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CAN SCHOOLS TEACH KIDS VALUABLE?

Special Feature
on Values

Complete the following sentence:

A cop stops a speeding car; he sees it's the President of the United States! He says . . .

Answer the following question:

Under what circumstances would you try to pass a toll machine without . . . paying the fee? . . .

_____ Only if I were certain that I would not be caught.

_____ If I felt I had a good chance of not getting caught.

_____ Never, under any circumstances.

_____ Only if I needed the money desperately, like for family food supplies.

Using such educational materials, often both somewhat provocative and somewhat inane (How likely is it that the patrolman would not notice the President until after he stops his limousine? How much food could money from a toll possibly buy?), teachers are trying to provide the hottest new item in post-Watergate curricula: moral education.

A 1975 Gallup Poll of a random sample of adult Americans reports that 4 out of every 5 favor instruction in morals and moral behavior in the schools.

By AMITAI ETZIONI

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Behind the surprisingly broad consensus that schools need to provide more moral education is considerable disagreement as to what the nature of the problem is, what is to be taught, and how.

What parents, educators, and community leaders perceive as the problem moral education should address depends largely on their upbringing and whether their outlook on personal and political issues is liberal, conservative, or some mixture of both. Thus, many who term themselves conservatives are alarmed about the decline in religion while crime, sexual permissiveness, and rebellion against authority are on the increase. In contrast, many liberals identify as the nation's major moral defects what they see as a disregard for basic human rights and civil liberties, persistence of poverty, social injustice, and "exploitation by institutions."

Various groups use different cue words to signal their views regarding the underlying sources and appropriate remedies for the nation's ethical malaise. Thus, the American Bar Association refers to the need for "law-related" studies in schools, implying that the ethical instruction students require is in more respect for and obedience to the law.

On the other hand, the followers

of Harvard's Lawrence Kohlberg favor the term *moral reasoning* (rather than compliance), which aptly conveys their view that at its highest level, morality is "creative," entailing the capacity to form and follow principles higher than the code of one's community. Thus, in a story used by Kohlberg and company to teach moral reasoning, Helga must decide whether or not to hide her friend Rachel from the Gestapo—clearly a violation of the law of that land, but an ethical act according to the "higher law" of conscience.

U.S. Office of Education officials, trying to sidestep the political booby traps risked in following one path or another, prefer terms such as *civic education*, *civic ethics*, or *citizen/moral education*—terms that presumably encompass some of everything.

It is impossible here to do justice to the plethora of educational philosophies, theories, and techniques competing with one another to shape how the schools are to take on moral education. Apologies to those whose favorite technique is left out in this brief Cook's tour.

• *Giving the Blue-Eyed the Blues.* Jane Elliott, a third grade teacher at Community Elementary School in Riceville, Iowa, came up with a method sufficiently imaginative and arresting to become the

subject of an ABC News documentary ("The Eye of the Storm") and a book (*A Class Divided* by William Peters). But few schools seemingly have followed her lead.

In 1968, Elliott wanted to teach her students the injustice of discrimination, but she sensed that just talking about the arbitrariness and unfairness of race prejudice would be too academic to have much impact. Her inspiration was to appeal directly to the kids' capacities for empathetic insight by declaring a day of discrimination against the blue-eyed. She began by "explaining" the innate superiority of the "cleaner," "more civilized," "smarter" brown-eyed. She moved all the blue-eyed to the back of the room to the tune of self-satisfied snickers from the brown-eyed. She then informed the blue-eyed children that they would not be permitted to play on the big playground equipment at recess and could only play with brown-eyed children if they were invited. Throughout the day she was conspicuously more tolerant of mistakes by brown-eyed children.

The brown-eyed lorded it over the blue-eyed, who soon showed signs of insecurity and loss of confidence. One blue-eyed girl, used to being popular, did poorly in class and walked around in a fog after being given the "treatment" by her erstwhile friends.

After reversing the roles, Elliott had every child write about how it felt to be discriminated against. Though to many adults the procedure may sound more than a bit heavy-handed, as far as the kids were concerned, the experience "took" and had a profound impact.

• *Moral Dilemmas.* A tamer method of moral education is discussion of "moral dilemmas." Thus, the students in a Pittsburgh junior high school started their civics class one Monday morning with a brief "moral dilemma."

Sharon and Jill were best friends.

One day they went shopping together. Jill tried on a sweater and then, to Sharon's surprise, walked out of the store wearing the sweater under her coat. A moment later, the store's security officer stopped Sharon and demanded that she tell him the name of the girl who had walked out. . . .

