

VALUES CLARIFICATION IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

MILDRED W. ABRAMOWITZ*
CLAUDIA MACARI

Do I have to go to the streets to get changes?

Does it make any difference to our government what I do?

Does religion have any meaning for me?

Should I follow what my parents do in religion?

How can I make school more meaningful?

How can I make better use of weekends?

How do I know where to draw the line on a date?

What is there to talk about in my family?

Jack was a close friend. Now we pass each other without a word to say. What happened?

How can I get money to work for me instead of my working for it?

What should I believe about drugs? diet? eggs? meat? mercury?

How should I wear my hair? Should I grow a beard?

for help with these questions, could you answer them?

They are the big questions in our lives, and only we can answer them for ourselves. Schools have not been very helpful. They have not given us the tools to answer them. The *values clarification approach* is one attempt to give young people the tools to answer—a chance to shape their lives.

The Key Questions

Adolescents are living in a very confusing world where they must continually make choices regarding their attitudes and actions in politics, religion, work, school, leisure, love and sex, family, friends, spending of money, health, and personal taste. These are all areas of confusion and conflict for them, because things are changing so fast that they have great difficulty in looking to the past for the "proper" way to behave. They have few established models. They are asking questions; and as they weigh what their parents say and do, what their friends say and do, and what their teachers say and do, they find uncertainty, inconsistency, and even no answers at all to the key questions

* Mildred W. Abramowitz, Principal, and Claudia Macari, Assistant Principal for Guidance, Niles Junior High School 118, Bronx, New York

THESE are just a few of the questions young people are asking today, and, of course, they are not just for the young but for all of us.

If young people were to come to you



Students are encouraged to take a stand on what they believe.

of their lives. They flounder for answers by themselves, and our schools have not been very helpful in developing the processes to help them get the answers.

Traditionally, schools have tried to impose values, or they have tried to ignore the whole problem, or they have said that it is not an area of their concern but that of parents and the church. Yet in this day of rapid change, adolescents are confronted with many different points of view, and they are then left to sort them out. The purpose of the values clarification approach is to give pupils experience in valuing to enable them to answer the questions that really concern them. It is important to pupils that schools are concerned with what they regard as personally important to them, as well as with their traditional role of passing on the achievements of the past.

Values are not readily transmitted, but they can be learned. If one accepts the idea that values cannot effectively be taught, but that they can be learned, one moves from moralizing and inculcating toward a process of value-clarification. Value-clarification involves a series of strategies which are not guilty of forcing one set of right values down the throats of all students. Instead, the process tends to raise issues, to confront the student with inconsistencies, and to get him to sort out his own values, in his own way, and at his own pace. The practice of this approach and the theory on which it is based

have been developed over a number of years by Louis Rath, Merrill Harmin, and Sidney Simon. A full presentation can be found in the book *Values and Teaching*¹ and in *New Strategies in Values Clarification*.²

In our school we are interested in values clarification teaching as one way to help our pupils know what they feel about what happens to them in the course of a day. We believe that thinking is accompanied by feeling, and we would like to experiment with ways of taking advantage of this so that pupils can be helped to answer the questions: Who am I? Where am I going? What do I care about? Is this what I want to do? What alternatives do I have? Which choice is wisest for me? We think that being able to answer such questions would make life more meaningful to our boys and girls, and in the process would help to make school a place where they would grow and where their lives would be affected.

Sidney Simon says that "it turns out that most people have very few values."³ Values clarification teaching is based on the seven criteria for the determination of a value developed by Louis Rath. Rath's contribution was unique, in that he was not interested so much in the content of the value (whether materialistic or spiritual) but was interested in the process whereby a value came about. He said a value started with a belief you were proud of and were willing to affirm, where you had chosen it from alternatives with regard to possible consequences and free from outside pressure to choose any particular thing, and where you had taken action on this belief other than to talk about it and had done this in a regular pattern, not just at sporadic times. Value-indicators are people's beliefs, attitudes, morals, activities, interests, feelings, goals, and aspirations; but they are

¹ L. E. Rath, M. Harmin, and S. Simon. *Values and Teaching*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1966.

² S. Simon et al. *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students*. New York: Hart Publishing Co., 1972.

³ Sidney Simon. "Promoting the Search for Values." *Educational Opportunity Forum* 1 (4): 84; Fall 1969. Special issue on Psychological Humanistic Education. Albany: New York State Education Department.

not values unless they meet the seven criteria. We may have many value-indicators, which are certainly good things to have, but very few values.

The theory further states that people with very few values tend to be conforming, apathetic, inconsistent, and often very ambivalent, all of which seems quite sad when one realizes the extent to which values should guide a man's life. This argues strongly for the school's taking a more active part in the clarification of values. There are few areas in the affective domain about which there is so much talk and so little action as there is with values. The valuing process weaves together critical thinking and affective education in a functional and relevant program.

