*Teachers discuss new ways of working with students, using clarifying procedures . . .*

# Clarifying as a Teaching Process

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MUCH has been written recently by Louis E. Raths and his students concerning their work in the areas of valuing and thinking. Their work suggests four areas of competence needed by teachers if they are to help children develop into valuing and thinking individuals.

The first area deals with the skill of the teacher in creating a climate favorable for valuing and thinking.[1] Competency in evoking valuing expressions and in giving invitations to think is the second skill needed by teachers. If a climate of psychological safety has been created by the teacher, then invitations to think may be more effectively tendered to the children.[2] Under conditions of safety, it is more likely that children will express prizing and cherishing.[3] Third, the teacher needs to be sensitive to thinking and valuing when these do occur. Special sensitivity training is needed to develop this competency. It is dealt with in Raths' books on valuing and thinking.

[1] Suggestions for creating such a climate are described by: Louis E. Raths. *Understanding the Problem Child*. West Orange, New Jersey: The Economics Press, 1963.

[2] Louis E. Raths *et al. Teaching for Thinking*. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1967.

[3] Louis E. Raths *et al. Values and Teaching*. Columbus. Ohio: Charles E. Merrill, 1966.

The fourth competency, the one with which this paper is concerned, deals with the question, "What does the teacher do when children are expressing their valuing and giving evidence that thinking may have occurred?" Raths and his students say, "Engage in clarifying procedures with the student."

Following are a few ways the writer has found that teachers use when they are engaged in raising some clarifying questions [4] with students. It is not meant to be a complete list; it could not be. Teachers are discovering new ways of working with students, using clarifying procedures each day. It is meant to provide a simple collection of devices for those who would like to use them.

The reader will note that the clarifying procedures have been divided into two modes, *reflective* and *dissonant*.[5] Some research has been done to study the relative effects [6] of these modes; yet

[4] The writer has drawn from papers written by Louis E. Raths, Laurence Hopp, Sidney Simon, James Raths, and others.

[5] Leon Festinger. *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Evanston. Illinois: Row, Peterson, 1957.

[6] Margaret D. Barnes. "The Relationship Between Reflective and Dissonant Forms of Clarifying Process." Unpublished Research Paper. College Park: University of Maryland. 1966.

more needs to be done since the findings are inconclusive.

### *Reflective Mode*

1. Repeating exactly what the student has said but with an inflection indicating a question is being raised.

2. Paraphrasing the student's remarks with an inflection as in "1." Teacher says, "Did I understand you?", followed by the paraphrased comment.

3. Asking for a definition of terms when appropriate. Teacher says, "How much appreciation of American History is an adequate appreciation?"

4. Raising the question concerning the degree of certitude with which an idea is held. Teacher says, "How sure are you?—Would you bet *all* your money on it?" This could be used when the student expresses either extreme certainty or uncertainty.

5. Asking the "How do you know?" question with a focus on the data to support a stated belief. Teacher says, "Can you cite some data to support your notion?"

6. Asking the "How do you know?" question with a focus on the origins of a belief. Teacher says, "Who else would agree with you?" or "I wonder where that idea got started?"

7. Requesting the student to expand his views. Teacher says, "Tell me more," or "Uh-Huh?"

8. Inquiring into the longevity of a belief. "Have you felt this way very long?" the teacher says, or "Is this an idea that you have thought about only recently?"

9. Raising the question of the critical incident. Teacher says, "Tell about an incident that was crucial to you in forming your opinions."

10. Asking a student to anticipate consequences by completing an "if . . . then" statement. The teacher says, "If we were to implement your proposal, then tell about the consequences you anticipate." "If we were all more humane to each other, what do you expect would result?" the teacher asks.

11. Soliciting statements of immediacy. Teacher says, "Is this close to your life right now?" or "Does this idea affect your life today?"

12. Looking for likenesses or differences in ideas expressed by others. Teacher says, "Where do you differ with (insert a political figure)?" or "Where do you agree with (same politician)?"

