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# **Effects of Value Clarification Training on Student Self-Concept: A Review of Research**

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The basic hypothesis of value clarification theory asserts that students who are confused about fundamental values often appear to be apathetic, flighty, drifty, listless, overconforming, overdis-senting, inconsistent and/or prone to role-playing, and that such students can become more positive, purposeful, enthusiastic and proud through participation in value clarification activities (Raths, et al, 1966). Within the past several years a number of investigators have reasoned that one way to determine student levels of positiveness, purposefulness, enthusiasm and (especially) pride would be through measures of student self-concept. These researchers tested the above mentioned hypothesis by measuring effects that value clarification activities had on the self-concept of students.

This report is designed to provide a concise description of findings of selected studies on the effect of value clarification training on self-concept of students at the elementary, secondary and post-secondary levels. The studies were selected not only because of their potential interest, significance and applicability, but also because they seemed to employ relatively sound research procedures.

## History and Development of Value Clarification Theory

The concept of value clarification was originated in the 1950's by Louis E. Raths. Building on notions

held by John Dewey (1939), Rath's rejected the then popular assumption that values were universal, institutionalized constructs which could, and indeed should, be forced on young people by agencies such as schools. Rath's believed, as did Dewey, that emphasis should be on the process of helping people rationally examine, clarify and develop their own personally unique value systems. Rath's ultimately identified the following seven criteria which comprised a process of valuing (called value clarification): freely choosing; choosing from alternatives; choosing after careful consideration of the consequences of each alternative; prizing--being glad about one's choice; prizing--publicly affirming the choice; acting on the preference; and acting on the preference repeatedly over time. Rath's asserted that all seven of the valuing criteria must be met if some particular preference was to be considered a value. Using this definition, Rath's, with the later assistance of Sidney Simon and Merrill Harmin (1966), and Leland Howe and Howard Kirschenbaum (Simon, et al, 1972), designed a set of clarifying questions, and a series of classroom strategies which teachers could use to help students become mindful of the degree to which their attitudes, feelings, goals, interests, aspirations and concerns represented values.

### Self-Concept

Self-concept is a psychological construct. That is, it is not an object or substance, but rather one's view of self inferred from behavior. Formally defined, self-concept is a person's "total appraisal of his/her appearance, background and origins, abilities and resources, attitudes and feelings, which culminate as a directing force in behavior" (LaBenne and Greene, 1969).

LaBenne and Green cite numerous studies which indicate a direct relationship between a student's self-concept and his/her overt behavior, perceptions and academic performance. In addition, the authors assert, "The manner of the teacher in presenting the subject matter is of critical importance, because

teaching activities have specific reference and meaning for the development of a student's self-concept." They condemn the setting of standards for groups of children and encourage teachers to build on the personal and dynamic nature of student abilities, interests, traits and values as a way of fostering improvement in student self-concept.

### Value Clarification Activities and Self-Concept

The common elements in both theories of self-concept and value clarification theory (e.g. that values are personal and dynamic in nature) suggest a close relationship between the theories, and that perhaps value clarification activities could be one means for improving student self-concept. Similarly, a relationship is suggested in methodology, for a number of the value clarification strategies (e.g., "Proud Whips," "Proud Line," "Coat of Arms") typically invite students to recognize and publicly affirm personal abilities, talents and accomplishments of which they are proud. The attention to one's strengths is alleged by value clarification proponents to enhance the self-concept of students. Those who have come to believe in the direct relationship between value clarification and self-concept have conducted research at various age levels using a variety of designs and instruments.

Studies at the Elementary Level. In a study designed to ascertain effects of value clarification activities on the self-concept of fifth graders, Thomas Covault (1973) exposed two experimental groups to eleven one-hour sessions of value clarification strategies. Two control groups spent the same amount of time in physical education activities with the investigator. Covault reported that the groups experiencing the value clarification training displayed significant improvement on the Sears Self-Concept Scale; the control groups showed no significant improvement. In addition, Covault found in the experimental groups: (1) improvement in initiation and self-direction of classroom activities; (2) improvement in positive attitude toward learning; and (3) a

reduction in apathetic, flighty, drifty, uncertain, inconsistent, over-conforming, over-dissenting and role-playing behavior, as reported by teachers.

