

Value Clarification

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HAVE you ever been on an archaeology expedition?

Learning about one's self is very similar to an archaeology "dig." An archaeologist finds a clue which leads him to suspect something interesting exists in an area. He focuses his attention on the covered area and begins the uncovering process in his search for the treasure.

The initial digging which removes large amounts of superficial rocks and dirt may be rough and crude. Yet as the archaeologist feels the nearness of the desired objects, the uncovering process becomes one of removing tiny trowels of dirt and a gentle brushing, in the care not to damage the anticipated treasure. This may be a long ongoing process which is not easily abandoned because of the hoped-for reward. To gain knowledge about one's self is like that.

A person gets a clue of himself that is enticing, and he begins the uncovering process. Once under way he begins to use many processes and techniques. One helpful tool he may use is the process of value clarification. The process of value clarification allows him to learn about himself and what he values. It does not give him values; rather, it permits the discovery of his own values.

The basic questions that he will ask to arrive at his values revolve around the following areas:

1. *Prizing*: What do I prize and cherish? What am I willing to affirm publicly?

2. *Choosing*: What alternatives do I have? What are the consequences of the alternatives? Am I free to choose?

3. *Acting*: Do I act on my beliefs? Do I act with a pattern, a consistency, a repetition?

There are numerous strategies that can be used in the process of valuing.¹ Each strategy, though, is designed to clarify responses to the aforementioned questions. A person does not really have a value if these questions cannot be answered positively regarding a specific behavior or belief.

One helpful strategy that can be used is called "Are you someone who . . . ?" Each question is answered yes, no, or maybe.

¹ Sidney Simon, Leland Howe, and Howard Kirschenbaum. *Value Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students*. New York: Hart Publishing Company, Inc., 1972.

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A	B	C	Are you someone who:
			1. Likes to break the curve on an exam?
			2. Likes to stay up all night when friends visit?
			3. Will stop the car to look at a sunset?
			4. Puts things off?
			5. Will publicly show affection for another person?
			6. Will do it yourself when you feel something needs doing?
			7. Will order a new dish in a restaurant?
			8. Could accept your own sexual impotence?
			9. Could be satisfied without a college degree?
			10. Could be part of a mercy killing?
			11. Is afraid alone in the dark in a strange place?
			12. Is willing to participate in a T-group?
			13. Eats when you are worried?
			14. Can receive a gift easily?
			15. Would steal apples from an orchard?
			16. Is apt to judge someone by his or her appearance?
			17. Would let your child drink or smoke pot?
			18. Watches television soap operas?
			19. Could kill in self-defense?
			20. Needs to be alone?

Another thing we have often done with the list of "Are you someone who . . ." is to set up vertical columns, A, B, and C. After someone codes the list for himself, we ask that person to fold back his answers and give the sheet to someone who knows him pretty well. That person fills in column B, trying to guess at the answers the first person made. Column C could be used for a third person to guess. Then, they could do this for each other and finally sit and talk about the messages we send and how these are received by others. Some students have learned

a great deal about openness, about congruency, about self-concept from sharing in this way.

This strategy allows a person to consider more thoughtfully what he values, what he wants of life, and what type of person he is.

The 20 items are only some of the hundreds of possibilities. Students can brainstorm 20 sets of 20, quite easily, and they are fun. Set up trios and get the students to dream up a list. Give them a chance to try their list out on another trio and vice versa. Eventually, get a master list dittoed for students to try out on other groups in the school. (Your class could start a whole school thinking about value clarification.)

This exercise can be followed by "I am someone who . . ." sentences.

I am someone who:

1. Blushes at a compliment.
2. Talks loudly when nervous.
3. Has faced death.
4. Enjoys intimacy with another person.

There are other variations on the strategy too. A student who is in love could make up a list of "I care deeply for someone who is . . ." and give it to the person he or she loves. Or it could be, "I am looking for someone who is . . ." Or at a later date, a list of, "I am not looking for someone who is . . ." Other creative variations will occur to the teacher who begins to see the spinoffs from this simple strategy. We might even ask, "Are you someone who will try it with your students?"

The search for self, the "Who am I?" of life as a conscious act, is a continual ongoing process. As a person works and plays, this self-adventure becomes a touchstone for living. From knowing one's self, behaviors, patterns, etc., a new confidence, an internal security, a sense of potency emerge which are life-giving. Too often in our lives we search outside ourselves for meaning and become preoccupied with assigning blame and trying to change others. A life of meaning lies within each of us by discovering and cultivating what we are right now. Know what you prize and cherish and act on it as you live fully each day of your life. □

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