13. Asking the student for examples. Teacher says, "Can you give a 'for instance'?"

14. Focusing on the facts. Teacher says, "Would you summarize the data that bear on the problem?"

15. Evoking expressions of feeling. Teacher says, "Are you happy that you believe this?"

16. Eliciting value-type expressions. Teacher says, "Do you prize your belief?"

17. Raising the question of the utility of an idea. Teacher says, "Would your idea be helpful to someone else to hold?"

18. Anticipating a more encompassing notion. Teacher says, "Where do you think this idea is taking you? Eventually, where is it leading you?"

19. Finding a point of difficulty. Teacher says, "You seem to have followed the notion up until we started looking for the assumptions. At what point after that did you find you were not following the discussion?"

20. Relating feelings and behavior.

Teacher says, "Tell how you felt when you were (insert specific behavior)."

21. Inquiring into purpose. Teacher says, "What was your goal (in a specific action)? What were you trying to accomplish?"

22. Asking for retrospection into process. Teacher says, "When you started the painting, did you have the finished product in mind?" or "Tell me what you were thinking about as you worked out your present beliefs. If you had it to do over again, would you change what you have done in any way?"

23. Focusing on choices others have made. Teacher says, "Tell about the choices you think (insert name) has made. What alternatives did he have?"

## Dissonant Mode

1. Distorting what the student has said with an inflection indicating a question. Extreme words may be added to the student's remarks. Teacher then says, "Is this what you meant?"

2. Stating assumptions for the student that have a negative connotation. Teacher says, "Are you assuming that Man is an animal?" (The teacher must be careful that the inflection of his voice does not communicate judgment.)

3. Raising moral or ethical questions. "Are you stating that it is ethical for one person to control the thoughts of another?" (The same caution mentioned in "2" above applies to this one also.)

4. Shifting the focus of the student's remarks to an implication that may be drawn from the statement. Student says, "The man who immolated himself was a hero because he was committed to an idea." Teacher says, "Maybe he was committed to self-destruction."

5. "Can you think of other explanations that somebody might hold?" This method focuses attention on alternatives. It is especially applicable to situations involving causal relationships.

6. Teacher says, "Tell us about some of the alternative explanations that you have rejected." Getting the student to look back on the choices he made in arriving at his present beliefs or conclusions.

7. Looking at alternatives. Teacher says, "What are some of the alternatives?" or "What other solutions do you see?" or "What solutions do other people propose?" or "What are some other suggestions?"

8. Taking a generalization a student has made and applying it to a new or extreme situation. "You say Democracy is the best way man has found for establishing decent human relations; would you say it is applicable to other institutions such as the army, the military, the family, or even education?"

9. Testing for the universality of a personal belief. Teacher says, "Do you think everyone ought to agree with you?" "Are there some whom you would expect to see things differently?"

10. Giving counter-examples. Students say "Hippies take LSD." Teacher says, "I know two hippies who do not."

11. Finding apparent inconsistencies in a student's remarks. Teacher asks a student to reconcile two statements he made previously that may be inconsistent; or to explain his behavior which may be inconsistent with an earlier exhortation.

12. Waiting for the student to draw an inference or state a conclusion. When the student finishes a statement that

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lacks a conclusion, the teacher says, "And therefore . . . ?"

13. Eliciting of counter-evidence. Teacher asks, "What data would you need to see before you would change your mind?"

14. Eliciting of counter-examples. Teacher says, "Are there some exceptions you can think of to your generalization?"

15. Examining the limitations of a belief. Teacher says, "Can you think of the conditions that might exist under which your belief would not be true?"

16. Raising the question of credibility of data. Teacher says, "Can you trust your source of information?" or "Can you trust your perceptions?"

17. Focusing on the extreme words used by the student, the teacher says, "Did you mean *all*?" or "Never" or "Continually" or "Always," etc.

18. Paying attention to indeterminate phrases. Teacher says, "Does it merely *seem* so to you?" or "Do you really just *think* so?" or "Is such an eventuality only a *possibility* to you?"

Two characteristics of the clarifying question that should be noted by the reader are (a) they are questions to which only the student could know the answer and (b) they include the word "you" in the question.[7]

The teacher who tries this method of instruction even for a very small portion of each day is likely to be rewarded by some relatively profound changes that take place in his classroom. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could say each day, "I really helped my children today. I could see them developing commitments, thinking more clearly."

[7] Suggested by Sidney B. Simon, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

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