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THOMAS MELADY and RALPH CORRIGAN

Values and Education

Presently, a change in the direction of higher education is afoot, and fast gaining support across the country. Confused over diluted curricula and lowered standards, and sobered by student apathy, the public sector now recognizes that the luxury of specialization creates legions of students with their heads stuck firmly in the proverbial sand. Because the American people believe too strongly in higher education's responsibility toward fashioning a more humane perspective on life, they are calling for a reordering of educational priorities with a strong emphasis on human values.

Values Teaching

No one questions the advisability of fashioning the integrated person or discovering a way out of the morass of modern social ills. But the questions come fast and furious when educators begin the risky business of formulating values programs. Which values should be taught? And how? And what about the personal hobby horses of particular professors? How, in fact, can the students determine the relative worth of one set of values over another? And what is to stop the professor from indoctrinating those impressionable minds? On the other hand, the need for values education is so apparent and the demand so widespread that most of the objections voiced by the skeptics are being swept aside.

Increasingly, education is looked upon as a liberating experience. Instructors in the classroom must ask their students to look beyond facts, and to question values. According to Edward B. Nyquist, Commissioner of Education for the State of New York,

there are legitimate ways to teach by critical inquiry
the consequences of choice, the meaning of law, of

due process, of equality, of freedom, of justice; the paradoxes which must be resolved in personal goals, values, and life-styles, such as unity with diversity, social cohesion and individuality, dissent and consensus, order and freedom, and personal identity with a sense of community.¹

In a sense, the lecture hall transforms into a laboratory where individual beliefs can be tested, and students motivated to search within themselves for their individual responses to ethical problems.

First comes awareness. Ethical problems demanding value judgments must be brought to the level of consciousness. In most courses, students read the material, or copy down the lecture, accept it as so much information to be stored away in case it is later called for on an examination, but never bring the information to the level of awareness that engages private beliefs or moral convictions. Such teaching fails to challenge the student where it counts — at a deeply personal level — and serves to perpetuate illogical distinctions between the real world and the classroom. What better place than the classroom to test convictions and a sense of values? What better place to grope toward a moral awareness that develops a sense of integration and integrity?

Once a student is consciously aware of an ethical dilemma — such as unchecked technological progress versus environmental sanity, or the emphasis on selfhood as opposed to man's obligation to fellow human beings — the problems in developing rational answers must be squarely met. And such answers do not come easily. They require a clear head, the logical analysis of many alternative responses, and the judicious selection of the most reasonable solution.

At the core of the drive to determine right from wrong stands the notion of integrity. When students yearn to believe that ennobling principles of character can be practiced, often precious little classroom time is spent on the exhilarating concept of human excellence and personal accountability. Surrounding the student is a world in a moral shambles. The ruling ethic is: take what you can get and run, and don't much worry about morality, or what will happen

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to the next person in line. The college catalog pays lip service to the ideal of integrity, but students long ago realized that the real test is not what people say, but what they do. And by the time students reach college they have been so disillusioned by the lack of integrity displayed by their role models (parents, teachers, and public officials), that when the life of virtue is held up as an ideal worth working toward, the student reaction borders on the incredulous.

Once the surprise and cynicism die down, and students understand the instructor means not only to discuss ideals and values but to work at putting those values into daily practice, real learning in values education can begin. Jon Dalton writes:

One such value principle that can be affirmed in developmental efforts with students is the principle of equal consideration of other persons and points of view. Our concept of justice rests upon this fundamental proposition. Likewise, it is possible to argue that other value principles are unavoidable in assisting students to move toward the goal of integrity; these include reverence for life, respect for law, human dignity, truth, and honesty. Such value principles are not sectarian or relative to partisan viewpoints or convictions. Use of these central value principles can enable us better to assist students in testing and evaluating their own value commitments. Thus, while student development personnel must avoid indoctrination of sectarian values, they can and should stress the importance of core value principles based upon universal human needs and rational conclusions.²

Obviously, not all students will react favorably to the idea of devoting their energies to create a life of excellence. But simply sitting in the classroom with a professor unafraid of facing doubt, and willing to express a commitment to values — no matter how unpopular or impractical those values may seem to be — is at the

core of the new values experience on campus.

