



Principles of Value Development (1980s)

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The emerging field of values development education is especially dependent on instructional games, simulations, and role plays in order to “curricularize” values development experiences.

The following excerpts from the platform document of the MSU (Michigan State University) Values Development Education Program serves as a background against which to plan, design, and evaluate instructional simulations and other experiences.

- Values are the particular choices and decisions that are basic to and revealed by a person's behavior.
- The totality of values in a person is a values system—whether consistent or inconsistent, logical or illogical—and that the person's value system is a reflection of what he has become up until that point in life.
- The basis of the values system is some more-or-less specific commitment to a concept of fundamental truth. (Whether or not a person can correctly identify or even verbalize this commitment is irrelevant.)
- Values have two dimensions: content and structure. (For this view, we are especially indebted to Lawrence Kohlberg.)
- The *content* of values is concerned with the *what* of a given behavior. For example, that a person manifests verbal honesty (he tells the truth) is a matter of content.
- The *structure* of values is concerned with the *why* of a given content. In the case of verbal honesty, people may behave this way because they are afraid of the consequences of lying. Others may be similarly truthful for a quite different reason—because they respect and enjoy the sort of communicative freedom that develops from verbal honesty.
- In reference to values development the more significant educational tasks lie in the area of values *structure*. To teach the content of values (a set of specific do's and don'ts) is an almost meaningless activity; if long-term impact is to be achieved, the issue is to help a person develop his or her values *structure*.
- The system of three levels (subdivided into six distinct stages) of values development through which Lawrence Kohlberg presents his research findings constitutes a useful and adequate way to conceptualize what sort of a values structure a person is reflecting in a given value-laden behavior.
- It is dangerous (unfair, depersonalizing, lazy) to label people. Though analytic tools such as the Kohlberg level-and-stage scheme are invaluable as scientific and technological devices, they are misused if a teacher or parent uses them to define a child.
- There may be a significant difference between a person's statements about personal values and actual behavior in reference to those same values. (This is not to suggest that everyone deliberately lies about his or her values, but rather that there is likely some degree of discrepancy between one's verbalized self-image and one's behavior.)
- Clarification of one's own values and the increasing of understanding of how those values relate to others and to their values is useful as a process within a program of values development education.