

Blog #3

Role of Values in a CBA

A Tragedy

I landed at 8:30 a.m. at the Orlando, FL airport on June 12, 2016 and boarded a shuttle to go to my destination. The driver had a news radio station on and all I could hear was the emotional voice of a reporter describing a massacre and police cars everywhere and helicopters hovering above. It was a few minutes before I learned that the report was not about an event in some distant location, but an unfolding account of a tragedy that had occurred in Orlando only six hours earlier.

On the flight to Orlando, I had been reflecting on the student results identified in our Construct-Based Approach (CBA) to school counseling's "A Vision to Live By." We stated that the results we could expect students to achieve by participating in a CBA school counseling program were that they would become "highly motivated, self-directed learners who are knowledgeable about themselves, engaged in meaningful relationships, and developing as contributing members to society and the well-being of our world."

Listening to the reports on the radio, I began to wonder what events such as these had to do with a CBA, and whether a CBA could help contribute to our understanding of such events and how to help students effectively respond. It made me question how the student results we articulated applied to those who committed acts of violence and terror.

Realization

The most striking realization I had was that many of the same attributes and learning results that are foundational to a CBA could equally be used to describe individuals who commit acts of violence and terror. For example, it is probably universally accepted that we want students to be highly motivated and that our educational systems should be designed to help ensure that result. As school counselors and educators, we expect students to become highly motivated to learn how to succeed in life without harming others. Motivation, as a learning outcome, however, can also be used to describe someone who becomes highly motivated to learn how to terrorize and massacre people.

We talk about the importance of students envisioning their possible selves, developing a strong sense of self-efficacy, and becoming proficient planners for their future success. But there is a difference between students envisioning their future selves as successful business persons or accomplished artists and envisioning their future selves as suicide bombers or martyrs. There is a

difference between planning for future success in order to increase our capacity to help people and to plan for the destruction of those who oppose us because they do not believe as we do.

In all these examples, both types of individuals can be described using attributes identified in the “A Vision to Live By.” But what then makes them so radically different, especially in terms of the consequences of their actions? A significant part of the answer can be found in the differences inherent in their value and belief systems.

With this perception, I further realized that although in developing the CBA model we assumed a set of positive values with which the constructs and sub-constructs were aligned, that we had not done enough to explicitly discuss the role of values in a CBA, nor had we explicitly articulated a core set of values which clarified what achieving the student results meant in terms of student expectations and outcomes.

This Blog (#3) will focus on the role of values in a CBA in a world of conflicting and sometimes irreconcilable value systems. Our next Blog (#4) will focus on the role of school counselors in an age of violence and terrorism.

The CBA and Democratic Values

The first point to be made is that a CBA is aligned with democratic values and supports student learning that prepares them to develop as responsible contributing members of society and our world. It is important to understand that although a general consensus may be achieved regarding the names of core values in a democratic society (e.g., freedom, equality, diversity, common good), there can be considerable disagreement regarding how those values are defined, how they are applied in specific contexts, and how they are to be transmitted or taught as a part of educational processes.

In a democratic society, we view these values to be sacred because of their importance in defining who we are, and how we think and behave. We value democracy because of what it provides us: a powerful sense of identity and belonging, and guidance for our lives. We believe in these values because we are confident that they are our best hope for survival and happiness, that they are worth defending, and perhaps most importantly because we believe they can be achieved and shared. A CBA is aligned with a core set of democratic values/beliefs that are constitutionally guaranteed and serve to protect the rights of members of our society. A CBA is intended to provide learning opportunities that support a democratic way of life and through an embodiment of democratic values.

Conflicting Values in U.S. History

All human thinking and behavior are informed by values, so it is important to recognize the nature and influence of different types of values that are part of our heritage. For example, a democracy should be based on equality without restricting the rights of some (e.g., because of their race, religion, gender). But even in a democratic society, value systems can be used to deny fundamental human rights.

The United States is no stranger to the consequences of values that divide rather than unite. Native Americans were massacred and their lands taken from them because they were devalued as human beings and viewed as savages. Slavery was made possible because people devalued human lives and viewed them as inferior beings that could be owned and traded like livestock,

all the while placing high value on their contribution to the economic prosperity of only some of the people rather than human rights for all.

Women's right to vote was denied because men were valued more as decision-makers and leaders. And even though women gained the right to vote, their voices and contributions are still not valued as much as men's as is evident in present day income inequality between men and women, and in the aggressive efforts by male-dominated legislatures and public policy-makers to deny women their reproductive rights. The reaction to efforts by the LGBTQ community or movements such as Black Lives Matter reveal the disturbing truth about how values are used to justify and promote ideologies and actions that violate basic human rights and divide rather than unite members of our society.

