has suggested, the sources of values are varied; they are in the arts and the sciences, in diverse social classes.

It is important that curriculum leaders speak out for their beliefs in the virtues of casteless man, just as the young—in their way—stand up for ideals that they believe carry no middle or other class labels. No age group conflict should exist; the young may find a renewed security in learning that school leaders share most of their own views on what is of value.

Curriculum decision makers must choose the "new" essentials, value essentials, as the basis of school curricula. The fact that it may be difficult to agree upon a set of fundamental values as the focus of new curricula does not negate the need to define fundamental values and their supporting curricula. When the young ask "What is of value?" the older must be available to help distinguish the valuable.

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¹ Harry S. Broudy. "Art, Science, and New Values." *Phi Delta Kappan* 49 (3): 115; November 1967.

One major pitfall in developing a value-based curriculum is that when the young fail to find enough values for stability, they attach themselves to the elusive norms of society. There they find themselves treading in a kind of quicksand of popular behaviors.²

Yet curriculum specialists may resist the development of a curriculum that is purposely based upon a set of value statements. Perhaps they do so because of the overemphasis upon objectivity that is the curse of their professionalism. Do educationists, like the other social scientists who were recently criticized in *Saturday Review's* Education Supplement,³ set themselves up as amoral technicians who regard value judgments as "unprofessional"?

In the view of this writer, value judgments *are* being made by educators. Such judgments are made, for example, when they decide *not* to include in the curriculum opportunities for experiences that are thought to be too mature, too controversial, or too frivolous for the young.

Components of a Value Curriculum

What would a value-oriented curriculum be like? How would a "value" curriculum differ from the usual discipline-oriented curriculum? The following is an attempt to define representative elements of such a curriculum by beginning with the questions, "What do young people value?" and "What do they feel a need to know?"

As a start, the young value life, idealism, sexuality, themselves, and others. They want to know who they are and what alternate routes they may chart for their lives. They want to compare "truths" and values with others, not to avoid these. A valid curriculum for young people is one that directly approaches the questions of their age and time.

Major portions of a value-based curriculum should focus upon:

² Eugene F. McKibbin. "Touching Base With Our Youth." *School and Society* 95 (2296): 424-25; November 11, 1967.

³ Peter Schrag. "Voices in the Classroom." *Saturday Review* 51 (7): 63; February 17, 1968.

1. *Self-knowledge.* Knowledge of emotions, talents, drives, and needs. This includes an attempt to build one's own mental health survival kit, to learn to give and to accept love and respect.

2. *Living and Dying.* The apparent meaning of life plus guesses about the "leap into the dark." Comparative religion studies are a must for public schools. It is important to know what words and ideas lead and sustain people of differently labeled faiths.

3. *The Cooperation-Competition Spectrum.* Comparative studies of Eastern and Western customs, language, literature, and thought not only help a student to see his own identity by way of contrasts (e.g., who he is *not*), but also reveal the knowledge that is needed in order to exist on this planet with those who are different. "Alternatives to War" would be a starkly appropriate label for a section of the curriculum.

4. *Sexuality and Family Responsibility.* Attempts at sex education as a high school instructional unit in physical education, biology, or home room are distressingly inadequate when the breadth and importance of sexuality is considered. Like the other facets of the value-based curriculum, this one should encompass all grade levels and most faculties.

5. *Future Orientation.* The conservation of natural, including human, resources is too important to be left principally in the hands of club sponsors, and merits special emphasis (e.g., waste control should be taught by schools as well as by Ralph Nader and television news staffs).

6. *Growth of American Technocracy.* Examples of bigness in government, urban sprawls, media, data handling, productivity, and economics lead to Orwellian value-laden questions about our country that should have ample consideration in the schools.

7. *Self-discipline.* This is, of course, what schools have always claimed to be about—to give each student a start on an adaptive path that he will be willing and able to follow on his own after graduation. Yet, this may be judged to be the area most needing improvement when the behaviors of graduates are considered.

The partial list here may be labeled as rather idealistic, but the school should be a bastion of idealism. It is critical that the cur-

riculum be flexible enough to include topics based upon the serious questions of students. Teachers should be encouraged to explain, but not to sell, their personal values. They should not be asked to wear the impossible mask of classroom neutrality that is usually called for today.

Evaluating Results

How can the effectiveness of a value-based curriculum be judged? As with any curriculum, the proof exists in the product. The product that should be observed most closely is the school graduate who has spent some years being directed by his own internal guidance system.

Examples of behavior-revealing questions that should be asked of the school's graduates are these:

—With respect to sexuality and family roles:

1. How do marriage and divorce rates compare to those of graduates of traditional curricula?

2. What is the record in terms of pregnancy outside marriage, venereal disease, and paternity cases?

3. As a measure of responsibility for children, what percent of the graduate's children lead to a critically low ratio of real income divided by each child?

—With respect to human conservation:

1. What are the current incidence counts of tobacco, alcohol, and drug use?

2. How many times per day is sufficient exercise pursued to make the heart pound?

—With respect to self-knowledge and mental health:

1. What do standardized test scales tell us of the graduate's personal qualities and adjustment?

2. What is the graduate's history to date on incidence of health needs or referrals?

3. How does employment status relate to measured traits?

School graduates can be asked many other questions that will yield quantitative indicators of behavior. Behavioral patterns for graduates of value-based and traditionally-based curricula can then be compared. It would be expected that such research would show that schools can teach toward behaviorally-defined value-laden goals.

It is time for this nation's curriculum leaders to identify their profession with value definitions leading to value-oriented curricula. The young, as the human products of the schools, deserve nothing less than the set of opportunities for school experiences judged to be of most human value. □

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