(This dilemma appeared in Barry K. Beyer's article, "Conducting Moral Discussions in the Classroom," *Social Education*, April 1976. It is based on a story created by Frank Alessi.)

The teacher confronted the class: Should Sharon tell?

George: Sharon could say, "I don't even know her. I just walked in the store off the street, and I don't even know where she lives. I just met her."

Teacher: So what she ought to do is lie for a friend. Right?

George: Yah.

Teacher: What is going to happen if everyone lies whenever they feel like it, whenever it suits their convenience? . . . Peter.

Peter: If everyone goes around shoplifting, if someone goes and steals a whole bunch of things from somebody's store, then you go back to your store and see everything from your store missing, do you know what kind of life that would be? Everybody would just be walking around stealing everybody else's stuff.

Teacher: Mary Lu, do you want to comment about what he said?

Mary Lu: Yah, but everybody doesn't steal and everybody wouldn't, and the thing is that the store owner probably has a large enough margin of profit anyway to cover some few rip-offs he might have.

George: But the store can't exist if everybody is stealing, there are so many people, and it is getting worse and worse every day. . . .

What educators who favor this approach stress as important about such dialogues is that a discussion rather than a lecture takes place and that the teacher refrains from pronouncing his or her values and tolerates a free expression of students' viewpoints.

Also, they believe—and are backed up by some data—that such give-and-take improves students' awareness of moral issues, improves their ability to reason out

moral issues, and leads to higher levels of moral reasoning.

The scholar most often cited by students of moral reasoning, Professor Kohlberg, suggests that children move from an amoral stage toward ever greater concern with the needs and feelings of others, a sense of justice, reciprocity, and equality. Children at first believe in doing what is right only because (and as long as) violations entail punishment or conformity generates pleasure. As their capacity for morality develops naturally with age and is developed by education, they learn to behave in ways that will gain the approval of others. Finally, at the highest levels, they come to understand the intrinsic virtue of being law-abiding and ethical.

Kohlberg argues, and to some extent has demonstrated, that it is useless to try to get children at the most primitive stage of moral development to understand principles or modes of reasoning at the highest level. At the same time, it is possible, through proper classroom dialectics, to help children move up one stage at a time in their levels of moral reasoning.

Kohlberg's critics maintain that the link between reasoning morally and acting morally is weak, that the focus on developing the cognitive side of morality neglects the affective side, the moral commitment. This, they say, is better achieved by more emotive techniques, such as setting examples to emulate, fostering identification of the child with educators, and encouraging the right values in the child's peer group.

One vainly looks for data to provide a definitive answer as to which approach is better, as this is a field in which rhetoric is abundant and facts extremely rare. Kohlberg, though, has more data to support his view than have his critics—which is not to say that he has much. In the end, it may well turn out that *both* emotional and

cognitive development and education are needed.

In discussion groups conducted for 150 children, aged eight and nine, at Brentwood College in the United Kingdom, the children were told: "There are 12 in a lifeboat after a shipwreck. Four must go overboard if any are to survive." The 12 included a teacher, a scientist, a priest, an artisan, a child of eight, a dog, etc. Invariably the teacher went overboard, never the child, often not the dog. It is questionable not only whether one wishes group discussions to enforce such views, but whether one wishes to encourage children to accept the *implied* ethical notion that you do throw people overboard rather than go down with them and not kill. What is a child to learn from these extreme situations to apply to everyday life? That self-interest sanctions killing?

• *Values Clarification.* The main champion of this approach, Sidney B. Simon of the University of Massachusetts, has just about lost count of the hundreds of schools that have purchased the "values clarification" kits he and his associates have designed.

One such school is the William W. Niles Junior High School, a school with predominantly minority students, located in the Bronx. According to Claudia Macari, assistant principal for guidance, and Mildred W. Abramowitz, principal, one of the teaching techniques they employed went something like this:

Exercise one: "Write down 20 things you love to do." Pause. "Now that you have all made your lists, star the five things you love to do best of all." Pause. "Place a check after the things you love to do alone." Pause. "Place a cross after the things you love to do with other people." Pause. "Circle the things that cost you less than \$3 to do." Pause. "Write the date of the last time you did each of these things."

Macari and Abramowitz explain that the purpose of having the students choose the five out of 20 things they like best is to make them aware of what it is they value. The whole idea of values clarification is *not* to instill or introduce any particular values, new or old, but to help students discover those they already have. Having to decide which 15 items to leave out, which five to include, leads the youngsters to an understanding of the concept of values, i.e., of the choices inevitably involved. Moreover, the theory stresses that "exercising" one's values via such paper-and-pencil exercises will help students hold on more firmly to their values. As with other facilities, so with the capacity to form and sustain values: If you don't use it, you lose it.