Learning About Values

No matter how much emphasis a college or university places on teaching values in the classroom, little can ever be accomplished unless the faculty act out those values in their daily lives. Values as abstractions sound very good indeed, but are meaningless. Talking about caring for others will amount to nothing if the instructor walks out of the classroom, and in casual conversation in the halls takes cheap-shots at colleagues and administrators. The instructor who effectively teaches values education knows he educates more by actions than by words.

Students need to be challenged in the classroom. They must be shocked out of the acquisitive drive for self-gratification, and into the awareness that other values systems still provide viable options. And students are best brought to recognize these options when they can identify with the searching, on-going probings of an instructor whose aim is not to provide pat answers to be memorized, but rather to fashion a mode of inquiry that drives through the confusion and immorality of the modern world to a position of belief based firmly on ethical principles.

The way inquiries are conducted largely determines the success or failure of values education. If the instructor assumes the mantle of the glib, self-assured professor making values pronouncements from Mt. Olympus, chances are much of what gets said will be overlooked or given little serious thought. In values education, students need to identify with the instructor at each critical juncture — from the initial recognition of a values issue, through the careful and rational analysis of its component parts, to the final values decision that must later confirm itself by specific actions. At each step along the way, the search for values and the commitment to a life of ideals is fraught with questions and self-doubt. To fail to share such confusion and self-doubt with students — when in fact the students experience these same human misgivings — is to deprive them of an essential ingredient in values education. In fact, the professor who cannot humanize inquiry by sharing his own doubts will fail to touch the students in any meaningful way.

Once values are brought into the open they can be defined, challenged, then reshaped. The goal is not to indoctrinate the student. No instructor should impose his values on his students. Rather, the aim is to display the process of arriving at a reasoned commitment. Once the instructor delineates the process and clarifies his commitment, then comes the time to put beliefs to the acid test: they must be acted upon. The final step of committed action ends the instructor's role. Then the student takes over, reasons through the entire process, and accepts or rejects the resulting beliefs and their call to action. The decision to adopt moral values or a lifestyle determined by ethical principles must always be left to the discretion of the student.

Not to be overlooked in this process is the enormous importance of friendly, relaxed dialogue between the student and instructor outside the classroom. A chance word on the part of the teacher, an act of caring and concern, often dramatically alters a student's perspective on himself and his values. Whether it be a meeting in the professor's home, a class outing, or simply a one-to-one counseling session, when students and faculty get together informally, much real values learning takes place. The college or university that fails to stress the significance of student-faculty get-togethers outside the classroom neglects one of its primary responsibilities. Professor-student friendship is an equation that has been discarded by too many faculty who will not give the commitment that this kind of relationship requires.

Values and Experience

Most educators now agree that an institution's mission to expand the student's knowledge is not enough. The responsibility to educate moves beyond the acquisition of knowledge and into the moral sphere. It is not enough to know; there is also the need for making judicious, moral decisions based on what we know.

But teaching a respect for values in a learning community where those same values are not practiced is an exercise in futility. Not only must the individual faculty member practice what he preaches, the entire community must be animated by a willing adherence to moral values. In other words, the call to excellence and moral integrity

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cannot exist as an isolated phenomenon on campus — at least not if it is expected to seriously touch the lives of the students. Each member of the learning community plays an important role in values education. Each person is required to maintain an open mind and an openness to others. Rigidity, fear of change, manipulation of people, and the need to hide behind bureaucratic red tape should be avoided, while at the same time a pervasive sense of caring for the well-being of others is necessary.

