



What We Believe About Values Development and Values Development Education¹

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The Values Development Program at Michigan State University has no sectarian creed and is non-doctrinaire except as individual program participants, faculty, and fellows have personal beliefs. Nevertheless, there are a number of particulars about values and value development that we do share in common. Some of the more important of these are presented below as a sort of backdrop for the ideas put forth in the book.

We believe . . .

1. That people develop and learn. It is normal and healthy to be in a state of transition, always in the process of becoming.
2. That every person is different. No matter how similar their genetic structures and their environments, no two human beings are identical personalities.
3. That the particular structure of values a person lives by is unique and changing. Though many people share similar positions on particular issues and though many more may share a particular view of foundational truth, each person's total configuration of values is unique.
4. All development occurs within and because of experiences.
5. The whole environment with which a person transacts is involved in his learning and development.
6. Learning is the process of deriving behavioral meanings from experience. (The word "behavioral" here reminds us that to be consequential in life-changing terms, an experience must result in some behavioral change. This includes, of course, mental processes as behaviors just as surely as physical processes are behaviors.)
7. That values are the particular choices and decisions that are basic to and revealed by a person's behavior.
8. That 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.

¹ Ted Ward. The Values Development Education Program, College of Education, Michigan State University. Unpublished document, February 1974

9. That 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.)
10. Two important dimensions of values are content and structure. (For this view, we are especially indebted to Lawrence Kohlberg.)
11. That 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.
12. That the *structure* of values is concerned with the *why* of a given content. For example, in the case of verbal honesty, persons 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.
13. That 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 values *structure*.
14. That 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.
15. That it is dangerous (unfair, incorrect, 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 looks at a child and defines him or her according to stage.
16. That there may be a significant difference between people's statements about their values and actions in reference to those same values. (This is not to suggest that people deliberately lie about their values, but rather that there is likely some degree of discrepancy between one's verbalized self-image and one's behavior.)
17. That clarification of one's own values and the increasing of understanding of how these values relate to others and to their values is useful as a process within a program of values development education.
18. That values development rightly involves *input* clarification, through which one becomes increasingly and discriminatingly aware of the sources of his or her values. We have observed that clarification of one's own values (commonly called "values clarification" techniques) are not adequately concerned about this matter of values sources and input processes. In fact, values clarification tends to be superficially concerned with content rather than adequately penetrating the matter of the structure of value.

19. That the value systems encouraged or theologically supported by major religions are to some extent, overlapping. The common ground with respect to humankind's most honorable, gratifying, and socially cohesive behavioral characteristics is well summarized by Kohlberg's descriptions of Level 3: moral values and principles have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding them and apart from the individual's own identification with the groups. In this anthropocentric orientation to values, moral principle is seen as superior though basic to law. In the highest stage of the Kohlberg strata (the universal ethical principle orientation), rights and duties are seen as correlations and the emphasis is on one's basic obligation toward the lives of any other human being.
20. That while each particular religion and sectarian bias within that religion must, for itself, resolve issues of the "fit" between theology and ethics, members of the several religious groups can work well together on the common task of the values development education. Regardless of our views of fundamental truth—which we do not necessarily share in common—we can work easily and graciously on three matters of great importance to all educators:
- What exactly are values and how do they develop?
 - What educational interventions or instructional procedures are compatible with the actual processes of values development?
 - How can we help the home, the school, the religious center places in which values development can easily occur?