Our ideas, methods, and inspiration were given to us by Sidney Simon of the University of Massachusetts and his colleague, Howard Kirschenbaum, the director of Adirondack Mountain Humanistic Education Center. We attended several of their workshops and worked with five classes and ten members of our faculty during the school year 1970-71. This current school year (1971-72) we are conducting a teachers workshop in our own school during the school day, and we are also working with three classes for demonstration and practice purposes. One of these classes was with us

last year, and we are planning to continue with this class for a third year.

William W. Niles Junior High School is located in a disadvantaged area in the Bronx. The student body is 60 percent Puerto Rican and 40 percent Black, and the pupils are familiar with the problems of perpetual mobility, broken homes, absent fathers, drugs, and violence in the streets and in the home. Achievement is low in reading, writing, and oral expression. Admissions and discharges result in a one-third turnover in the course of a school year. Literacy in any language is a problem. The boys and girls are, on the average, more than two and a half years retarded in reading and in mathematics when they come to us from elementary school. The school is well thought of and well liked in the community because it has a concerned faculty that works hard at teaching and at establishing warm relationships with children and parents and to foster self-discipline so that teachers can concentrate on teaching.

Specific structured techniques have been designed to accomplish the goals of values clarification teaching. Some of these are described here.

Strategies

The strategies which were presented to our students were employed for the purpose of stimulating thinking and of making them aware of the processes of values clarification. Students were encouraged to take a stand on what they believed, declare it publicly, make their choice freely, and to act upon it. However, the right of the student to "pass" on any strategy was respected and protected. It is necessary to have the right not to say anything. Whatever was said by the student was accepted with no sign of condemnation, rejection, or ridicule. The task of not commenting or of controlling one's facial expressions is the most difficult of all. It is only in a free and relaxed atmosphere of mutual respect and acceptance that the pupils can express themselves and think about where they stand and how they feel and how they will act upon issues that affect their lives.



Values cannot effectively be taught, but they can be learned.

The following strategies are some examples of those used in our classes:

1. *I Love To Do.* Students were asked to write 20 things they love to do. (Incidentally, all written work is absolutely private and is only shared with others if the student wants to.)

The procedure that followed was:

1. Star the five things you love to do best of all.
2. Place a check after the things you love to do alone.
3. Place a cross after the things you love to do with other people.
4. Circle the things that cost you less than \$3 to do.
5. Write the date of the last time you did each of these 20 things.

This strategy gives the student some insight into what is important to him. It reveals his needs for companionship or his lack of it, pleasures which may cost very little, and helps him to evaluate the way he spends his time.

2. *Alternative Search.* There are times when our students are stymied and frustrated by situations and incidents in their lives. They are overwhelmed by the feeling that they do not know where to go or how to act and that they inevitably have to bow to circumstances or fight without direction or reason. Students must be trained to examine a situation and consider all possible alternatives.

For example, the following problem is given to the students as a strategy for alternative search:

You are walking home and as you approach the building in which you live, you see a man and woman standing in a doorway. They are arguing loudly and violently. Suddenly the man pulls the woman by the hair and slaps her face, punches her in the eye. She screams again and again and calls for help.

Directions: Form a group of three people. Each person will say in turn one action he would take in this situation. One person will record what is being said. All answers are to be accepted without comment or criticism no matter how ridiculous or impossible they may seem. This is a way of brainstorming. Do not

judge or evaluate the ideas given in this search for alternatives.

After this is done, we ask the person who has recorded the alternatives to share with us what has been said by the trio.

It is through this that students realize that people may think and act in the same manner, or that there are many different ways to try to resolve a problem, or that there are always possible solutions to every problem if we consider alternatives. It will also indicate to what extent a person will allow himself to become involved with other people and what feelings and ideas he is protecting.

3. *Values Voting.* This is a strategy that allows a student to indicate his feelings and thoughts publicly on any questions asked of him and to see how others feel about the same things. It emphasizes that people differ. This is a time when he can give an answer without being told that he is right or wrong. His opinion on an issue is respected. The value of this strategy in the development of self-confidence is immeasurable.

Directions: The teacher explains that a vote will be taken on 10 questions and each student will show how he feels or thinks about the subject by doing the following: positive answer—raise hands; negative answer—thumbs down; neutral or pass—fold arms.

If the student feels strongly about the subject, he may shake his hand vigorously up or down as the case may be.

All questions must begin with "How many of you." Some examples of questions are:

1. How many of you follow a religion?
2. How many of you are happy in school?
3. How many of you are honest all the time?
4. How many of you have a best friend?
5. How many of you are in favor of war?
6. How many of you choose your own clothes?
7. How many of you feel loved?
8. How many of you think sex education should be taught in school?
9. How many of you would like to live the rest of your life where you are living now?
10. How many of you think a family should be limited in size?

After the questions have been asked,



Teachers improve their rapport with each other and with pupils.

the teacher can ask several students to share their feelings about a particular question and give reasons for voting as they did. This, of course, is on a voluntary basis. This strategy is a learning experience for the teacher because he is in close contact with feelings and ideas and values that his students are revealing. It is also a form of public affirmation of what he prizes or cherishes. It is up to the teacher to incorporate these in his teaching. Those questions where big differences occur can lead to good class discussions. After the first session, students are encouraged to bring in their own questions to have the class vote on them.

