

At the Heart of Education is Heart

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High school youths in New York City, members of the International Family Association, demonstrate in favor of a value-oriented high school curriculum.

"The future is purchased by the present," Samuel Johnson once said.

At no time since he said this some 200 odd years ago has this been more apparent than in today's discussions on education -- its methods and purpose. It is in the schools of today that the next generation is being trained.

Only in the last two centuries has education become chiefly the responsibility of schools -- that is, of formal institutions of learning. Schools took over the job of training children for life. We required our schools to do what in the Old World the family, the church, apprenticeships, and the guilds did.

But schools, to fulfill all those roles, must teach more than bread-and-butter skills. The present era of moral confusion has shown all too clearly the need for some way of inculcating values.

Lawrence Kohlberg, a Harvard University psychologist, says children must be exposed to the process of making value choices. There are various stages of moral reasoning, he says, through which all people must pass, but progression through these stages is not automatic.

The stages are: 1) moral action based on punishment or reward; 2) acting on the basis of reciprocity; 3) doing what authority figures expect of you; 4) respect for law and order; 5) belief in majority will and social contracts; and 6) action based on individual conscience, mutual respect and trust, and universal principles.

Teaching values is not completely new in education. The famed McGuffey readers pounded away at moral imperatives, quoted the Bible liberally, and included many literary and patriotic passages with a moral message. Even John Dewey, the father of the progressive movement in education, believed in moral education: "What avail is it to win prescribed amounts of information about geography and history, to win ability to read and write, if in the process the individual loses his own soul, loses appreciation of things worthwhile...?"

However, the subsequent decline in the role of the school regarding the teaching of values can be traced to the 1962 U.S. Supreme Court decision barring the use of official prayers in public schools. School systems reacted by generally taking the position that schools must be neutral on most issues that could touch on religious or moral questions.

Recently, however, what the specialists call "moral education" or "value clarification" has been popping up in more and more schools. As one principal in Maryland explains the concept, "The emphasis of value clarification is to help children learn how to make decisions on what they value. No attempt is made to teach a value system." For example, first-grade children decide what they would do if they saw a fire on a neighbor's porch or if they had \$200 and had a choice between buying new clothes or helping a friend who was starving.

In a Maryland school, a teacher presented her class with a list of 15 "miracle workers" and most of the students chose "Prof. Val U Clear -- With his help you will always know what you want, and you will be completely clear on all the muddy issues of these confused days."

The College Entrance Examination Board has evolved a detailed program, called "Deciding, ' ' intended to teach youngsters how to make decisions based on the formation of value judgments as well as on a consideration of successful strategies. "The most important step in learning decision-making skills," the workbook advises, "is to understand and clarify your values. Once you have identified your values, you can set goals and objectives and make the decisions that are most satisfying to you."

According to Fred M. Hechinger of The New York Times, "All this suggests at least a glimmer of recognition among educators that the value-free view of human behavior that had mistakenly been considered the sign of liberal sophistication is being seriously questioned."

The Panel on Youth of the President's Science Advisory Committee revealed what one contributor called a basic flaw in our socialization apparatus -- the failure to give children a sense of obligation to their society and to set authoritative guidelines for them. "It is precisely the lack of shared moral commitment that is at the root of the dissatisfactions and alienations of many youth," the report stated.

The Committee pointed out that just as the job that schools have been called upon to fill is unique in the history of man, so too is the position of young people today. With the gradual raising of the age for compulsory education and the closing off of job opportunities for adolescents, the proportion in school has gone from 15 percent in 1910 to more than 90 percent today.

As schools become more and more the focus of adolescent life, a youth culture has flourished, tending to wall youth off from the larger society. Youth tend to be excluded from challenging jobs both by humanitarian considerations that protect them from exploitation and by the increasing bureaucratization of jobs. Youth are, then, to a considerable degree, "outsiders" in American society.

John Clausen of the University of California at Berkeley's Department of Sociology commented on the Committee's failure to deal with moral issues in its recommendations. He added, "There is room for other analyses that... inquire into ways that families might be assisted to demand more responsibility from children and adolescents, or that consider whether we can indefinitely subscribe to the notion that everyone should be free to do his own thing. The report of the Panel on Youth is circumscribed, but it clearly indicates the need for redesigning social roles for youth and reshaping some of the institutional structures within which youth move to adulthood."

The need for a change cries out from the headlines almost daily. Recently, police raided suburban high schools in Montgomery County, Maryland, to break up a suspected drug ring. Twenty-two persons were arrested. After the arrests, many teachers blamed themselves for not exerting enough influence over students and allowing the drug situation to develop.

Shortly after this incident, Montgomery County Police Chief Kenneth Watkins attributed the crime problem among young people to the breakdown of family life, although laxity in the churches, courts, and other public institutions -- particularly the public school system -- have contributed to a disrespect for authority and the rights of others, which leads to criminal behavior, Watkins charged.