Michael Coy (1974) investigated the effects of a 16-day inservice training program in value clarification on the attitudes of students toward themselves, school and the teacher. Ten classes of third, fourth, fifth and sixth-grade students from one elementary school served as the experimental group, and eight classes from the same grade levels in another elementary school served as the control group. The investigator developed three attitude surveys, How I Am, How School Is and How My Teacher Is, to measure the three dependent variables. Though there was (1) a significant difference favoring the experimental group on mean change scores on the attitude toward school dimension (fourth graders only), and (2) a significant difference on the attitude toward the teacher dimension (favoring the experimental group for all grade levels), there was no significant improvement in attitudes toward themselves, as measured by the survey developed for the study.

The purpose of a study by Sigmund Guziak (1975) was to measure the effect of value clarification strategies on the self-concept and value-related<sup>1</sup> behaviors of fifth-grade students. Two experimental and two control classes were randomly chosen from 21 fifth grade classes. The 55 students in the control classes received eight weekly sessions of music class taught by the investigator. The 51 students in the experimental group received eight weekly sessions in value clarification activities from two trained psychologists, one of whom was the investigator of the study. A modified version of The Sears Self-Concept Scale,

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<sup>1</sup>Value-related behaviors included: 1) raising of relevant questions and alternatives, 2) initiation and self-direction in the classroom, and 3) less acute and less frequent apathetic, flighty, uncertain, inconsistent, drifting, over-conforming and over-dissenting behavior in the classroom.

Student Classroom Behavior Rating Form and Student Value-Related Behavior Form were used for assessment. Guziak reported that individual self-concept of the experimental group improved significantly as compared to the individual self-concept of the control group. From the studies, the investigator concluded that the value clarification strategies utilized appeared to be an effective means for improving self-concept.

Russell Gray (1975) measured the influence of value clarification strategies on student self-concept and sociometric structures in selected self-contained parochial sixth-grade classrooms. A quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design was employed. The sample consisted of 115 sixth-grade students in each of the experimental and control groups. The value clarification activities had no apparent effect on any of six dimensions of self-concept as measured by the Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale. (Only one of the classroom sociometric structures was affected--sociometric rejectees was significant in favor of the control group.) Gray speculated that perhaps the regular classroom teacher, who would have long-term interaction with the students, could more effectively employ value clarification strategies than could an outside specialist.

Junior and Senior High School Level. Two seventh-grade classes in each of ten schools were randomly assigned to experimental and control groups by Karen Fitzpatrick (1975) for the purpose of testing the effects of value clarifying methods on self-concept and reading achievement. The ten experimental classes were involved in 16 weekly sessions of selected value-clarifying strategies adapted from the text, Value Clarification, A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students. A total of 547 students participated in the study. The Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale, the California Test of Personality and the Iowa Silent Reading Tests of Reading Comprehension and Reading Efficiency were administered as pre- and post-tests. Fitzpatrick reported significantly greater gains in scores by the experimental group than by the control group on both the

self-concept and reading achievement measures. The investigator recommended that those involved in curriculum development give value clarification skill-building strategies a prominent place in curriculum planning.

Gerald Olson (1974) conducted a study designed to measure the effects of value clarification activities on self-esteem and the valuing process of 61 ninth-grade students--29 in the experimental group and 32 in the control group. The experimental group was involved in a three-month value clarification program emphasizing involvement in the classroom strategies and the general clarifying response. Coopersmith's Self-Esteem Inventory, Kuhn and McPartland's Who Am I? Test, and Olson's Valuing Process Inventory were used as pre- and post-test. Olson noted no change in measured self-concept. (Because of changes related to valuing<sup>2</sup>, however, Olson recommended the value clarification approach as a counseling procedure.)

