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Values formation in citizenship education: a proposition and an empirical study

The question of an explicit values orientation in formal education is an ancient one, with clear roots stretching back to the time of Plato and Aristotle. In recent times, public systems of education throughout the Western world have begun addressing the question anew. In New South Wales, the primary school document *The Values We Teach* (1991) heralded a new era of overt values inculcation as a proper goal for public school teachers to pursue. With the national push for Civics and Citizenship Education, the presence of values in the public curriculum becomes even more apparent. This paper proposes a proper place for values in the public curriculum and provides an update on empirical research on a values curriculum being carried out in public schools in the Hunter Valley district of New South Wales.

Introduction

The past decade or so has marked a turning point for moral and values curricula in Western public education, including in Australia. While each of its States and Territories has a unique education system and Act, there has been a remarkable uniformity across these systems in the development of policy documents and curriculum directions in the area of values education. This uniformity has taken a new turn in the launching of the Civics and Citizenship Education Program by the Prime Minister on 6 June 1995, a move that Kennedy (1995) claims cannot be separated from the issue of values and education about values. The program, developed along the lines recommended by the Civics Expert Group (1994), takes up many of the issues flagged in individual values education programs, including the vexed issue of

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whether values can be taught and, if so, how. It moves quickly to assume that the answer to the former question is in the affirmative, then goes on to specify many of the values that should underpin attempts to promote standards in civics and citizenship at this point in Australian history. What is not answered is **how** such teaching can be effected. Interestingly, the 1994 document highlights advice offered in the New South Wales Department of School Education document, (NSW 1991), which reads:

Public schools are not value-free. They aim to inculcate and develop in students entrusted in their care those educational, personal, social, moral and spiritual values which are shared by the great majority of Australians (p 55).

This paper attempts to answer the questions of whether values can be taught and how such teaching can be implemented. Indeed, it attempts to answer the first question by undertaking the practicalities of the second and measuring the results. The study on which the paper is based has been concerned with interpreting the New South Wales document referred to above and, in particular, with finding out what it means in terms of practical curriculum development at the school level. The empirical study referred to in the title, which began with a pilot project in 1991 (*cf.* Schofield and Lovat 1991), was designed to evaluate the effects of a direct curriculum intervention modelled on the guidelines of *The Values We Teach*.

The Values We Teach and the values education debate

The New South Wales Government's White Paper on curriculum, *Excellence and Equity* (NSW 1989), highlighted the place of moral education and training as a legitimate part of the responsibilities borne by the curriculum offerings of the public school system:

All teachers, across all areas of the curriculum, have a responsibility to inculcate in their students positive values and a capacity for moral and ethical judgement (p 75).

The paper referred to an imminent review of departmental documentation concerned with this aspect of the curriculum. The review, which resulted in the *Values We Teach* (NSW 1991), set out a core of values concerned with **education** (focusing on the inherent value of learning, knowledge, curiosity, logical and critical thinking, truth and life-long learning), **self and others** (such as self-acceptance, responsibility, cooperation, honesty, respect for others, health and fitness) and **civic responsibilities** (such as respect for the rights and property of others, social justice and the elimination of discrimination), which would be central to school-based values education.

In asserting that such values formation is a central responsibility of public education and, indeed, that public schools should '...work actively and consciously to help their students acquire values ...' (1991, 4), *The Values We Teach* picks up on the ancient and as yet unresolved dilemma in ethical theory concerned with the capacity of anyone to educate effectively in moral matters. In *The Republic*, (Lee trans. 1987), Plato asserted that the Good can only be understood as an ultimate object of knowledge. Copleston (1962) interprets this as a thesis of the teachability of ethics.

On the other hand, Urmson (1988) interprets Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1985) as an Aristotelian thesis of its essential unteachability, at least as a purely rational activity: for Aristotle, virtue of character, the heart of ethics, could not be taught because it is essentially non-rational. Nonetheless, the Aristotelian formula does allow for a development of moral character through 'habituation', a phrase which Urmson takes as indicating Aristotle's predilection for environmental factors as being crucial in moral formation. In other words, if one has the good fortune to grow up in a benevolent environment, with good parents and good teachers, one can acquire the habits with which we associate virtue. Somewhere between the Platonic and Aristotelian formulas, therefore, a validity would seem to be established for the formal values education program.

