

The Case for a Strong Values Education Program in Public Schools

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The accumulating evidence related to the various forms of violence throughout our society indicates a need for values instruction in educational institutions. The main issue is the vigor of those efforts. A significant number of schools have created low intensity programs which seem out of step with the severity of the problem. They portend failure in this critical area. The nation needs high intensity efforts that clearly reflect society's fervent intent to correct its values deficit. Such a program must involve broad-based groups who are fully dedicated to its objectives and informed about its procedures.

The need for a strong values education program in public education was expressed forthrightly by Close who said, "The fundamental tragedy of American Education is not that we are turning out ignoramuses but that we are turning out savages" (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1994, p.49). This statement was followed by one by Ryan (Elam, Rose, Gallup, 1994, p. 49) who called schools "morally dangerous places."

The public's awareness of the values crisis was reflected by Cal Thomas (1994) who wrote, "Suddenly, like a tornado that approaches unexpectedly, values are the hottest political issue" (p. A7). He continued with this quote from George Washington:

Let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason, and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle. (p. A7)

This view is supported by Barone (1994) who wrote, "The conflict between the values of the feminist left and the religious right frames the political discussion" (p. 40).

The tornado that Thomas cites can be seen in writings all around us. William Bennett's (1994) *The Book of Virtues* is a bestseller. The Brookings Institution issued *Values and Public Policy* (Aaron, Mann, & Taylor, 1994). *Newsweek* (Fineman, 1994) published a major article on virtues as did *U.S. News and World Report* (August 1, 1994). Similarly, *The Futurist* listed Kidder's (1994) eight universal human values.

In education, *The American School Board Journal* (May, 1994) featured an article on character education (Thomas & Roberts, 1994). *Educational Leadership* (November, 1993) devoted an entire edition to character education as it had done in December 1985. *Counseling and Values* has presented a series of articles on values including February 1979 (Nordberg), October 1984 (Russo), April 1985 (Bergin), October 1991 (Haugen, Tyler, & Clark), and April 1993 (Mitchell).

There is values-related action at the Federal level. On July 29-30 there was a White House Conference on Character Education Building

for a Democratic, Civil Society. In preparation for that conference Etzioni (1994) wrote, "Without character, merely knowing what is right is no assurance that we shall live up to it. At the same time, character without values grafted upon it lacks content" (p. 2).

In short, things are happening in the values area. The nation is stirred. A major question is just how deep that renewal reaches. There is a need to generate enthusiasm for a profound look at this nation's basic values.

In 1990, Daley recognized that values education was returning to American schools. He stated:

Decades after God, in effect, was banished from the classroom, along with organized prayer, public schools around the country are cautiously venturing beyond academics to teach youngsters something about right and wrong, good and bad behavior. (p. B8)

Daley's pronouncement was accepted as a *fait accompli*. Indeed, a renewed interest in values was reflected in an announcement (*New York Times* editorial June 27, 1990) heralding a \$21 million grant to create a Center for Human Values that "will convene a range of specialists to study broad ethical questions" (p. B6).

Another indication of the emergence of values as a pressing issue can be found in the political arena. Paul Weyrich, New Right activist, called upon conservatives to take on "the role of defending and fostering basic American values" (Shogan,1990). William F. Buckley (1995) charged the American Press with the responsibility to inform the public on what is really happening to their rights to public prayer and school choice rather than providing misinformation that is an assault on self-government.

From the political left, Norman Lear of People for the American Way told the participants in the 1989 National Education Association Conference in Anaheim, California, that he "urged them to nurture the sense of the sacred that he says underlies all religions" (Steinfels, 1989, p. A10).

It is clear that interest in values education is surging. A strong stance is appropriate.

Historical Perspective

History suggests three phases of values education in America. These three phases will be described in the following paragraphs.

Phase I

This phase began in the 1840s and continued until the 1930s. It was characterized by a rather universal use of the Bible as the source of values. The major question was: How should people practice the values described in the Bible ?

Phase II

This phase covered the period from the 1950-1980s and was characterized by individual definition of personal values. The major question was: How should people practice what she/he thinks is important?

Phase III

This period began with the 1990s and is characterized by the specification of the values found important by society. The major question is: How should one practice society's values?

