

# Adolescent Female Views of Values Education

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**Abstract:** The curricular rationale for many of today's secondary school "values education" programs is based on the assumption that such programs influence citizenship behavior, decision making, "appropriate" social behavior and problem-solving skills. To examine program participants' reactions to this kind of undertaking, 19 eighth grade females in a Minneapolis middle school accomplished a Q sort of 60 statements derived from values education program participants' focus groups. Three defined student types emerged which contribute to this understanding of student reactions to a values education program. A positive viewpoint toward values education factor was so named based on its generally conclusive orientation to the program. Defining "neutrality," values education was reflected in a mix of indifference and acceptance of values education programming. A negative factor represented a distinct deviation from the other two types. By acknowledging the realities that these eighth graders held for this approach to values education, schools should be able to develop programmatic models responsive to a range of learner types.

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## **Study Rationale**

If one believes the national data, the typical college student arrives on campus having already endured at least 18 years of increasingly complex family life and having watched 20,000 hours of television. In college, in addition to "formal education," these students will be confronted by a bewildering array of assaults and perhaps formative influences upon their values -- newspapers, magazines, more TV, clubs, student politics -- and especially their friends and peers. From all these sources they will receive messages as to how the world works and advice on how to cope with the confusion.

To assume that even the most dedicated proselytizer or ideologue could successfully transform the values of college students in four concentrated years borders on the optimistic. Students generally are a hard sell. Their skepticism is well honed and their views on most political and social issues are well formed by the time they reach college. Even the most purposeful efforts to affect their values have been shown not to be very successful. Most formal contemporary "values education," therefore, has been undertaken at younger age levels.

## **The Study**

This research explores "values education" as a curricular dimension of kindergarten through 12th grade social studies. Its curricular rationale is based on the assumption that a values education program influences citizenship behavior, decision making, "appropriate" social behavior and problem-solving skills -- all necessary for success in life-long learning (Saterlie, 1988).

The research on values education among students often attempts to assess behavior and attitude changes, as well as related student attributes. This inquiry asked students to examine themselves for perceptions of the impact of their values education program (Bormann, 1980).

The values education program at Blake Middle School in Minneapolis, Minnesota presumes to emphasize the values of trust, responsibility, honesty, and acceptance of others. These values are integrated throughout the curriculum. Special home room projects such as skits and posters comprise a part of the program.

### **Research Procedure**

Four focus groups consisting of 8 to 10 students each were conducted to generate sample statements to represent values education as a broadly unstructured domain of interest (Hannah, 1978). Students volunteered for the 45-minute session conducted during school hours. Discussions were tape recorded. Questions included:

- What values are important to you now (your own choice)?
- What attitudes are important to adolescents?
- Who influences you the most regarding your values?
- Why do you think Blake has this values education program?
- How is this program taught at Blake? What is the most influential part of the program?
- How has this program affected peer relations at school?
- What do you think the future effect (if any) of this program will have on your lives?

The discussions were quite lively as the eighth graders enjoyed sharing their opinions.

Students' responses were transcribed. Of these responses, 60 "I think" or "I feel" statements that comprise the Q deck were written. Each card has a different statement regarding values education. Any statement that was specific to Blake Middle School was not included or was generalized so the Q sample could be used in any school system.

Centroid factor analysis with a varimax rotation was employed in analyzing the students Q sorts (Block, 1961). The Q sorts were completed by 19 eighth grade females. Students sorted the cards from "most like me" to "most unlike me" on an 11-point scale ranging from +5 to -5. Three distinct student types emerged from the analysis.

### **Student Concerns**

Consensus statements denoting areas of agreement across three defined student types (i.e., which did not distinguish among the factors) contribute to an overall understanding of student opinions concerning values education. The most positively consensual statements are as follows, along with their average factor scores (expressed as z scores):

- 1.74 Believing in self is an important value
- 1.08 Your values do change with age
- 0.61 You learn your values when really young

Additional influences are drawn from statements for which there was a negative consensus:

- 0.54 Teaching values won't help build students' esteem
- 1.10 Values education made a big impact on our school
- 1.18 Teachers influence my values
- 1.47 Everyone is taught the same values in their home

Strongest agreement asserts a student belief that teachers do not influence their values, and the values education program itself was not seen as having an important impact upon the school. There was mutual agreement that not all persons acquire the same values, and that values do change with age even though they may be formed at an early age. Consensus among student types was further indicated through the belief in self as an important value and that values education does build self esteem. It is noted that these students believe that values education is not another way to control their behaviors. Their ideas that peers do not influence their values development and their beliefs that people whom they admire influence their values development also were modalities. All student types in this study believed that trust, respect, and acceptance of others and responsibility are important values, and these are the values emphasized in the values education program at Blake Middle School.

