VALUES EDUCATION: THE MISSING LINK IN QUALITY TEACHING

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The Context of Quality Teaching

Educational research of the 1990s and beyond has challenged earlier conceptions concerned with the capacity of teachers, and formal education generally, to make a difference in the lives of students. Highly interventionist studies (cf. Newmann, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997) were conducted in the USA that tested, against virtually every category of disadvantage, whether a particular approach to teaching and schooling could break through the disadvantage effect. The particular approach to teaching and schooling goes by various names but is most commonly captured in the notion of 'Quality Teaching', a notion that encompasses both the work of individual teachers in classrooms and, ideally, the work of whole-school teaching regimes.

The results of these studies have severely called into question, if not shattered earlier conceptions relating to the alleged limitations of teacher and school power to have effective impact on student development. In virtually every instance among a myriad of instances, where the disadvantaged cohorts were facilitated by being offered 'Quality Teaching' as defined by the study, and their non-disadvantaged equivalent cohort was being supported by 'ineffective teaching', also as defined, it was the disadvantaged who were shown to achieve at a greater rate. In summary, when faced with all the 'proven' barriers to learning, be they barriers based on gender, class, language or even disabilities of sorts, Quality Teaching had at least sufficient power to begin to even up the chances of the disadvantaged and in some instances and over time to change the rules of the advantage/disadvantage divide altogether. While many remain sceptical, as is appropriate in the research setting, the effect is that the

earlier thesis about the centrality of heritage to achievement is fairly quickly being replaced as a core belief by a new belief about the centrality of teacher quality (Rowe, 2004).

Quality Teaching and Values Education

Furthermore, recent research seems to illustrate the clear link to be found between teacher quality and the values-laden nature of the teaching environment. In a recent Australian study, Rowe (2004) noted that, of all the teacher qualities nominated by those students who achieve best at school, it was notions of care and trust that were paramount. While the more predictable measures of demonstrable content knowledge and stimulating pedagogy were as evident as one would expect, they rarely stood alone and appeared to be relative to the greater indicator of student confidence that the teacher was trustworthy and had the student's best interests at heart. Similarly, Louden et al. (2004) concluded that it was difficult to pick likely student effects from simple observation of teacher practice. One might caricature the findings of this study by suggesting that, lying behind the relationship between practitioner and student, was the far more powerful relationship between elder and younger person. In some extreme instances, the study seemed to find that superior student effect could actually emanate from situations where teacher practice was questionable in terms of the most updated content and pedagogy but, against this, where a positive relationship existed between teacher and student.

Similarly, Hattie's (2004) recent work places 'respect for students' at the top of the list of those characteristics that mark out the demonstrably expert teachers, while Brady's (2005) work has shown 'relationship between teacher and student' to be at least as significant as technical proficiency in teachers drawing the best out of their students. So, the content and substance of Values Education has the potential to go to the very heart of the power of Quality Teaching by focussing teacher and system attention on those features of their professional practice that have most impact, namely the relationship of due care, mutual respect, fairness and positive modelling established with the student and, in turn, the network of systemic 'relational trust' that results.

Ways of Knowing and Values Education

One is reminded, many years on, of the caution against instrumentalist approaches to education that was provided by the eminent John Dewey in the early days of public education. He said that to depend overly on subject knowledge and methods was fatal to the best interests of education. He spoke, rather, of the need for the cultivation of a mindset on the part of teachers that was, at one and the same time, self-reflective and directed towards

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instilling reflectivity, inquiry and a capacity for moral judiciousness on the part of students (cf. Dewey, 1964). Dewey would not be at all surprised with the findings of modern research noted above. He would also feel vindicated, I believe, by the priority being given at present to Values Education in the broad and comprehensive way it is being conceived.

