

Invasion of Privacy Occurs in Schools

NOT MANY parents would put up with invasion of privacy that their children are being subjected to in some Oklahoma public schools.

How many parents would like to stand before classmates and be required to answer honestly such questions as: "Have you ever cheated on a school test?"

Which middle-aged parent would write honest answers to such questions as "What have you ever done that you wouldn't want your father and mother to know about?"

These questions were selected from "values clarification" studies that have been brought to the attention of this writer by parents in the Oklahoma City area and in other parts of the state.

Materials and procedures used apparently vary from school to school and by no means are all of the questions objectionable. One may call for discussion of a news item, song or poem. Another asks, "If you were an animal for a day, what would you choose?" But the lists have other questions that probe deeply into the individual's

private life.

The approach is said to encourage individuals to decide for themselves what is right or wrong and to choose what is good for themselves. Methods used by the system may include encounter groups, "secret" daily journals, role playing, touch therapy and exercises in psychodrama.

"Values clarification" is a nice-sounding term and defenders of the system claim it helps the children to become self-reliant and self-confident. Materials used are described as "supplementary" and usually are not subject to review by the state textbook commission. Local school officials may review them but are not required to do so.

The programs have been described as the answer to exclusion of traditional teachings of moral responsibilities formerly derived from religious sources or parental instruction. Critics have traced materials to humanist philosophers and funding often is derived from federal or state grants.

Senate Bill 132, pending in the Legislature, has aroused a number

of parents who insist that values clarification often contradicts parental teachings and constitutes an unwarranted invasion of privacy of pupils.

The proposed law would require written consent of parents before pupils would be assigned to participate but the bill would not eliminate values clarification programs from the schools. Sponsors say that parents should pass upon questions that probe into family political affiliations, sexual attitudes and personal information.

When one parent asked how teachers knew whether pupils were keeping the "secret journals" she was told by her son that the teacher "flipped through" notebooks occasionally to check entries.

Most parents do not seem to be aware of how extensively this "Big Brother" invasion of privacy is practiced. They might become concerned if they suspected their embarrassed offspring were revealing family secrets at school, as well as their own innermost thoughts.

MAY 10 1981
Deering in the Dark

TO THE EDITOR:

May I, as a parent, teacher, and former newspaper reporter, comment on Ferdie Deering's recent editorial concerning values clarification in the public schools?

Mr. Deering appears to have denounced a very fine teaching vehicle without knowing much about it. This is journalistically irresponsible. Even editorial writers have an obligation to inform themselves.

Values clarification does not invade privacy, and it doesn't even come close to asking the things children reveal voluntarily to teachers and friends. Neither does it encourage children to question the authority of their parents. On the contrary, it encourages them to think, and anyone who bothers to think will inevitably understand and appreciate authority, even if he doesn't like it.

Our society is having difficulty developing ethics to keep pace with the rapidly expanding technology. Parents (often single parents rearing children alone) look to educators for help. The three R's aren't all teachers are expected to teach: They teach manners, how to get along with others, how to handle pressures, how to set priorities and they encourage students to use their minds for more than memory banks.

So that parents' rights aren't trammeled and so that the teachers' values are not imposed upon children, values clarification is used to support children in thinking, questioning, figuring out, looking for solutions. Remember that a child who never questions or thinks for himself is the ideal dupe, questioning no governmental or business decision. Is that what you want, Mr. Deering?

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