The third phase of values education was supported by Thomas Lickona of the State University of New York at Cortland, who maintains that society has a right to teach values essential to democracy (Lickona,1991). Kevin Ryan of Boston University specified some of these values as kindness, honesty, loyalty to parents, spouses, and family members; an obligation to help the poor, the sick, and the less fortunate; the right to private property (Ryan, 1993). The recent effort emphasizes teaching people the values they need to be good citizens of a democracy. Therefore, values education has moved sequentially from a Biblical center to an individual focus and currently, to a social orientation.

Values and the Social Context

Daley (1990) recognized deeper problems that gave rise to the recent return to teaching values in education. She stated, "Partly, this is in response to growing concern over drug abuse, violence and teen-age pregnancy and it comes at a time when more and more broken homes and two-income families have left parents with less and less time to supervise their children" (p. B8). Thus, the force of the problems seems clearly incongruent with the nearly apologetic approach of the remedy which, according to Daley is, "cautiously venturing beyond academics to teach youngsters something about right and wrong" (p. B8).

The broad scale return to teaching values in public schools is reflected in the range of states initiating programs. These include Mississippi, New Hampshire, Maryland, Virginia, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New York. Also, one national educational organization, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, has endorsed values education. As Lickona (1993) stated, "character education is making a comeback in American education" (p. 6).

The moderate posture of the new efforts directed toward values education seems at variance with some rather important data. For instance, in a project sponsored by the Girl Scouts, Lilly Endowment and the Mott Foundation, Coles (1990) in cooperation with Louis Harris conducted a continuing survey of 5,000 children grades 4 through 12. Among their findings are:

- 82% believe there is a God;
- 40% say daily prayers;
- 3% would seek out a member of the clergy for help with a moral problem;

- 33% believe their teachers care about them;
- 7% would turn to their teachers for moral advice.

Hechinger (1990) stated that Coles drew several important conclusions from his research:

- One reason for moral shortcomings is the pressure to succeed;
- Some children merely reflect the values of their society: the notion of what works is "what works for me";
- Given the membership in a highly competitive culture, some children can very easily entertain the notion of cheating;
- As so-called cultural literacy grows, what could be called moral literacy declines;
- A lot of kids have been brought up not to be anxious or ever to feel guilty. Shame, after all, is a moral position and some of these kids have no language to express this;
- It is very worrisome that almost 60% of the children in the survey rely on moral standards that have as their main purpose, self-gratification;
- Even at Harvard, there are a lot of kids who are bright but whose conscience is not all that muscular;
- Teachers can make a difference if they explain vigorously what we expect of our students and why. (p. B6)

In a similar vein, Jeff Meade, senior editor of *Teacher* wrote, "Parents, along with some of our more celebrated white collar thieves, are often the unknowing font of situational ethics," (Hechinger,1990). These adults contribute to the moral problems of children.

A survey developed by the federal Centers for Disease Control was administered to 5,500 high school freshmen and seniors in Kentucky and yielded data relevant to the moral decisions of students (Jennings,1990). The findings indicated the following:

- 55% had engaged in sexual intercourse;
- 32% had sex with more than one partner;
- 83% had drunk alcohol;
- 51 % had drunk alcohol within the last month;
- 30% had thought about suicide within the last 12 months;
- 19% made a specific plan and 11% made an attempt. (p. A1)

The foregoing information led Kentucky's superintendent of public instruction (John Brock) to state, "Clearly, a significant portion of our youngsters are in trouble-and I mean serious trouble, the kinds of trouble that our state can ill afford," (Jennings, 1990, p. A1) Surely, the data from Kentucky and the conclusions drawn by the CEO for education are not unique to that state. Others must be experiencing similar situations. For example, alcohol consumption among adolescents in Texas is increasing. According to a New York Times News Service editorial:

William Bennett's (1993) study of cultural indicators gave additional reason for concern. He reported:

- A 56% increase in violent crime
- A 40% increase in illegitimate births
- A 20% increase in teen-age suicide
- The divorce rate quadrupled
- Children in single parent homes tripled
- An 80 point drop in SAT scores. (p. 2-22)

These findings lend credence to a need for morals instruction.

Schools and Values

There are data to support the contention that schools contribute to students' values problems. In his studies, Robert Coles (1990) found that 21% of elementary students said they would try to copy answers or glance at another student's test. In high school, 65% said they

would. Apparently, at a minimum, the school experience does not diminish these students' copying from others. Indeed, the broad extent of cheating in school is rather solid evidence of the schools' role in that practice.