Another more recent but equally influential thinker worth mentioning in this context is Jurgen Habermas (1972; 1974; 1984; 1987; 1990). Habermas's theory of knowing has been instrumental in much of the thought that educationists have seized on in attempting to deepen our understanding of learning and stretching conceptions of the role of the teacher. Beyond the importance of empirical-analytic knowing (the knowing and understanding of facts and figures), Habermas spoke, when it was entirely unfashionable, of the more challenging and authentic learning of what he described as historical-hermeneutic or 'communicative knowledge' (the knowing and understanding that results from engagement and interrelationship with others) and of 'critical knowing' or 'self-reflectivity' (the knowing and understanding that comes from critique of all one's sources of knowledge and ultimately from critique of one's own self or, in Habermas's terms, from knowing oneself, perhaps for the first time). For Habermas, this latter was the supreme knowledge that marked a point of one's having arrived as a human being. One might caricature him as saying 'There is no knowing without knowing the knower', and the knower is oneself. In a sense, the ultimate point of the learning game is to be found in knowing oneself, and the consequent change of belief and behaviour, that inevitably follows. This change is described by Habermas as 'praxis', a practical or communicative action designed to right the wrongs in one's environment.

The Two-fold Task of Values Education

Employing Dewey's and Habermas's comprehensive views of knowing and the role of learning in the school, we can see that the task of Values Education is twofold. First, it is to establish an environment of respect, trust and care that, before a word is said, challenges the preconceived beliefs and consequent behaviours that many will bring with them from their heritage and wider cultural 'life-world', to coin a Habermasian phrase. Ideally, through this, students will see people being respected by a whole school community that they may have come to regard as not worthy of respect. This is the most powerful lesson of all. When a whole school embraces this modelling, research would suggest transformation of belief and behaviour is more likely to happen than not.

However, beyond the implicit, teachers are trained to be explicit about the learning they engage in. So, having been established, the task is then to make explicit why this environment of respect, trust and acceptance is so vital to the human community. This is the teaching or curriculum aspect of Values Education and, at whatever age, its essential focus

must be to raise those questions which characterize Habermas's critical and self-reflective way of knowing. It is to ensure that the evidence of facts and figures, as well as of human interactions and conversations, is of the broadest and most challenging kind. Ultimately, its task is to push student learning towards self-reflectivity, that knowing of self that allows one to step out of the shadow of one's upbringing and cultural heritage, to challenge not only the preconceived beliefs and behaviours of this upbringing and heritage but, more painfully, one's own deep seated comfort zone of beliefs and behaviours. The task, in other words, is to transform. It is to do the very opposite of what Christopher Jencks (1972) held to be the truth about the school. It is to take the input of the entering children and to transform the output. The importance of school-based Values Education in undertaking this task cannot be overstated. While transformation is painful at any stage of life, the longer one stays in one's comfort zone, the harder it gets.

Transforming beliefs and behaviour does not mean imposing a different set of beliefs and values on students than those they came in with. Imposing someone else's comfort zone would be a contradiction of everything implied by critical and self-reflective knowing. It does however mean challenging students to see that whatever beliefs and values they brought with them are but one set, one life-world, and to consider the life-worlds of others. This is the hallmark of what Habermas (1984; 1987) describes as 'communicative capacity' and, beyond that, 'communicative action'. Communicative capacity is when the self-reflective knower comes to see his or her own life-world as just one that needs to function in a myriad of life-worlds, and so comes to possess communicative capacity. In a sense, this is a formula for the modern, globally competent, intercultural communicator. Beyond this, however, is the notion of communicative action. Here, the self-reflective knower takes a step beyond mere tolerance to take a stand both for justice and for oneself because one's new found self, one's own integrity, is at stake. This is a concept about personal commitment, reliability and trustworthiness that spills over into practical action that makes a difference, or what Habermas describes as 'praxis'. It is the kind of action that can only come from the wellspring enshrined in the notion of self-reflectivity, from one who knows who they are, values the integrity of being authentic and commits oneself to establishing the kinds of caring and trusting relationships that bear the best fruits of human interactivity.

The Importance of School-based Values Education

What is important to say, in many ways against the conventional wisdom, is that school is clearly the best place where this can happen. While this is not to pit the school against the other social agencies of home, peers, religion, media, etc., it is to boldly assert that, for most

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people, these agencies tend towards a narrowing of lifeworlds and towards pressure to conform to those lifeworlds, to compound the sense that "we've got it right!". The school's bolder role should be to stretch the comfort implied by this and to open minds to the breadth of lifeworlds. Ideally, this will be done carefully and with the support of other agencies, especially the home, but one should not be surprised if there are occasional tensions between the role of the school and the other agencies. Like the other agencies, the school's role is a distinctive one and much of the substance of this role is to be found in a comprehensive Values Education pursuit.

