



The Goals Game

ETHICS

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In a session with fifth graders at Kettering Elementary School in Long Beach, California, we philosophized about what would make us happy in life and how we could get to those goals that would make us happy. I started by handing out eleven goals written on index cards. The goals included good health, power, a lot of money, children, a husband or wife, fame, a job I love, travel around the world, a high school diploma, a college degree, and friends. Each student had a pack of goals and was asked to arrange them in order of what is most important and what would make them happy in life.

About ten minutes went by and the students started to come up with their final lists. They had the goals arranged from most important at the top of the column to least important at the bottom. Rearranging was also discussed and they all had a chance to change their minds after they had really thought about what would make them happy. We started talking about each student's goals and why they had arranged them in such a way. Some of their answers included:

Stephanie G.: Good Health
Friends
High School Diploma
College Degree
Travel around the world
Be Famous
A Husband
Children
A job I love
A lot of money
Power

When asked why she put her goals in this order, Stephanie said because it is the way she wants her life to be and it is the most important way to live. When asked why she would put friends before an education, she said that people have always told her that if she had didn't have friends the rest of her life wouldn't matter. Most of the girls in the class agreed that if they had no friends, that everything else in life loses meaning. The boys disagreed. Teeral told us his goal priorities:

Teeral: Good Health
High School Diploma
College Degree
Travel around the world
Power
Friends
A job I love
Be Famous
A lot of money
A wife
Children

When asked why he arranged the goals in this order, Teeral said that education and health were the most important because without those he could not get any of the other goals accomplished. He also said that he did not want to have children or get married until he had finished college.

While arranging their goals, most of the students were quick to critique another when someone put, say, a college degree before a high school diploma, pointing out that one has to be accomplished before another can be reached. They also had strong feelings about getting married before having children, believing that it is simply is not allowable to have children before a husband or wife. They also focused on education as an important goal because things like jobs and money can only be obtained through education.

Overall our discussion focused on why the students put certain goals ahead of others and why their top goals were at the top. The students agreed that health was very important to be happy, and that things like power, money and fame were things that would not make them happy if they didn't already have things like health and education. The focus of the game was on what would truly make them happy in life and how to achieve happiness.

Education, Virtue, and the Child

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express their natural understanding and appreciation for the order and inherent beauty of the world. Age-appropriate study of philosophy facilitates the children's expression of what is held most dearly and naturally in their hearts. The weekly philosophy class says that one's inner life is profoundly important and is worthy of consideration in school.

Equally important is the example set by the teacher and the other adults with whom the students come in contact. As the story of the holy man and the sweets teaches, children naturally imitate and adopt the actions and standards of those who teach them. This is not limited to their classroom teachers. In fact, they have learned many of life's philosophic lessons before they ever set foot in a school. Parents, siblings, relatives, baby-sitters, friends, media, and advertising all contribute to the modeling process. Even those 'cute' cartoon characters on TV are teaching our children some standard of virtue (or lack thereof). Sometimes a teacher needs to stand in opposition to the negative impulses that may reach the child. This requires courage and the support of one's peers. When a school's faculty is philosophically united, then their students live in and are supported by that union. At our school, we have addressed this by continuing our common study of the world's great philosophies. We also take the time, as a staff, to go on retreat together for one or two weeks each summer. In our studies, we consider the same philosophic questions that the children face. From that common ground we can then address curricular and behavioral issues in preparation for the coming school year.

Service is most closely connected to justice. Rendering each their due requires generosity and open-heartedness. Service is an aspect of education that is often overlooked. In this context, service can be defined as any action taken without thought of recompense of any sort. There's "nothing in it for me" in service. The idea is to treat your fellow student or your teacher as you would care to be treated. Students learn about service in various contexts in the school. At lunch, for example, students at each table make sure that their neighbors are served. Rather than serving themselves, one waits until another offers service. The meal doesn't commence until all have something on their plates. In addition, class monitors are assigned on a rotating basis to care for their teachers at meals. This can sometimes be arduous for the teacher, but what is, at first, lost in efficiency pays great dividends in developing love. It is the most natural thing

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