Goodlad (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990) attributes some of education's moral problems to teacher training. He asserted that, "Many students (and regrettably, many faculty members) had little interest in or vocabulary for discourse regarding moral issues and norms" (p. 256). In fact, Goodlad is so concerned that he proposes extensive changes in teacher training institutions.

Sirotnik (1990), a co-author of *The Moral Dimensions of Teaching*, stated:

Clearly, the moral and ethical foundations of public education in a democratic society and the requisite character of educators have received the most emphasis in this book. Ironically, in our view, they have received the least emphasis in today's programs for educating educators. (p. 316)

Sirotnik's conclusions were supported strongly by the findings of Aspy, Aspy and Roebuck (1984) who have analyzed 200,000 hours of classroom interactions. This is the world's largest data base drawn from evaluations of classroom interactions. The sample includes classes from 42 states and 7 foreign countries. Notably, morality was *never* mentioned in any of the classes in that huge study of teaching. These findings are consistent with the patterns of subsequent studies.

Evidence of an inverse relationship between age and responsiveness to moral instruction is buttressed by the results from a study in Amherst, New York. Values-related instruction was offered to both elementary and secondary students. The younger learners were

far more receptive to the program than were their older cohorts (Daley,1990). The clear inference is that as people age they become less amenable to morals instruction.

Additional, pertinent information can be found outside of education. Hechinger (1990) gave the following summary of Urie Bronfenbrenner's conclusions from his studies of American families:

- The average child of 10 in the U.S. has already developed a noncondemning attitude toward cheating.
- The environment teaches that it is unrealistic to maintain standards of honesty that are ridiculed by his friends and ignored by his elders.
- Exemplary characters which are the most powerful influence in education, are too weak to offset the evidence of the daily experience of how other people "get by." (p. B6)

Clearly, the foregoing data support two contentions: (a) that schools have a huge problem related to values and (b) that the general cultural climate restrains them from applying strong programs to deal with the difficulties.

Presently, there are two main courses of action available to advocates of values education. First, to implement the *low-intensity* moral education efforts permissible within the current legal/social constraints. Second, to initiate *high-intensity* efforts designed to prepare society to implement vigorous moral instruction programs commensurate with the nearly overwhelming problems. Of course, one approach does not preclude the other. That is, the former could be employed while the latter creates a climate for a more potent effort.

Course Content and Teaching Methods

A critical issue for values education is that of finding a curriculum that a functional majority can support. For instance, the Sweet Home Central School District in Amherst, New York, (Daley, 1990) is trying to develop such a consensus by focusing upon relatively non-controversial values such as doing good deeds, respecting others and being fair. Among their instructional methods for teaching these standards are: (a) recycling drives, (b) collecting food for the needy, (c) helping younger pupils with homework, (d) discussing morals in class, (e) rewarding good behavior in the cafeteria, (f) rewarding students for sticking their necks out for other students, and (g) paying students who are friendly and polite.

Kennelly (1994) reported programs at the following sites:

Dayton, Ohio: Bravery and trustworthiness will be among lessons emphasized at Allen Traditional Academy. Speakers will visit, posters will go up, and educators will get more training. (p.10)

Menominee Indian Reservation, Wisconsin: This fall, a foundation to promote values education on and off reservations nationwide will be announced. The program was developed by the Vision Pursuit Team. (p. 10)

Howard County, Maryland: They decided on a tentative list of 18 values and put the list in a local newspaper, requesting input from parents. More than 2,000 replies supported values education. (p. 10)

Need for Stronger Programs

The outcomes of low-keyed efforts such as the Amherst program are unclear. Students report mixed reactions to the project. One eighth-grade student said that some make fun but others appreciate it.

Teachers and administrators believe there is general enthusiasm for the program but it lags in the high school. Also, some teachers seem to have reservations because they feel responsible for teaching only substantive content (Daley, 1990). Thus, at best, the results from this low-intensity project indicate qualified success.

To the degree that the Amherst program is representative of those using less-intensive instructional procedures, it suggests that some consideration should be given to high-intensity programs that emphasize firm, personal accountability for behavior of citizens in a democracy. This would seem to favor an approach that begins by increasing the school community's understanding of the importance of moral instruction. The Amherst data indicates that motivation is especially necessary at the secondary level and should include staff as well as students.