**Type 1: Positive Viewpoint  
of Values Education**

The Positive Viewpoint Toward Values Education factor was so named based on its generally conclusive orientation to the subject of interest. Some of the statements, accompanied by their significant factors scores ( $p < .05$ ), distinguish this factor (scores in parentheses for factors 2 and 3, respectively):

- 2.28 Religion teaches you values (-0.80 -2.05)
- 1.55 A person's family has the greatest influence on values (-0.17 0.27)
- 1.46 A person's values depend on background and environment (0.55 0.10)
- 2.54 I don't live my life by values (-0.69 0.00)

These students believe values play an important role in their lives and that religion is highly important in teaching values; however, the family is regarded as the greatest influence. Type 1 students clearly believe that a person's values depend on background and environment, and that values are comprehensive moral guidelines that once formed are not forgotten. Values education affects how one feels about oneself, and also helps people make better choices in their lives. These students also believe they live their lives based on values taught them in the home, school, and through religion. They believe values education does influence peer relations and that values are more than rules, but are moral guidelines. In short, these students believe that values education plays an important role in their lives.

Type 1 is purely defined by 8 of the 13 students who had significant loadings on this factor. Parental occupations of the young women comprising this Positive Viewpoint toward values in their school required at least some training beyond twelfth grade. These students reported a great diversity of religious orientation: two reported no religion, three Christian, one American Indian traditional religion, one Buddhist, and one Jewish student. Five of the eight had been enrolled in the school six years or longer, three of the eight four years

or fewer, and one indicated this was her first year in the school. Only one student was 15 years of age, the rest 14. All of the students' mothers except one worked outside the home.

***Type 2: Neutral Viewpoint  
of Values Education***

Defining "neutrality" toward values education, factor 2 reflects a mix of indifference and acceptance of taking the role of values for granted (scores in parentheses for factors 1 and 3, respectively):

- 1.97 Values are basic to me; I don't think about them (0.93 0.92)
- 1.71 My school is no better because it has values education (-0.29 0.10)
- 1.42 People live by values and don't need to be taught them (-0.08 -0.48)
- 1.41 Socio-economic class has nothing to do with values (-1.55 0.38)

Type 2 students believe that values are basic to existence but don't need to be taught. These students do not think too much about the values they live by as values are in all we do together. They do not believe that a values education program makes their school any better or that values education affects peer relations, even though a school values education program can remind students of their own values. Type 2 students also believe that socio-economic class has nothing to do with values: People have "good" and "bad" values, and values education can't change these; nor does parental care at home influence a child's values. Plus, these students believe that schools should not reward students who live by values. In sum, these students are indifferent to the role of a values education program.

All three of the students defining factor 2 described themselves as neutral on the idea of values education programming. All three listed a religious affiliation (two Christian, one Jewish). All of the fathers' occupations required advanced education. These students had been enrolled in the school for

a shorter time than the type-1 students. All three young women were 14 years of age; none of their mothers worked outside the home.

### **Type 3: Negative Viewpoint of Values Education**

This factor represents a distinct deviation from the two types which are either very positively inclined toward the program of interest or at least indifferent toward it. Statements distinguishing this factor include the following (scores for factors 1 and 2, respective, in parentheses):

- 2.05 Schools talk values to impress parents (-0.22 -1.00)
- 1.50 I listen to my parents talk values but I don't follow them (-1.27 -0.79)
- 1.40 People don't really listen to values education (-0.23 -0.35)
- 1.19 I feel that values education is not effective (0.33 -0.30)
- 1.13 I would pay closer attention if values education were more fun (0.16 -0.32)
- 1.29 What you learn in values education stays with you (0.21 -0.43)
- 1.40 The Values Education Program reminds me of my values (-0.42 -0.32)
- 1.84 Values education made a big impact on our school (-0.48 -0.97)
- 2.05 Religion teaches you values (2.28 -0.80)
- 2.32 Values taught represent what my school stands for (-0.37 -0.53)

Type 3 students believe it is not effective to have this curriculum in the schools as students do not really attend to values education; if values education were more fun or exciting, they say, they might pay more attention. These students listen to their parents talk about values, but they do not follow parental guidelines. These students feel that it is the individual who determines what is going to be done, and they go so far as to say that schools talk values to impress parents. These students also believe that religion does not teach values. In addition, these students do not believe that the values taught in this program represent what their school actually stands

for; nor does the program remind them of their own values. A values education program may be ineffective because the values learned may not stay with the student. To these students, a values education program really does not have a place in the school. They also have a negative attitude about the role the school should play in values education.

One of the two students comprising this negative factor was Jewish, and the other professed no religious preference. Both of their fathers were engineers, and both mothers had careers outside the home. One of the young women was 14 years old, the other 13. While one had been enrolled for three years, the other was a two-year student.

### ***Concluding Comment***

This study has looked directly to the students for their interpretations of a values education program. Such interpretations suggest that not all eighth grade students perceive that a school values education program is influential in their lives. Schools must review their values education programs and the emphasis they place on the role of values education in the curriculum. By addressing the realities eighth graders hold for values education, schools can build support systems and program models that respond to the three types of learners.

### ***References***

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