Depending on one's value system, such practices in our history can be interpreted in different ways. They could be seen as a source of national shame (e.g., belief that restricting people's rights through racism and sexism should be abhorred and eliminated in a democratic society). Or, they could be viewed as a source of national pride (e.g., belief that practices such as slavery or income inequality are acceptable and need to be continued). It is obvious in a complex society like ours that achieving total consensus on which values are most important, and how they are defined, is not possible, at least at this stage of human development. What steps then can we take to begin resolving these critical issues? Understanding how value systems have been used to promote or restrict our pathways to a genuine democracy is critical to our ability to move forward.

We must recognize in what ways value systems have impacted our democratic way of life in order to figure out how to improve it. To accomplish this we must be willing to question the value systems that are deeply ingrained in our history, culture and psyche in order to find a way to a more democratic and free society. Educational processes, and therefore school counseling programs, must be an integral part of this effort. The focus should not be on indoctrinating our youth on a particular value system, but to help students learn how to critically view the value systems that impact their lives in order to make their own decisions about how to respond.

Blind acceptance of beliefs and attributions (how we explain the causes of our condition) without questioning their validity or consequences for our future, both intended and unintended, will not bring our world into balance. A democratic way of life is severely jeopardized by intransigent polarization of ideologies evident in our society today. One example that demonstrates the negative impact of such practices on our nation's youth can be seen in the current race to become the next president.

A recent survey (April 2016) of approximately 2,000 K-12 teachers was conducted by Teaching Tolerance and published by the Southern Poverty Law Center under the title "The Trump Effect: The Impact of the Presidential Campaign on Our Nation's Schools" (retrieved from <https://www.splcenter.org/20160413/trump-effect-impact-presidential-campaign-our-nations-schools>). The survey found that the political campaign "is producing an alarming level of fear and anxiety among children of color and inflaming racial and ethnic tensions in the classroom." Many Muslim, Black and Latino students worry about being deported.

Teachers noted increases in "bullying, harassment and intimidation of students whose races, religions or nationalities have been the verbal targets of candidates on the campaign trail." These trends are highly disruptive of the learning process and feelings of safety. Civil discourse and a

willingness to be open to opposing views have been jeopardized. It is regrettable that expecting students to learn how to act as responsible citizens by following the example of political figures may no longer be viewed as a credible learning experience. As the report notes: “For the sake of children and their education, presidential candidates should begin modeling the kind of civil behavior and civic values that we all want children to learn in school.”

If the solution to our problems was continuing to believe in the conflicting and uncompromising value systems without questioning them, then one would assume that evidence of doing so (e.g., willingness to dialog, finding common ground, making decisions based on the common good) would be obvious. That is not the case. So if blind acceptance of inflexible value systems continues to exacerbate the problem, then nurturing students’ ability to be critical thinkers and problem solvers who respect others and act for the common good is part of the solution to effecting positive change and restoring hope for a better future for all.

Role of Values in a CBA

School counselors help students learn how to learn, plan for their future success and cope with the many challenges of growing up, preparing for life in the postsecondary world, and building their capacity for participating in a democratic society. The CBA was developed to help ensure that comprehensive school counseling programs contributed to helping students achieve these results. This, in part, is accomplished by students developing their ability to understand and critically examine the values and value system that significantly impact their learning and lives. By focusing on the CBA constructs and sub-constructs, a CBA can help students learn about and embrace democratic values.



There is a sense in which each of these constructs and sub-constructs constitutes a value because of its importance in articulating the defining characteristics of a successful learner. Integral to understanding this is the recognition that they have significant value because research has demonstrated the strong link between them and student achievement and well-being.

There is also a sense in which each can be considered a belief in that we accept them as truthful representations of the results we want students to achieve, and we strongly believe the desired results are achievable by students with help from school counselors. The constructs and sub-

constructs, viewed in the context of core democratic values, provide a clear sense of the type of excellence students can achieve by participating in a CBA school counseling program.

CBA Core Values

The graphic below identifies several core values that are important for students to embody as a result of participating in a CBA school counseling program. This is not intended as an exhaustive list, but to highlight values that are especially relevant and meaningful to students today.



Ten values are identified. Five of the values are “personal” in that they focus on intrinsic aspects of individual students. The other five values are “relational” in that they focus on students in relationship with others. Viewed collectively, these values provide insight into the type of values that students can be expected to achieve by participating in a comprehensive CBA school counseling program. A brief description of each of the values is provided below.