All too frequently, the teaching mission of institutions of higher learning avoids concerning itself with the student as a person. In the age of the computer, which emphasizes the delivery of specialized blocks of knowledge which the student consumer pays dearly for, the humanizing element easily fades from the scene. Students recognize all too well the feelings of frustration, isolation, and loss of identity that exist on even the most well-meaning campuses. Because such an atmosphere is inimical to the best interests of all involved, each person needs to combat this malaise by accepting the moral responsibility to become a caring person. Edward Eddy writes:

If we are interested in values, we can begin by moving back into the lives of students — not to smother them with good will, not to be their parental substitutes, but to perform as concerned, perhaps wiser, more experienced colleagues who care. Relationships of this sort do not require friendship and closeness. That's not the point. Rather, they depend on reciprocal openness from which springs both mutual confirmation and judgment. The aim is not to invade the privacy of the self, but to address those common commitments, promises, and values that mark a true community of liberal learning. Plagiarism, cheating, and deception don't just violate a code; they destroy the interpersonal integrity of a community. . . . Liberal education's true purpose is a concern for all human beings — but also for this woman and this man. The college should act neither as the diffident

skeptic nor as the rigid authoritarian, but, rather, as the sober realist who knows the inescapable moral and intellectual requirements of existence in our time. The responsibility of the educated person is that he articulate to himself and to others what he is willing to bet his life on.³

When the faculty member, for any reason, is no longer either allowed or capable of acting out his moral convictions, then the chance to create a more humane, loving world will be lost.

Programs on a Human Scale

With the current need for values so apparent, and with a new sense of excitement surrounding the humanizing forms of higher education, the question remains: how can colleges and universities best satisfy this new desire for values education? Certainly, few educators would disagree with the proposition that a values-based education is a central concern, even the principal concern of institutions of higher learning.

But values education cannot happen in a vacuum. It grows out of courses in the humanities which emphasize the liberation of the imagination, and growth of the human spirit. The ultimate task of higher education is not to compartmentalize, not to divide and specialize, but to engage the student in a process of moving toward freedom of the mind. While the student must be taught how to break through the barriers of complacency, ignorance, apathy, and negativism, the ultimate success or failure of a course lies in the question: how much has the student grown and developed, and what direction has that growth taken?

Education in values is quite different from that education which merely dispenses information. In the latter, the students are viewed as so many jars or beakers, and the professor's job is to stuff those beakers with information by semester's end. In fact, the analogy can be drawn even further because at the end of the course, the student diligently pours out the information on the final examination. A thin coating of information may be left on the sides of the beaker, but

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within a few months, even most of that residue will have evaporated into thin air. The result? The professor is satisfied with the success of the course (proof of teaching ability lies in all that information piled back on the final exam), and the students have satisfied all the requirements. But no real learning has taken place. And certainly no worthwhile values have been brought to anyone's attention.

Values education moves in a different direction. It imparts information, but the information remains secondary. Of primary importance is the method or process used to discover the information and its human implications. Values education shows how the information came to be while at the same time demanding that the information be scrutinized from a variety of angles, and challenged in an organized, rational way. The object is to engage more than simply the surface of the student's awareness. Education in values aims to challenge the student's beliefs by providing a classroom experience which makes possible the testing of values. The curriculum emphasizes encouraging and helping students to make decisions on issues and problems that in some way impinge on the quality of life surrounding them.

The institution's role is clear. Whether it be in the computerized operations of the multiversity, or the community spirit of the small liberal arts college, education must be offered on a comprehensible scale. The idea is to educate the whole person while at the same time developing programs reflecting a human scale of life. Rather than add to the fracturing quality of modern life by dividing and compartmentalizing, a college needs to enable the person to develop a sensible notion of selfhood, and a lifestyle characterized by open-mindedness and meaning.

College is, after all, a place where the student grows up, assumes the responsibilities of young adulthood, and adopts a code of values that undergoes little further change during the course of a lifetime. The institution that allows the student to grow toward an awareness of his own humanity and his responsibility toward his fellowman is fulfilling its major function. Instructors who find the courage to create courses which demand the very best of themselves and their students, and which go far beyond the mere dispensing of information

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to delve into the deeper human concerns about truth, beauty, and goodness, are in fact accomplishing their sacred mission of caring and loving.

ENDNOTES

¹Ewald B. Nyquist, "The American 'No-Fault' Morality," *Phi Delta Kappan*, 58 (November 1976), p. 272.

²Jon C. Dalton, "Student Development From A Values Education Perspective," *Counseling and Values*, 22 (October 1977), p. 39.

³Edward D. Eddy, "What Happened to Student Values?" *Educational Record*, 58 (Winter 1977), pp. 16-17.