The other questions in this exercise aim at helping a person gain insight into what he or she values and why (e.g., Do you prefer to do things with others or by yourself? Do the things you like to do cost a lot of money?).

There are no right and wrong answers in values-clarification exercises. Any and all answers are considered "right" as long as one can give a reason for them. Asked whether a youngster might not therefore end up reaffirming "wrong" values, such as thievery, the designers of the approach reply, ". . . our position is that we respect his right to decide upon that value."

Critics point to this moral neutrality as a main weakness of the approach. Granted that preaching a code and testing students to see if they subscribe to it may well be inappropriate, ineffectual, or both, does it follow that teachers must imply that all values are equally valid? Others claim that it is precisely this principled amorality of the values-clarification package that is the chief reason for its popularity in the public schools, which are thereby protected from having

to choose *whose* values to teach. At the same time, whatever directions for teacher neutrality the kit contains, each teacher is in fact free to lead the discussion of each exercise as he or she sees fit—and to decide just how neutral to be if confronted with a classroom full of 13-year-old Machiavellians.

Actually, it seems to me, few teachers can hide their feelings or views when issues such as abortion, women's rights, and injustice to minorities are discussed in the classroom. Body language, tone of voice, allotment of more time to speak to kids who have the desired answer, if not outright statements of advocacy, are sure to cue the

How can our schools be restructured to make them sources of ethical experiences?

class as to what side of the issue the teacher is on. Whatever limited teacher training comes with the moral education kits cannot hope to neutralize teachers' ethical feelings or put them completely out of view.

Nor may this be as important as the advocates of the kits believe it to be. Pupils are exposed to a variety of views of different teachers, coaches, parents, peers; they can well evolve their moral positions out of the competing variety of positions they face, rather than in an artificial moral vacuum.

Several educators have empha-

sized that schools "impact" children not only—and indeed probably not even primarily—via the curriculum taught in class, but by the way the schools themselves are structured. It has long been understood that children learn from their parents by emulation—as is acknowledged in the well-known saw of the parent who himself sets a bad example: "Do as I say, not as I do!" The same notion is applicable to the ethics taught in school: The way teachers, administrators, coaches, and other school officials interact with children teaches ethical values by example—or sets some contrary example of petty tyranny, hypocrisy, or see-no-evil mentality. These comprise the school's "hidden curriculum."

After talking to students, I find that the core of the hidden curriculum revolves around such subjects as grades, athletics, and exploitation of some students by others (e.g., extortion). School officials' attitudes and actions regarding these topics often do not convey the importance of standing up for ethical principles in the face of the pressures of self-interest or pragmatic expediency.

For example, in two schools in an Eastern state, administrators became aware that some minority pupils had formed gangs which collected a quarter a day in protection money from younger, mainly white children. For a long time, however, officials in both schools looked the other way. Why? Well, they said, they were afraid that an active effort to find out which children were in the extortion rings and punish them would open them up to charges of "police tactics."

Finally some gang members were caught in both schools. In one school, the principal sent the boys to the guidance counselor, who in turn handled the matter by asking them if perhaps their families were poor and badly needed the money. Upon establishing that they were "needy," he warned them not to

extort money again.

The other principal's main concern was that it was a "no-win" situation. As he put it, "If we kick them [the extortionists] out of school, the black community will be up in arms, and we already have our hands full with everything from drugs to alcoholism to vandalism, etc." After being caught, the extortionist pupils were first suspended; then when minority parents protested, reinstated; then when white parents were outraged, sent to an experimental school; then when the minority parents charged "exile"—back to the original school. The principal felt no need to apologize for setting policy according to which group protested most at the time. The main issue, as he saw it, was not what to do about extortion or how his failure to do anything credible about it would affect the kids, but how to negotiate a political tightrope without falling into the vengeful hands of either set of outraged parents.

As for grades, they seem to have lost legitimacy for a large number of students. But at the same time, many students believe that nothing less than their life's fate hangs on getting into the "right" college—which in turn depends on having high grades. But since they see good grades as having little real meaning, they view what they do to get them as similarly unimportant. Thus, for quite a few students the notion that cheating on exams or term papers is a serious ethical issue is about as quaint as is the medieval scholastic debate over how many angels can dance on the head of a pin to modern theologians.

