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We Suggest

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WE SUGGEST

Eleanor Buelke

Raths, Louis E., Harmin, Merrill, and Simon, Sidney B.
Values and Teaching

Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc., 1966. Pp. ix +275.

What is that elusive something that makes the difference between poor teaching and good teaching, that impedes or promotes efficient learning, that stimulates intellectual growth in all members of a class group? Conclusions from a number of reading research studies done in the past few years under auspices of the U. S. Office of Education seem to indicate that the most important variable in the process of learning to read is closely related to the teacher. Is it the meshing of his personality with that of his pupils? Can it be the pervasive importance of their intrapersonal relationships? Might it be the quality of the interaction process as teachers and pupils, together, examine cognitive and affective dimensions of learning, making choices, prizing those choices, and acting upon them consistently? Does it have something to do with what Nila B. Smith calls the "common denominator" of humaneness, promoting "moral, social, and educational values which . . . must be achieved solely through association of human beings with other human beings?"¹

Perhaps, what is needed to solve teaching and learning problems are insights into relationships between all elements of the problems so that those involved can understand the choices, with their limitations, that are offered for solution. Perhaps, man can never gain a productive understanding of his own values until he reaches a deeper understanding of contradictory meanings and applications of the basic values of others. It may be that, as pupils are helped toward clarification of their relationships to society, they may come to an independent understanding of circumstances which may condition, but not necessarily determine, the extent and nature of their growth.²

The authors of *Values and Teaching* believe that teachers who have seen their formerly relatively stable professional environments change rapidly in recent years can no longer assume that the same problems and instructional tasks for them, and for their pupils, will arise repeatedly. Teachers need approaches which provide them, and

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1. Nila B. Smith, Editor, *Current Issues in Reading*, p. 486. Newark, Delaware: International Reading Association, 1969.
 2. Erich Fromm, *The Revolution of Hope*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1968.

their learners, with a basis for viewing new and unanticipated problems. Good teachers operate above a craft level, analyzing their problems and performances, actively in control of improvement of their teaching. With a real concern for the affective domain of learning, they are serious about building and organizing their own value systems so as to order their world and their consistent, effective actions in it.³

These writers suggest that persons whose behavior evidences no responsibility for decisions about using their lives appear to have unclear values. They seem “unable or unwilling to marshal up their full intellectual resources for use in the crucial game of living.” Children like this are categorized as being *apathetic*, *flighty*, *uncertain*, or *inconsistent*, or as *drifters*, *overconformers*, *overdissenters*, *under-achievers*, or *role players*. In order to show others how to work professionally with such children, helping them to clarify their own values, promoting more purposeful, more positive, more enthusiastic learning behavior, the writers have outlined here a theory of values and a methodology for clarification of values.

The main premises of the book are concerned more with the *processes* persons use to obtain their values than with their particular value outcomes. Seven criteria for reaching a value that can work effectively for a person are listed:

- Choosing: (1) freely
- (2) from among alternatives
- (3) after thoughtful consideration of each alternative
- Prizing: (4) cherishing, being happy with the choice
- (5) affirming, being willing to make a position known publicly
- Acting: (6) doing something with the choice
- (7) repeating this action in different situations, on a number of occasions

If a value is to result, all seven criteria must apply. In addition, eight categories of classroom behavior which have a significant relationship to valuing are explained. They are labeled “value indicators.” These expressions, which approach values, may be raised to the level of values if teachers provide opportunities for children to reveal them. Goals

3. David R. Krathwohl, Benjamin S. Bloom, and Bertram B. Masia, *A Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: Handbook II: The Affective Domain*. New York: David McKay, 1964.

and purposes, aspirations, feelings, interests, beliefs and convictions, attitudes, activities, and worries are seen as typical value indicators.

Teachers who accept the seven criteria of the valuing process can learn techniques and practice teaching behaviors for spotting value indicators and helping children to develop their values. For example, in the process of "choosing," a free choice from among considered alternatives suggests that there must be a group of meaningful things to choose from, with no "either-or" alternatives. Choices offered must be those which can be honored by the teacher. In the matters of "prizing" and "acting," pupils need to be given time for verbal interaction, expressions of feelings and opinions, and ways and means of putting decisions into action.

Two later sections of the book define and describe more specific strategies, procedures, and workable guidelines for teachers to use in implementation and evaluation of the value theory in the classroom. Chapter Nine, concerning emotional needs of learners, needs to be considered for what it is, largely the authors' statement of position. However, it may serve to help the teacher place his own values and valuing processes in proper perspective to his responsibilities to children. The last chapter is a review of research in this field. Here it is stated that this value theory has been used with positive, significant results, but that further research is needed for better understanding of its implications for education.

Readers attracted to *Values and Teaching* will most likely be those whose own values are centered upon what Fromm calls "priorities of life," whose efforts in the classroom are aimed at helping others to be live, dynamic controllers of their own personal and societal systems,⁴ and who concur with the authors' affirmation of respect for the pupil's own highly personal life, for "his experience, and his right to help in examining it for values."

4. Erich Fromm, *op. cit.*