Scheffler (1960) and Straughan (1988) appear to emphasise the Platonic line, which stresses the rational basis of values inculcation. Scheffler, for instance, demonstrates that the formal learning of values can instil an academic sense that certain things are considered right and others wrong. This is seen as important regardless of whether such learning translates into observable behavioural change or not. Similarly, Straughan concludes that such a program comprises a vital educational exercise for reasons that relate mainly to changing perceptions and cognitive awareness.

Other theorists appear to stress the more Aristotelian line that an overt emphasis on values education in schools is in fact likely to instil positive habits. Warnock (1975), for instance, stresses the vital role of the teacher as a moral character worthy of emulation and as one who can put forward sound and convincing moral argument. In a similar vein, Purpel and Ryan (1976) emphasise the teacher's role as one of encouraging self-reflectiveness in students concerning moral values, such that actual behaviour might ultimately change. Shaver and Strong (1982) insist that a core of values put forward by schools and teachers regarding moral principles and actions will direct students' thoughts and, ultimately, their actions as well.

Kohlberg (1984) draws the Platonic and Aristotelian emphases together. In some of the strongest advocacy for the formal values education program, he underlines the central place of reasoning in moral formation but also suggests practical ways in which the school can be transformed to become a suitable site for values formation. Kohlberg has also developed mechanisms that purport to be capable of tracking and measuring the movement from cognitive change to that state of mind that signals likely future behavioural change. The Kohlbergian position, then, highlights the centrality of perceptual change in establishing the likelihood of behavioural change.

This research project sought to determine the validity of the basic premise that, at the very least, a school curriculum could modify and change perceptual awareness in relation to ethical matters. That is, it sought to determine whether a curriculum intervention could make some difference to the way students think about, and respond to, moral phenomena which, in turn, should establish the basis for behavioural change. The project attempted to provide some empirical evidence for such potential cognitive changes by measuring the apparent success or otherwise of a formal values education program, based on *The Values We Teach* (NSW 1991).

Rationale and aims of the study

The ultimate aim of the study was to determine whether it was possible to change the stated values held by children in a positive direction by means of direct curriculum intervention. No attempt was made to determine whether these stated values were in fact translated into behavioural changes. The project involved a number of discrete elements, the first of which was the need to devise a reliable and valid scale to measure the values held by primary school-aged children. The development of the scale was based on issues considered relevant and realistic in the world of a child. The second element, the actual intervention, was in the form of a 'values education program', devised by the researchers following the guidelines established by *The Values We Teach* (NSW 1991). Finally, an attempt was made to evaluate the 'felt' effects of the program, and determine from both students and staff the perceived value of the program. The measurement instruments used, the program itself and the results obtained, are described and reported below.

Method

Scale development

As already stated, the New South Wales policy document classifies the values that it considers essential under three categories; those relating to education, self/others, and civic responsibilities. Under each of these categories are listed up to 14 specific behavioural goals such as 'accepting own worth as an individual' or 'rejecting racism, sexism and other forms of prejudice'.

Using these goal statements as a basis, a bank of 70 items based on 'real-life' experiences of children was initially established, to which students were required to respond using a six-point Likert scale. Confidentiality of responses was stressed, as was the need for all questions to be answered truthfully and with their own opinions. This instrument was trialed in 1993 on a sample of 505 students in Years 5 and 6 from five primary schools.

Through a combination of item analysis and principal components analysis, this bank was reduced to 33 items and a three-factor solution was finally accepted. In accordance with the stated categories of *The Values We Teach* (NSW 1991), these factors were described as **education**, **self/others**, and **civic responsibilities**. (1)

The **education** factor included those items that were directly related to the school life of the child, such as the importance of doing well at school, asking questions in class and working cooperatively. It also included such items as the importance of punctuality and freedom of personal expression. The relevance of these latter items to the context of the school life of a child is obvious, even though they encompass concepts that are not directly related to the curriculum.