A program designed to prepare a school community for potent moral instruction should focus upon the common need to live in a morally strong community. That is, it is essential to create a consensual understanding that moral behavior has "real world" benefits that can be expressed in very practical terms. For instance, honesty and civility among citizens can be translated readily into dollars and cents savings derived from smaller expenditures for police security and criminal prosecution. These behaviors also produce huge dividends in happiness, peace of mind and quality of life. In short, it is to everyone's advantage to live in a community that practices desirable values. It is critical that all parties share this concept.

Unifying the Advocates of Values Education

Since the problems related to values education are extensive, it seems highly advisable to coalesce as many forces as possible to bear

upon the problem of our students' current moral posture. However, this tact encounters one major obstruction that results from the countervailing forces among those involved in the effort. Frequently, three primary groups emerge: (a) opponents of values instruction, (b) advocates of values instruction who include references to God, and (c) advocates of values instruction who exclude references to God. These divisions are typical of the groups developing within the pluralistic approach to public education.

Each of the diverse groups brings a unique strength to the general effort. The religious element has an established credibility for honoring moral behavior. Many religions propound a philosophy that holds that people are created in the image of God. Thus, everyone is to be treated with respect. Also, the religious community has an organization outside the school. It can support the values program beyond the educational context.

Ironically, groups that oppose values instruction have a respectability derived from their skepticism. Individuals who come to support a position they once opposed seem to have credibility. For example, President Nixon was able to lead the nation into a rapprochement with Communist China because the nation trusted him as a result of his earlier strong opposition to Communism. Thus, if an opposition group reverses its position and supports moral instruction, it gains validity among the doubters.

The advocates of values instruction that excludes references to God have a centrist position (Daley, 1990) which most people find acceptable. They may well be the ones who support the type of moderate approach being used in Amherst, New York. Quite probably, one of their major strengths is their accessibility to most groups within the school's community. That is, they are trusted by a

wide range of citizens. They may be the "door openers" for a stronger values education program.

A review of assets will reveal that, together, the three groups have the attributes essential for success: Tradition, fringe support and main-stream support. A combination of these groups can be effective.

The critical task is to unite the divergent groups into a cohesive force that will present a morals instruction program that is potent enough to counter effectively the values problems related to drugs, violence, teenage pregnancy, etc. This may be accomplished by a procedure practiced by the Prichard Committee for Educational Excellence in Kentucky which successfully has facilitated the most extensive educational reforms of any state in the nation. They bring participants together and let them exchange ideas until they have said all they wish to say. Then, they integrate the input into a program the entire group can support.

The Public's Views of Character Education

According to its 1994 polls, Phi Delta Kappa (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1994) reported that when the public was asked if values and ethics should be taught in public schools, "a small plurality favored" them. But, the results were different when the subjects were asked about teaching specific personal traits. The percentages making favorable responses can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
Personal Traits Taught In School

Trait	% Favorable

1. Respect for others	94
2. Industry or hard work	93
3. Persistence	93
4. Fairness	92
5. Compassion	91
6. Self-esteem	90
7. High selfexpectations	87
8. Thrift	74

Sixty-six percent favored teaching non-denominational religion. In short, the public mood is to include moral and religious training in the public school curriculum.

The Need for Alacrity

If a community builds a consensual, cognitive understanding of the universal need for moral behavior, the next step is to determine the level of importance of moral education in the schools. This means that a critical issue is: Does the problem demand prompt action? There is a large body of information to support the contention that the nation has a critical problem related to values education. However, this must be established in a given community through dissemination of the appropriate data.

Generally, the current opinion seems to be that values education is a rather nice program but not of critical importance. Jones (1994) wrote, "...two-thirds of the districts are working the requirement into their regular curriculum without any extra funding. You can look at Cadillacs or you can do many of these projects with Volkswagens...A lot of schools seem to be driving Volkswagens" (p. 36).

The source of limited financial supports for values programs may develop from the situation described by Thomas and Roberts (1994). They stated:

Some argue that character education has no place in public schools. It is too difficult to determine which values should be taught, they say, and teaching values should be seen as indoctrinating students. Educators at the other end of the spectrum argue that education must be taught as a separate subject, like algebra or history" (p. 33).

