

WHAT IS VALUES EDUCATION ALL ABOUT?

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The first thing we may have to do with values education is change its image and possibly even its name. It sounds altogether too much like a system's latest bright idea, like the participation and equity programme of the 1980s or civics and citizenship education in the 1990s. It risks being dismissed altogether in many public schools which won't really see it as part of their charter. Similarly, it may not be taken seriously in religious schools because they will assume it is already in place in their religious education. So what can we say about values education to change these unhelpful ways of thinking?

Values education goes to the heart of where education began, as a public good designed to make a difference, either as a supplement to what was offered at home or to make up for what was missing at home. The earliest forms of education in Islam were about creating a positive, supportive learning environment geared towards redressing the natural inequities to be found in society. Christendom followed suit in the later Middle Ages with many of contemporary Europe's most exclusive schools and universities having their origins in learning centres for those with limited opportunities from birth.

In Australia, the tradition was carried on first by the religious schools that pre-dated a formal public system. Mary MacKillop's parish schools of the 1860s onwards were typical in their first and foremost charter to be a positive influence in the lives of young people, to their intellectual development as well as their social and personal development (Modystack, 1985). When formal public education began in the 1870s and 1880s, there was a surprising (for many!) similarity in the charter around these things. The documents of the 1870s and 1880s that contained the charters of the various State and Territory systems witness to a breadth of vision about the scope of education. Beyond the standard goals of literacy and numeracy, education was said to be capable of assuring personal morality for each individual and a suitable citizenry for the soon-to-be new nation.

For instance, the NSW Public Instruction Act of 1880 (cf. NSW, 1912) stressed the need for students to be inculcated into the values of their society, including understanding the role that those values had played in forming their society's legal codes and social ethics, as well as learning to conform to those values in the form of good citizenry. The notion, therefore, that public education is part of a deep and ancient heritage around values neutrality is

mistaken and in need of serious revision. The evidence suggests that public education's initial conception was of being the complete educator, not only of young people's minds but of their inner characters as well.

In our own time, this conception is being revived largely because societal changes are impacting on the wider conception of schooling and the role of the teacher. With the greater breakdown of family life as once known, the greater fluidity of the moral authority of religion over the mainstream population, what are seen to be more complex social issues of a heterogeneous society, as well as the global issues of a divided world with powers of self-immolation, the role of the school and the teacher are being called on for more. Increasingly, they are being turned to as major socialising forces, quite beyond those of mere academic tutelage, with assumed power to be able to make some real difference in the lives of their students. Teachers now often find themselves playing the roles of stand-in parent and even counsellor at the local level, as well as semi-public intellectual about world events.

Clearly, these changes, that have nothing to do with values education *per se*, have nonetheless created an environment more conducive to the acceptance of values education as a natural attachment to the roles of the teacher and the school. Moreover, the environment is not only conducive to values education as an academic exercise but to it as a practical agency of moral formation. Whether they like it or not, teachers cannot stand wholly apart from this role any longer. The only questions now are around the extent of the role, the kinds of strategies (including curricula) that the teacher should use in playing this role and, of course, performing evaluation studies that allow us to know how effective or not these strategies are in inculcating the ideas and behaviours associated with moral formation (cf. Lovat & Schofield, 1998; 2004; Lovat et al., 2002).

The conception that the teacher and school are natural agencies of values education has much in common with similar conceptions to be found in contemporary research about the role of the teacher. Much of this conception is contained in the language of 'quality teaching'. Quality teaching has been defined in various ways within different projects (cf. Newmann, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Qld, 1999; NSW, 2000; 2003; Louden et al., 2004; Rowe, 2004). Among the differences, however, there is a discernible pattern that has stretched the conception of 'teacher' beyond its former constraints. Beyond the expected criteria related to qualifications and updated skills, there are more subtle features that speak, for instance of, 'intellectual depth'. This is a concept that identifies the need not only to drive students towards dealing

with the full array of facts and details related to any topic (in other words to avoid surface factual learning), but to induct students into the skills of interpretation, communication, negotiation and reflection.

In a word, the teacher's job is well beyond preparing students for 'get the answer right' standardised testing, but to engage the students' more sophisticated skills levels around features such as 'inter-relational capacity' and 'self-reflection'. Inter-relational capacity takes in many of the dispositions necessary to a highly developed social conscience, and self-reflection may be taken as the basis of a truly integrated and owned personal morality. In other words, it is not just the surface factual learning so characteristic of education of old that is to be surpassed, it is surface learning in general that is to be traded in in favour of a learning that engages the whole person in depth of cognition, emotion and self-knowledge.