4. *Continuum.* The continuum is another device to get our students to examine how they stand or feel about issues at a particular moment in time. This shows how people are the same or differ, and that there are many different positions on an issue. The position a student chooses on a continuum is not fixed. A student may change his mind due to certain experiences and reexamination of his feelings. In that case he will change his position on the continuum.

Directions: A line is drawn and two opposite ideas are put on each end of the line. Pupils take a position on this line which represents where they stand on the issue at that moment. They may not use the center—this is reserved for “compulsive moderates.”

For example, if the subject is School Marks, the continuum may appear as follows:

Mable Marks Gradeless George

The student is told to put his mark at the place he stands on this line.

Continuum on Draft

Dodger Dan Eager Egbert

Continuum on Medicine

Pillbox Pauline Natural Nell

Students are encouraged to think about their answers and to make any changes in position they wish to at subsequent sessions. They are made to feel free to change their position as they weigh more evidence. The value here is that students may see how their peers think and feel. Sharing the same experience draws the group together and gives it the comforting feeling of not being alone. This strategy can be the forerunner of exciting discussions.

5. *Rank Order.* This strategy involves decision making, evaluating, weighing consequences, judging, in a very realistic way. The student has to become totally involved in the problem at hand because he has important choices to make.

Directions: The student is given three statements and he must choose which would be hardest for him to do or tolerate as a first choice; second choice, less hard; third choice, easiest for him to do or tolerate.

1. Three “things” that some men do that people do not like:

- A man who always interrupts his wife, finishes her story, contradicts her.
- A man who lies around watching TV all day.
- A man who smokes a pack of cigarettes a day.

2. You are on a Congressional Committee in Washington, D.C. \$10,000,000 has been given for three worthy causes. Which would you do first, second, third? You must spend all the money on one thing.

- Use the money to clean up rivers, garbage, sewage, pollution.
- Train those who do not have jobs.
- Divide the money among 10,000 needy families.

3. Which would you find hardest to do?

- Drop a bomb on Vietnam?
- Electrocute a man who has been judged to die in the electric chair?
- Run over someone who is threatening you with harm while you are driving your car?



The valuing process weaves together critical thinking and affective education.

This strategy allows the student to compare his thinking to that of his classmates. If they feel as he does, he feels reinforced. If the thinking is different from his, he can examine the issue and reevaluate his own thinking if necessary.

A variation of this strategy is to have the students list what they think might be other types of behavior that men practice that they do not like; or to list other worthy causes on which to spend \$10,000,000. Any of the Rank Order Strategies might be the takeoff point for a social studies lesson, a science lesson, or an English lesson.

The few strategies we have used for demonstration purposes are just a sample of the many that have been developed. It is through these devices that our students learn to think critically in deciding what their values are. They learn to accept them, and, at the same time, to respect and tolerate other people's values.

A Better Rapport

We have been working with the values clarification approach for only nine months, and yet we see many benefits for pupils, teachers, and administrators. Pupils have felt warmth and there has been evidence of the development of mutual trust. Students like the personal attention, the relaxation, the period of "fun," the freedom to express their ideas and feelings. Discipline problems seem to disappear. Pupils feel important and they see their teachers and administrators

as human beings with the usual "ups" and "downs" of human beings. They hear that other pupils have the same problems and confusions and conflicts that they do. They hear their ideas and thoughts being accepted without either praise or condemnation.

Teachers and administrators have experienced a better understanding and a better rapport with each other and with pupils whom they can see as fellow humans. They have shared experiences with each other and with pupils and have become more aware of each other. Teachers have many opportunities to really "listen" to each other and to pupils and to build a group feeling among themselves and pupils.

Our main problem has been to contend with "killer" statements—efforts by some pupils to put each other down by ridicule, laughter, or jeering. Since we are living in a "put-down" society where all of us find it difficult to speak openly and freely of a person's strong points, we have really had to do much thinking about how to stop this at least during class time. We are also living with a society that has had the biblical ethic that "pride goeth before a fall" ingrained in it, so that all of us think that to be proud of something will hurt us; and even if we do feel proud, we keep it to ourselves. We are working on how to handle this and have seen enough success to encourage us. "Put-down" remarks and lack of self-esteem are both very characteristic of the kind of children we are working with, and this, of course, intensifies the problem.

There are authorities who doubt that values clarification work can be done with ghetto children at all. The feeling is that until basic emotional needs are met, pupils will not be able to look at their values. We understand this point of view, but we feel we have seen enough success of the type described in the previous paragraph to continue our experimentation with enthusiasm. Perhaps we will not be able to go as far with our youngsters as we could with middle class children, but we will have begun the difficult process of getting pupils to decide for themselves what they value and take steps to live the lives they would like to live. □

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