With sports, how seriously ethical issues are taken appears to vary with the sport; each sport has its own informal rules of fair play that range from just somewhat to a great deal looser than the official code. Two students who play tennis said that they did believe the as-

sistant coach wanted them to play it fair, "gentleman style," but they were somewhat unclear how strongly he felt that way.

Basketball players told me that they are trained to keep a keen eye on the referee and push another player out of the way only when the referee is not looking, although "really digging your elbow into the other guy" is going too far. Football seems to be the focus of the most intense pressures to win—and hence the greatest temptations to win at any price. Football players expressed the feeling that the coaches want them to win any way they know how, short of pulling a face mask.

Traditionally, one of the major justifications for lavishing large sums of money on sports programs in the schools—especially competitive team sports programs—has been that athletics are "character-building." And indeed they very likely are—the question that needs greater attention, however, is. What kind of character are they building?

The hidden curriculum's emphasis on high grades and winning in sports suggests that grades and sports are still important tools for instilling the American "success ethic"; likewise, it would seem that stimulating the drive for success is still a major mission of the American school. The success ethic is scarcely very ethical, however, if it builds into its creed in school and afterward an attitude toward the meaning of competition and reward such as that conveyed by the oft-quoted motto: "Winning is not the most important thing, it's the *only* thing." Competition may well build character and be compatible with an industrious society. Unbounded competition, however, is incompatible with any ethical code or social order; it puts self above all.

Of all the approaches to moral education, the one that focuses on reform of the hidden curriculum is

likely to be both the most relevant and the most difficult to accomplish, because teachers and students are less aware of its moral implications than they are of the formal curriculum and because its roots lie in what the community values most. It is hence far from accidental that when Kohlberg tried to apply his ideas about how best to foster higher levels of moral reasoning in the schools, he ended up having to set up an experimental alternate school. (The school is run on participatory principles. Each pupil and each staff member has one vote and "no major decision or commitments are made without consulting the entire community.")

While this solution is entirely suitable to Kohlberg's experimental purposes, most of America is probably far from ready for such a radically egalitarian approach to the public school's authority structures. Most schools require reforms if they are to provide a just allotment of grades which pupils perceive as relevant, sports played to learn respect for rules (not just to win), the hidden curriculum as much as possible in line with what is taught in ethics classes.

The objection may well be raised that a school structured to produce more ethical youth would of necessity fail in its major mission of adequately preparing its students for later life. Such a view is especially likely to be espoused by those who believe that the American success ethic, though indeed subtler now than in its nineteenth-century form, still owes a lot to the unapologetic amorality displayed by Tammany boss George Washington Plunkitt, who, in defining what he called "honest graft," said "I seen my opportunities and I took 'em."

One could counter this criticism, somewhat stiffly and stubbornly perhaps, by steadfastly maintaining that the schools have a duty to educate their students morally—

over and above whatever the prevalent societal standards are. At the very least, then the students will have some principles to compromise later on, and though their standards may fall, they may nonetheless not stoop so low as they would have if they started out with no such scruples. True, most schools cannot proceed very far in promoting values not shared by the community at large. Hence, ultimately, whether via the hidden curriculum or the conventional one, before the schools can effectively provide moral education, the surrounding society must care about morality and work to reform itself.

What is thus required now is for all concerned to get together to focus on the question: How can our schools be *restructured* to make them sources of ethical experiences rather than, as they too often are, training grounds for cheating, intolerance, coping with bureaucratic or arbitrary authority?

The present period seems especially opportune for attempting such a change. We are now in an era in which various elements of society have had to confront questions of ethicality, of how to formulate and move toward higher standards of conduct. The schools can act as either an accelerator or a brake on this ethical drive. □

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Reactions

Professor Etzioni has done a reasonable survey of the field of values/moral education.

He has been kind enough to values clarification, but I think he could have been gentler on Kohlberg and his associates, because what this world needs now is a sensitive synthesis of the many efforts of the well-meaning people working in the values/moral education area.

One of the major wellsprings for a new synthesis will be the human potential movement. This movement has made enormous contributions to our understanding of the power of our emotions and feelings to dominate our decision making and dictate how we negotiate our relationships and wend our way through the chaotic and complex maze of human interaction.

It would be well if some research foundation were to underwrite a massive research program that could select the best of the moral reasoning work, the best of the values clarification work, and the best work of all other branches of the movement to help in the search to make this a better world for all of us.

The truth is that none of us has the final answer. The time of taking potshots at each other is past. We should join together and build an ultimate program of values/moral education that will truly serve America's children. My experience indicates that you can't give them values but that you certainly can give them skills and tools and the beginnings of values, or what we call values indicators.