Quality teaching research has illustrated the true and full power of the teacher to make a difference in student learning not only around the technical (or factual), but around the interpretive (or social) and reflective (or personal) as well (after Habermas, 1972; see also Lovat & Smith, 2003). In the USA, it was the Carnegie Corporation's 1994 Task Force on Learning (Carnegie, 1994) that in many ways impelled the modern era of quality teaching. It represented a turning-point in the dominant conceptions placed on the role of the school and, in turn, on the power of teaching to effect change in student achievement. It also played a part in identifying the range of learning skills that should constitute student achievement. Beyond the more predictable aspects of intellectual development, the Task Force report introduced for the modern era notions of learning concerned with communication, empathy, reflection, self-management and the particularly intriguing notion of self-knowing. It is also explicit in making the point that, while heritage and upbringing can make a difference to the ease with which these forms of learning can be achieved, they are in no way certain predictors of success. Consistent with the era of quality teaching which the report in some ways ushered in, the final onus is placed on the school and the teacher in making the bigger difference.

In summary, quality teaching illustrates the power of teaching across the range of technical learning (otherwise known as the factual), interpretive learning (otherwise known as the social) and reflective learning (otherwise known as the personal). Quality teaching has alerted the educational community to the greater potential of teaching, including in such areas as personal and social values inculcation. As such, it has huge relevance for the world inhabited by a comprehensive and exhaustive values education.

These are the underpinning philosophies of teaching which must be understood in order for the modern values education pursuit to be truly saturating of our schooling systems, religious, independent and public. Especially in relation to the public system, it is only through these linkages with the most updated educational theory and teaching philosophy that the words of the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century*, and the even sharper words of the 2003 Federal Government Values Education Study (DEST, 2003) and the 2005 *National Framework for Values Education* (DEST, 2005), will truly capture the hearts and minds of the average teacher.

The *Adelaide Declaration* (1999) tells us that schooling is to provide young Australians with a foundation for '... intellectual, physical, social, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development,' while the Values Education Study tells us that '... schools are not value-free or value neutral zones of social and educational engagement,' that they are '... as much about building character as ... equipping students with specific skills,' and that '... values education is ... an explicit goal ... aimed at promoting care, respect and cooperation.' (DEST, 2003:12) In a very explicit connection between the goals of values education and the centrality of a quality teaching perspective, the *National Framework for Values Education* tells us that 'values education reflects good practice pedagogy.' The report makes explicit reference to the language of quality teaching in extending the general notion of good practice pedagogy to incorporate the specific notion of 'good practice values education.' (DEST, 2005:7)

Ken Rowe (Rowe, 2004), one of Australia's leading educational researchers, notes that of all the teacher qualities nominated by those students who achieve best at school, the level of obvious care shown by the teacher towards the student is first and foremost. In other words, the content and substance of values education has potential to go to the very heart of the power of quality teaching by focussing teacher attention on those features of their professional practice that contemporary research tells us has the major impact on learning. This major impacting feature concerns the relationship of due care, mutual respect, fairness and positive modelling established by the teacher with the student.

We live in a time when our understanding of the role of the teacher and the power of values education is coalescing. No longer is values education on the periphery of the roles to be played by the teacher and the school in our society. It is at the very heart of these roles. Unlike the assumptions that seem to underpin so many of our concerns around structures, curriculum and

resources, values education is premised on the power of the teacher to make a difference. While the artefacts of structure, curriculum and resources are not denied, the focus is, appropriate to the insights of the day, on the teacher's capacity to engage students in the sophisticated and life-shaping learning of personal and social moral development.

I suggest that the nature, shape and intent of values education has potential to re-focus the attention of teachers and their systems on the fundamental item of all effective teaching – namely the teachers themselves, the quality of the teachers' knowledge, content and pedagogy, but above all the teachers' capacity to form the kinds of relationships with students which convey their commitment to them as individuals as well as model to them the attitudes and practices of personal integrity and social conscience. I know it's a challenging thought for many who, rightly or wrongly, were trained to think differently about the role of the teacher and the social agency of the school. However, values education or no values education, we live in a society that is shouting out about a new charter for schooling and teaching. Values education is first and foremost a way of conceiving of that charter as well as a practical instrument by which we might live it out.

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