Perspectives like those of Dewey and Habermas help to illuminate why it is that issues of trust, care, respect and acceptance are so vital if Quality Teaching is to have its full effects (cf. Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Louden et al., 2004; Rowe, 2004). Furthermore, these perspectives underline just why it is that the Values Education pursuit must be grasped by teachers, schools and systems as being central and pivotal to their endeavours, rather than being on their margins. Again, it is worth re-stating the central proposition in this paper, namely that Values Education has the potential to go to the very heart of what it is that teachers, schools and educational systems are about. It certainly has potential to provide the missing link for Quality Teaching.

Testing the Thesis through the VEGPS Project

One of the great delights for me is to see these recognitions settling ever so slowly but surely in a culture that has not only been disposed to be other than with these perspectives but has been actively trained and encouraged to be somewhere else, to see Values Education as a distraction at best to the real business of teaching and schooling. In some very early data to hand from the Values Education Good Practices Schools Project (VEGPS), one can see coming through a language about quality teaching, quality leadership, trusting and caring relationships, and the intellectual depth that develops naturally when what is said in the explicit curriculum and what is modelled and lived out in the learning environment are brought together.

At the Project Advisory Committee briefing on 24 February 2006, under the section titled 'Key Findings to Date', the project leaders identified some emerging trends among the clusters and schools that are standing out for their 'good practice' (cf. Harris & Bereznicki, 2006). Furthermore, on 3 April, 2006, the VEGPS cluster leaders and their UAN advisors met to discuss their findings to date. Here is some of the language used by people on the

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ground in schools trying to capture what they have experienced in the way of student learning as a result of Values Education implementation:

- Quality leadership at cluster and school level, especially where understanding of the comprehensive reach of values is clearest and the link with practice is demonstrable;
- Quality teaching and pedagogy;
- Taking a 'whole school approach';
- Maximum 'buy in' by all stakeholders;
- Quality relationships within and between the schools of the cluster;
- Modelling, living out and practising the values that are being enunciated in the curriculum;
- Intellectual depth in teacher understanding;
- Intellectual depth among students demonstrated by a willingness to become involved in complex thinking across the curriculum;
- Greater levels of student engagement in the mainstream curriculum;
- Pedagogical approaches that match those espoused by 'Quality Teaching';
- Deep knowledge, deep understanding and meta-learning;
- Depth of thinking necessary to ethical reasoning and ethical decision-making;
- Knowing the good moving to doing the good;
- Demonstrations of greater student responsibility over local, national and international issues, greater student resilience and social skills, and improved relationships of care and trust;
- The 'ripple' or 'trickle-down' effect that Values Education is having across the school.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we live in a time when our understanding of the role of the teacher and the power of Values Education are coalescing. No longer is Values Education on the periphery of a curriculum that enshrines the central 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 relating to 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 what Hattie (2003) describes as "… the greatest source of variance that can make a difference, (namely the teacher)." In the case of Values Education, the belief is premised on the teacher's capacity to make a difference by engaging students in the

sophisticated and life-shaping learning of personal moral development. As the late Haim G. Ginott, renowned child psychologist, once said: "To reach a child's mind, a teacher must capture his heart. Only if a child feels right can he think right." (Ginott, 1969)

I suggest that the nature, shape and intent of Values Education has the potential to re-focus the attention of teachers and their systems on the fundamental item of all effective teaching, namely the teacher her or himself, including naturally the quality of the teacher's knowledge, content and pedagogy, but above and beyond all of these, on the teacher's capacity to form relationships of care and trust, and so establish a values-filled environment and, along with this, to teach about those values and so promote in students commitment to live by those values and to build a society where justice and respect are assured. Values Education and Quality Teaching are cohering. Values Education without Quality Teaching is an oxymoron, of course, but Quality Teaching without Values Education has the potential to suffer from the missing link that promises to strengthen and complete it.

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