Henry DePetro (1975) studied effects of using value clarification activities on the self-esteem of high school students in psychology classes. The control group class had no formal exposure to value clarification strategies while the experimental group class experienced strategies taken from Values Clarification, A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students. Pre- and post-measures--the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory and the Rokeach Value Survey--were administered. DePetro reported (1) a significant increase in measures of self-esteem

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<sup>2</sup>There were significant changes in values within the experimental group (pre-test). Students in the experimental group increased in choosing values but did not tend to identify with, prize or act on their choices. High intelligence, high economic status and femaleness correlated significantly with choosing values, identifying with, prizing and acting on their choices. Olson hypothesized that values changed because the valuing process: (1) motivates self-differentiations, (2) communicates authenticity, unconditional positive regard and accurate empathy.

in experimental group students, (2) no significant differences between the experimental and control group on post-measures of self-esteem and (3) no significant changes in the priority in which students ranked their values on the Rokeach Value Survey.

Post Secondary Level. David Clark (1972) found that a ten-week program of value clarification training had no significant effect on the self-concept of 25 elementary school teachers, as measured by the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale. Total Positive Scores of the treatment group's post-test showed an "increase or decrease," implying that the value process had an effect on experimental subjects, but these effects lacked conclusiveness when analysis of variance was conducted.

Richard Wilgoren (1973) contrasted the effect of what he considered two different value clarification approaches on the self-concept of 50 pre-service teachers. The Raths approach invited learners to articulate and organize their own personal value system at their own pace. The other approach, by Oliver, demanded that the participant compare personal choices to a hierarchy of democratic individualism. Two experimental and two control groups each met for two-and-one-half hours during each week for six weeks. A positive change was calculated in self-concept as measured by the Berger Self-Acceptance Scale (pre-test) and the Phillips Self Questionnaire (post-test) in both the experimental and control groups. Wilgoren perceived no differences between the two approaches in their effects on the groups.

### Overview of Completed Research

Nine varied research studies designed to test effects of the value clarification approach on the self-concept of students are described in this report: four on the elementary level, three on the secondary level and two on the post-secondary level. A general comment regarding the significance of the findings of completed research studies is offered here.



The findings of Gray (1975), Coy (1974), Olson (1974) and Clark (1972) do not support (or disapprove) the hypothesis that value clarification training can enhance student self-concept. Studies by Guziak (1975), Fitzpatrick (1975) and DePetro (1975), however, do suggest a correlation between value clarification activities and improved self-concept.<sup>3</sup> Research by Covault (1973) and Wilgoren (1973) likewise suggest a correlation; however, because of the lack of controls on variables, this research is less convincing.

Though not overwhelming, evidence revealing a relationship between value clarification training and improved self-concept seems to be accumulating. In this writer's opinion, findings to date certainly suggest that more research is warranted. Furthermore, it is my opinion, based on both objective data such as reported here as well as subjective data reported by teachers, that aspects of value clarification methodology can significantly contribute to the improvement of student self-concept and, hence, to the learning and growth of youth in general.<sup>4</sup>

### Recommendations

Though a number of problems and prospects facing research in value clarification and/or self-concept could be identified, only a few will be noted here. First, the term "self-concept" must be more precisely defined and that definition related to a more comprehensive theory of human behavior. Until this is done, various interpretations and misinterpretations will lead to inaccurate communication on both the research

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<sup>3</sup>It must be noted that Guziak (1975) and DePetro (1975) found pre-post increases in self-concept in the experimental and control group post-tests.

<sup>4</sup>For a brief survey of research on effectiveness of inservice value clarification training programs for teachers see Redman, George L., "Effects of Inservice Value Clarification Training: What the Research Says," unpublished manuscript, Hamline University, 1976.

and practice fronts. Second, self-respect techniques for value clarification and self-concept research are of limited use.<sup>5</sup> Unobtrusive (projective) techniques need to be developed and employed in values research (see Redman, 1975 for one example). Third, it must be determined just which kinds of value clarification skills and strategies contribute most to student self-concept and which have other (desirable and undesirable) effects on student outcomes in terms of knowledge, attitude and behavior.

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<sup>5</sup>Combs, et al, (1963), list six factors upon which accurate self-report of self-concept depends: (1) clarity of the person's awareness, (2) availability of adequate symbols for expression, (3) willingness of the person to cooperate, (4) social expectancy, (5) the person's feeling of person adequacy and (6) the person's feeling of freedom from threat.

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