Critical Thinking

School counselors help students learn how to learn by focusing on the importance of self-reflection on their metacognitive abilities, social-emotional learning processes, and thinking and behavior patterns. They are taught to learn about how they learn in order to improve their learning processes and outcomes. Critical thinking requires an open mind, a willingness to consider various and sometimes opposing perspectives, a desire to seek truth, and a commitment to act based on the results of their critical thinking efforts. Critical thinkers carefully examine and question the efficacy of value and belief systems to determine their impact on themselves and others, and whether they need to be changed for the common good. It is especially critical for students to carefully examine their own values and beliefs, and the values and beliefs of their cultural heritage.

Discernment

A CBA helps develop students’ ability to discern right from wrong and truth from falsehood. It fosters a desire in students to think and behave appropriately without harming others. Students need to appreciate the importance of finding workable solution to complex problems and to make

choices that will contribute to the resolution of difficult issues. The most difficult choices are not between things that are all good or all evil, but between the genuine and the counterfeit which can look like and sound the same as the genuine but which yield a very different set of outcomes. For example, students need to develop their capacity to distinguish whether political promises are genuine (workable solutions are offered) or counterfeit (promises are continuously made without any solutions proposed). A democratic society requires a discerning citizenship.

Skilled

Skill is the ability to do, to take the knowledge students have acquired in their learning opportunities and successfully applying the knowledge to improve conditions or solve problems in a variety of authentic contexts. We want students to be skilled problem solvers, skilled in developing meaningful relationships, and skilled in achieving and sustaining positive outcomes. We want students to be skilled in conflict resolution and collaborating with others to build community, achieve personal success, work for the common good, and improve the human condition. A CBA values knowledge acquisition and the ability to apply the knowledge in ways that lead to personal success and benefit others.

Self-Regulating

The ability to self-regulate is dependent, in part, on one's values. For example, students need to value positive interactions rather than disruptive activity in the classroom. They need to place the highest value on human life and reject the notion that it is okay to harm or kill someone because they disagree with you. Self-regulation of emotions is a critical aspect of this process, and students need to be taught to value the importance of regulating their behavior in the classroom and in life. A CBA helps students learn how to self-regulate by teaching them how to focus on their metacognitive abilities, social-emotional learning processes, attribution styles and behavior patterns. It helps students to understand their executive functions, how to observe them, and how to improve them. A CBA values the whole child and holistic approaches to helping students learn through integrating both our cognitive and metacognitive understanding of students' thinking and behavior.

Accountability

Accountability is basically taking responsibility for (assuming ownership of) what we think and do. We want students to assume ownership of their learning processes in order to succeed in school and become life-long learners. We want them to hold themselves accountable for their actions. Accountability requires a value system that specifies what we need to be accountable for and under what conditions those values should be evident in our thinking and behavior. School counselors contribute to students' sense of accountable behavior by helping them understand the underlying values in a good education (e.g., motivation to learn, good study habits, demonstrating one's learning to others).

Respect

Respect is a fundamental value for a civil society. It enables us to see others as having value as human beings with whom we share this earth. Respect means we see value in others and the contribution they make to our lives, our communities, our nation and our world. There are many types of respect (e.g., self-respect, respect for others, respect for authority, respect for the environment). All are required for a healthy society and world. It is safe to assume that given the

choice between living in a peaceful world or a world filled with terror and destruction that the overwhelming majority of people would choose to live in a world of peace where they feel safe and are free to pursue and achieve fulfilling lives. This will not happen in a world in which people show no respect for others.

Diversity

America is a diverse country, built by immigrants from a broad spectrum of cultural, linguistic, political and economic heritages who interacted to define common goals that could be achieved through shared experience. Diversity is one of our greatest strengths as it demonstrates that a democratic society is capable of providing opportunities for a better life for diverse peoples. A CBA encourages students to embrace the importance of diversity and to show respect for everyone who contributes to a vibrant and productive democratic way of life.

Interdependence

We establish our identity (who we are, what we believe in) more as a result of the groups and societies we live in than through individual thought. We accept many of the assumptions about who we are versus who others are as we are growing up, many times never questioning the assumptions we come to believe in. The result is a society and world filled with conflicting value and belief systems. Humans have a tendency to address these differences through violent and oppressive acts. The hope for world peace is grounded in the assumption that all these different groups are capable, with concerted effort, to recognize their interdependence while at the same time maintaining their sense of identity derived from their group and/or society. It is imperative, if we are to find a solution to the increased divisiveness and violence in our world, that we take strong measures to build trust among groups and foster the belief that relying on each other is the only reliable option we have to make our world a safer place to live. A CBA illustrates the need for interdependence in its focus on critical consciousness and social justice.