"When I was coming along as a youngster," he said in a Washington Star interview, "it seemed that from the time you were old enough to know anything, your folks said 'don't take someone else's property.' You knew when you went to school and picked up someone else's pencil that the teacher would say 'put that back. It isn't yours.' It was reinforced when you walked through your neighborhood and saw apples hanging on a tree and people you knew sitting on the porch. You knew you wanted to have one of those apples, but you knew you weren't supposed to do it. If you did do it, these people would say something to your parents and you'd be flogged anyway."

Young people aren't taught such things now, Watkins said, and the result is that they feel they don't have to show respect for anyone or anything, obey the law or do anything just because it's right. "Just because it's right."

Therein lies the heart of the matter. Right and wrong imply an absolute moral standard, a standard which ultimately is based on a belief in God. Debates over school policies are only a peg on which to hang more fundamental differences over the philosophy of education, and indeed over a philosophy of life. The fundamental clash is between a God-centered, principled outlook and a godless, self-centered, "I will do what I feel like doing," one.

Behind the second philosophy of education is the view that basically everyone is good and you just have to allow children to express their feelings naturally and all will be well.

For example, at one "open education" school in California, students are given a maximum of individual freedom, a minimum of teacher supervision. There are no dress rules, and very few restrictions on behavior. Barefoot and blue-jeaned, the students themselves decide what and when they want to learn. No tests measure the students' progress, no grades indicate their relative standing or achievement; instead, the teachers gauge their students in terms of creativity. Discipline, of course, is kept to an absolute minimum.

"Sometimes," said one eighth-grader, "I even make it to class."

But a sixth-grader at a more traditional school commented, "Without a strict class, you just bum around and don't learn anything."

Dr. Robert Coles, eminent child psychiatrist, has said, "The best teacher is the person who knows that kids need limits. They don't need to be beaten up, but they need that balance where they learn mastery of themselves and how to express that mastery with confidence and sureness."

Implicit in this statement and this viewpoint in general is that children and mankind as a whole are not good by nature. Within each newly-born child is a spark or seed, the image of God. We must continually struggle to reach God's standard of goodness, and this requires discipline, a habit learned from parents and teachers.

Dr. Benjamin Spock, in his most recent book (*Raising Children in a Difficult Time*), laments his reputation for encouraging parental permissiveness. "Inability to be firm," he says, "is to my mind the commonest problem of American parents today."

That seed within each child is a little like the seed in Jesus' parable of the sower, which when it fell among thorns or on stony ground could not flourish. The purpose of education should be to see that the conditions are right for that seed to grow and blossom.

Nor does discipline stunt creativity. There are many people who have had talent and creative ability which has never borne fruit because they have followed their own whims and fancies, like a horn player who doesn't bother to practice because it's too much trouble.

Team sports provide the perfect example -- nothing is more frustrating than to see a player so dazzled by his own brilliance that he forgets the rest of the team and the aim of the game. A brilliant display is wasted if it is not directed at the goal of scoring.

In other words, discipline is necessary if a person is to be truly free to use his creative abilities to the full.

What are the right conditions to nurture a seed? Certainly just having a modern classroom with lots of bright new equipment isn't enough. Nor is it enough to have teachers who are the best authorities in their field. This won't inspire and raise young people with the will and desire to go out to serve God and create a better world.

Education should be the process by which each child learns how to become an individual capable of bringing the greatest joy to God, his parents, all mankind and the creation, as well as himself. Since children are not naturally born that way, they need to be guided during their growth so that they will become selfless and loving persons capable of raising families in the same way.

The most important characteristic we want to convey to children would be the capacity to feel and understand God's heart and to be able to express it to other people. For this to occur, the child needs the example of such people to follow -- a model. Parents and teachers act in the position of God in raising His child. Teaching can't be just another job; the teacher must through his deeds, words, his very life express the heart of God.

The importance of a model was demonstrated in an experiment conducted by J. Philippe Rushton of the University of London. He wanted to know: Does adult example or preaching make a child generous? The experiment was in the form of a game, played by a child with an adult partner who either donated part of his winnings to a "Save the Children Fund" or kept them all for himself, while at the same time preaching generosity or selfishness or providing a neutral conversation.

Rushton reported that adult demonstration of generosity was highly effective. In the long run, preaching was also effective if it coincided with generous behavior on the part of the adult.

Teachers educate best when they not only impart knowledge but by their sincerity deeply influence the hearts of their students. The teacher can be a source of inspiration and become a second father or mother to the child while he is away from home during the day. In this way, the child's character can develop fully at school as well as at home. The teachers at the Montgomery County high school where the drug raids happened acknowledge their partial responsibility for the situation having developed. That is quite true.

There are a lot of conflicting ideas floating around these days about education. But if we clearly keep in mind the ultimate purpose of education -- raising a child in the image of God, to be a loving and selfless person -- then the demand for an ideal theory and method will reach worldwide proportions and the needed changes will be brought about.