Related Data

Information from other areas supports the position assumed by this paper. Josephson (1990) wrote:

An unprecedented proportion of today's young generation have severed themselves from the traditional moral anchors of American Society—honesty, respect for others, personal responsibility and civic duty The twenty something generation is more likely to lie, cheat, and engage in irresponsible behavior when it suits their purposes. (*Los Angeles Times*, Tuesday, October 16, 1990, p. A1)

Alexander Astin, Director of the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, stated:

This age group is largely materialistic...surveys have shown an increase in the desire to make money, a drop in interest in the helping professions and a decline in existential concerns such as one's purpose in life. (Bailey, 1991, p. H1)

Indirectly, these statements indicate a strong need for potent values education programs to be implemented with alacrity. Josephson (1991) described some of the dimensions of such an effort:

Comprehensive ethics programs should also focus on the ability to solve realistic practical ethical dilemmas that students are likely to face. Discussing relevant examples, teachers can help students develop ethical alternatives and make them aware of the common rationalizations people use to justify improper conduct. (p. 52)

This is the kind of curriculum goal that will help the nation face its values education crisis but only if it has the proper support.

Discussion

Historically, values education in America has passed through two major phases: Bible centered and individual centered. The education community has rejected both of these approaches and yet, the needs that gave rise to them still exist and, in fact, have enlarged. Thus, schools are initiating a third phase in which a new form of values education emphasizes values commonly accepted throughout our society.

Since the earlier forms of values education were more or less expelled from schools, considerable controversy surrounded them. Therefore, the entire area is sensitive and a new approach is couched

in terms designed to avoid the opposition encountered by the previous efforts. Indeed, they are called centrist by Berreth (Daley, 1990) because they are constructed to gain acceptance by a broad middle-of-the-road group. The long-range hope is to strengthen the programs as they gain credibility.

The cautious approach to values education assumes there is time for it to gain acceptance. However, the severity of the problems related to values issues raises important questions about the time dimension. Violence, drugs, teenage pregnancies, and other related difficulties are hard core, intractable problems that are growing rapidly. The time frame for their solution may be small.

When the values-related *problems* are placed vis-a-vis the *solutions* proposed by the advocates of low-intensity values education programs, the best outcome prediction seems to be either moderate success or failure. This is not meant as a criticism, but rather to suggest the advantage of a complementary strategy. *Specifically, there is a need to supplement the less-intensive values program with a high-intensity effort* focused upon educating the school community about the severity of the problems that give rise to the need for values education. That is, there must be an increase in both the volume and perceived significance of the information about the need for values education so that the *community will support an appropriately vigorous program* that might achieve success.

It seems profitable for the advocates of values education to initiate an intensive program such as that designed by the Josephson institute for Ethics (Josephson, 1991). This program was created to accomplish two purposes: (a) to inform the education community about the problems related to students' values; and (b) to coalesce potential constituencies into an effective force to support values education. This recommendation stems from an analysis of data which indicate that

difficulties are increasing rapidly and there is need for haste in delivering a strong, personal accountability program to counter them. Indeed, the related information solidly supports the notion that the temporal dimension is quite limited.

There seems to be potential danger in pursuing a well-intentioned, low-keyed values education program that, by most reasonable predictions, will fall woefully short of a satisfactory goal. The nation cannot afford a negative outcome. The stakes simply are too high .

A second warning about the low-keyed approach is warranted. It may placate those who support values education and neutralize their efforts to create a potent program. The need for a strong intervention is clearly indicated by the data and the impetus drawn from it may be deterred by a watered-down procedure whose inability to cope with the problem is fully predictable.

It may be asserted that a moderate-values education effort is better than none because it may lay the groundwork for more potent ones. However, this conclusion is questionable because it is just as tenable to support an alternative hypothesis: The less-intensive approach will fail and, in light of related failures, will lead to the general conclusion that all such efforts are futile. Thus, it will cause the abandonment of the entire range of similar programs. That is, a negative outcome at this time might lead to a total banishment of all values education programs from schools.

The nation's schools must decide whether or not they have a crisis related to students' values. Certainly, there is a danger in being stampeded by cries of alarmists; but, there also is a problem that educators may be lulled into a false sense of security by those who settle for a less intensive brand of morals education. Schools are especially susceptible to the latter difficulty during this period when so many

changes are being proposed. Therefore, the best course is to turn to the data base related to the deficits in students' values. In short, the advocates of stronger values education programs must ask their colleagues to consider the objective facts of the situation. The information supports a vigorous approach.

In short, to make democracy work, we must learn and re-learn that it is important for us to live together in ways that optimize our use of our physical, intellectual and emotional resources so that all of us can benefit fully from our individual and group assets. The operative phrase is: Learn and re-learn that it is important. It is not a luxury. It is critical. This is a matter of values and we need strong values education programs to focus effectively on that goal.

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