Human behavior will always remain incredibly complex, and ultimate solutions will always be ephemeral or downright unworkable—if not immoral. To find the best design for helping students clarify values, we will have to borrow the most useful elements from many branches of the human potential movement and, like good physicians, watch out for any dangerous side effects.

—Sidney B. Simon, professor of education, University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Years ago everyone moralized. Home, church, and school shared in the indoctrination. Now, more and more of society looks to the school to solve the problems of moral decay and vanishing virtues—what Etzioni calls "our na-

tion's ethical malaise." There is no doubt about the need; the only thing in question is the method.

Kohlberg's approach to moral reasoning and Simon's values clarification techniques are popular with teachers today. My concerns with Kohlberg's approach are the obvious ones. First, the dilemmas belong to someone else and are therefore unreal to students. Second, the fact that the discussions are intentionally open-ended and incomplete could be construed as subtle condoning of blatantly bad moral judgment. Third, reasoning ability is directly related to intellectual maturity and experience. Hence, discussions can confuse and frustrate the less mature students in a classroom.

Simon's values clarification techniques cause me similar concerns. What does a teacher do if a student reaffirms "wrong" values? Etzioni says few teachers can remain neutral. This was certainly true of me. I caught myself cueing students in some not-so-subtle ways: by changing facial expression, through tone of voice, in leading the discussion *my way*.

Teachers and schools are teaching values and ethics every minute of the school day—by word, gesture, appearance; by orderliness and classroom environment. What we expect and demand, what we praise and admonish show what we hold dear.

—Albert J. George, *social studies teacher, Burgess Elementary School, Sturbridge, Massachusetts*.

Our society has asked educators to help teach morals—something that has always been taught in the classroom. We can handle it.

Yes, Mr. Etzioni, "the schools can act as either an accelerator or a brake," and we teachers are in the driver's seat. The responsibility is tremendous: How and what we do and say has something to do with the type of ride the students

will have. Will all students reach their common destination or will they get off before their stop? We must bring the vehicle to a sudden halt, regroup, restructure our destination, and then plot the necessary procedure for getting there.

—Dean A. Chandler, *social studies teacher, Penn Junior High School, Pittsburgh*.

It is understandable, and I believe not surprising, that a 1975 Gallup Poll found that 4 out of 5 adult Americans favor instruction in morals. What surprises me is that the educational "experts" are conceding that classroom teachers should undertake what I believe to be a crucial responsibility of parents: teaching their own children right from wrong.

I can feel comfortable with data that indicate we can teach moral behavior in the classroom, but has anyone thought to survey classroom teachers on whether they are prepared to take on a burden that I believe belongs to family and church?

Etzioni's article misses the real issue in the debate over moral education. The question is not Can schools teach kids values? as Dr. Etzioni suggests, but Should schools teach values? And the question should be asked of the fallible people who everyone seems to assume believe they should be doing it.

I would be much more comfortable being part of an organized effort to involve parents of school-aged children in parent effectiveness programs. I believe we teachers can play a productive part by supporting rather than taking over family and church responsibilities.

—Jerry DeWan, *social studies teacher, Methacton Senior High School, Fairview Village, Pennsylvania*.

Etzioni clearly intimates that schools do teach kids values. But

how well do the schools do it?

The hidden curriculum of the schools that allows cheating and intolerance is really the unacknowledged standard of our society. We have to determine whether our schools should reflect our society or whether society should reflect morally and ethically sound schools. When educators face up to the latter, reform will begin.

In Pennsylvania we have adopted what we call the Ten Goals of Quality Education. One goal is to develop societal responsibility or good citizenship. Components of societal responsibility include concern for the welfare and dignity of others, respect for law and authority, and personal responsibility and integrity.

Recently I assigned my students a reading unit on societal responsibility whose purpose was to develop an awareness of the responsibilities a good citizen assumes. First, the students read about characters who displayed societal responsibility. Then each student wrote about how he or she fulfilled various aspects of such responsibility in life. Not surprisingly, these 300 junior high students gave strong indications of moral responsibility.

Certainly, if our young people can base their daily actions on right principles, then the schools and communities that try to nurture these principles must not allow hidden or written curriculums that tolerate any less than our highest principles.

It has been said that human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe. Educators must honor their personal commitment to the future and lead the way toward higher standards of conduct. No longer can we afford to turn our heads.

—Norma McLean, *reading specialist, North Penn School District, Lansdale, Pennsylvania*.

An overcrowded schedule prevented Dr. Kohlberg from accepting our invitation to react to the Etzioni article.