Tolerance

Being tolerant of others means we can accept the value of those who are different from us. Tolerance is an important value as it is one of the first steps in creating a dialog among seemingly irreconcilable value and belief systems. Tolerance is required for open-minded inquiry, a willingness to try and understand differing perspectives, finding shared values and beliefs, and developing effective solutions to common problems. Lack of tolerance is highly restrictive as it diminishes and often times eliminates opportunities for people to work together for the common good.

Altruism

Altruism means that we care about others, their hopes and dreams, their current condition and the problems they encounter. It is also a desire and willingness to act to help others improve their conditions and prospects for a better future. Altruism is an attitude, a state of mind that recognizes that we are responsible for helping each other survive and thrive. A CBA helps students become aware of human needs and contribute to helping others find fulfillment in life.

Should School Counselors Teach Values?

Values are fundamental to the human experience. Values-free individuals, groups, societies and nations do not exist. We may not always be aware of what values inform our thinking and

behavior, but they are there nevertheless. To ask whether schools, or school counseling programs in schools, should teach values is rather an irrelevant question. Values are all around us in the assumptions we make about the purpose of schooling, how students learn, and in the practices we develop to instruct students. So values exist and have a strong impact on our own thinking and on how we expect students to think and behave as a result of their learning experiences. The values are there and we are teaching them all the time through our words and examples, all we have to do is look for them.

The short answer to whether values should be taught is yes. The question may be further refined to ask whether values should be explicitly taught (e.g., in character education programs). The answer to this question has been the source of major controversies, most centering around whether parents or educators are responsible for values-related education, what values are to be taught and how will the instruction be delivered. Political and religious value systems play a large role in fueling these controversies.

A CBA answers the question of whether school counselors should be involved in explicitly teaching students about values in the affirmative. This should occur, however, by ensuring that the following conditions exist within the school community:

- Recognition of the difference between education and indoctrination. Education ensures that students are fully engaged in the teaching-learning process (e.g., invited to provide ongoing input and feedback regarding what is taught, what it means to them and how values impact their lives). Indoctrination can result when adults define the results students are expected to exhibit without inviting them into the decision-making process, and expecting students to simply accept what they are being taught without reflection or dialog.
- Adults from key constituent groups within the school community come to a consensus on what should be taught and why, and the most effective strategies and practices to ensure that positive values are integrated into students' understanding of the world and how their thinking and behavior impacts their chances for success and the well-being of their communities. In addition, they need to examine the way they structure their education program to determine whether it needs to be reorganized to provide more meaningful learning opportunities for students.
- Students are taught how to be critical thinkers capable of grasping the importance and consequences of what they are being taught. Student learn to carefully examine how what they are being taught impacts their personal lives and social interactions, and make their own choices about what is good for them and the well-being of others. We need to teach students' the function of values, how they affect our lives, and that we have the ability and responsibility to examine them carefully and take action to modify or change them for the common good. Education values fully engaging students in this process by helping them develop the tools to become reflective learners who make ethical choices and moral decisions through their critical awareness.
- View the essential character of students and their abilities from a resiliency rather than a deficit model. In other words, understand students as full of potential who can be excited about learning when we provide meaningful learning environment, rather than a deficit model which assumes that children are inherently bad and need to be fixed by the educational system.

- Students are engaged in understanding and developing values that support personal growth and building community at the same time. Helping students with the ethical choices and moral development through engaging them in discussions and projects related to values supporting the common good are foundational to a participatory democracy.
- Focusing on the CBA's four constructs enable students be self-reflective and dialogic. They help students to become self-knowledgeable about their thinking and learning processes, thus creating a pathway to enhance their metacognitive abilities, mature in their social-emotional responses, and improve behavior patterns that inhibit their capacity to learn and succeed.

Conclusion

Our world is filled with conflicting value and belief systems. These have become so polarized and devoid of dialog and compromise that it has rendered us incapable of effecting major changes that improve the human condition. Every generation feels that it can educate its youth to accomplish what it has not been able, or willing, to accomplish: progress in resolving its fundamental problems that divide rather than unite people. One of the greatest gifts we can give our students is to help them develop the ability to explore, analyze, discern and act to accomplish what preceding generations have failed to achieve.

Part of this is to teach youth how to question the very assumptions which comprise their worldview so they can better comprehend their intent and consequences. Blind acceptance of the worldviews of others without critically examining them will not bring us closer to a world of peace wherein the common good is valued and achieved. CBA school counseling programs can help students learn and embrace positive values that guide their moral and ethical development.