The second factor, titled **self/others**, comprised items that related to general truth and honesty and included an item on bullying. The third factor, **civic responsibilities**, clearly encompassed issues relating to various 'isms', in this case racism and sexism, but also included items relating to the equitable distribution of resources at both an

individual and national level. Although the concepts being addressed were quite sophisticated, the items were worded in such a way that their relevance to the real-life of the child was paramount.

Pre-testing at the beginning of Term 2 using the 33-item instrument described above was undertaken; the same instrument was used at the beginning of Term 4 after the intervention had ceased. Testing was undertaken in class groups with the tester reading all items aloud to avoid problems of literacy.

A second 17-item instrument, designed to measure affective response to the actual intervention program, was used with the intervention group at the time of post-testing. Again, a six-point Likert scale was used. It was emphasised that class teachers would not have access to the information provided.

Intervention study

The intervention consisted of a formal values education program across two school terms with the parameters of the program matching the goals and objectives of the syllabus. In particular, the teachers sought to facilitate discussion with their students on the full range of moral issues and moral dilemmas arising from the syllabus. Role plays and games were also used as catalysts for discussion. Throughout the program, teachers attempted to act as role models and used their personal experiences to stimulate class discussion. Where teachers observed specific benefits flowing from such pro-social activities as cooperation, these benefits were highlighted and the behaviour was reinforced. In this way, an attempt was made to combine elements of the cognitive (eg Kohlberg 1976), social learning (e.g. Bandura 1991) and psycho-analytic/affective (e.g. Eysenck 1976) theories of moral development, since it was considered that any program of moral education should operate at all of these levels (Rest and Thoma 1986).

Teachers attempted to spend at least ten minutes a day on values-related activities. This was often integrated with other lessons, with the result that the time spent on many of the activities was considerably more than the suggested ten minutes. The nett result of this approach was that the intervention permeated much of the overall teaching program. However, the levels of commitment and enthusiasm from the teachers for the goals of the program varied considerably, even though principals had consulted staff before agreeing to participate in the intervention program. As a consequence, there were considerable differences in the levels of participation by teachers and even the amount of the program package covered in class.

Subjects

Subjects for this study comprised 1048 students in Years 5 and 6 drawn from 15 primary schools in the Hunter region of NSW. Once a school had agreed to participate, total school populations were allocated to either the intervention or control groups on an essentially random basis, resulting in 579 children in the intervention group and 469 in the control group. Only those with complete data sets were included in these numbers.

Although it could be argued that, given the differences in enthusiasm and even personality of the teachers, the unit of analysis should actually have been the class or

even the school, it was considered that, since the program was aimed at producing change in the individual student, the student should remain the unit of analysis. It was further thought that if the program could still produce some broad quantifiable change across individuals in spite of the differences in quality and quantity of presentation, then the validity of the program as an agent of change would actually have been enhanced.

Results

Factor scores

The primary aim of the study was to determine whether the intervention program produced any significant improvement in the attitudes and values of the experimental group. Using the principal components analysis mentioned above, factor scores for each subject were saved and used as three new dependent variables, these being education, integrity and equity. This method was used in order to provide standardised, weighted scores for the individual items in each of the three subscales (2). A series of two-way ANOVAs, with intervention group and sex as the grouping variables, was calculated. A significant ($F=6.64$, $p<.01$) main effect was observed for the first factor, education, with the intervention group showing a significant improvement over the intervention period. No other significant differences between groups were observed and no significant interactions between group and sex were observed.

An unexpected finding was that very large and significant differences between males and females for both experimental and control groups were observed for integrity ($F=79.40$, $p<.001$) and equality ($F=45.73$, $p<.001$), with females having much higher scores on both of these variables. This suggests that, although there was no greater benefit for one sex over the other from the intervention program, all females were starting from a much higher base-line level on these issues. Perhaps what is more surprising and disappointing is that the program did not produce a significant improvement among the males. It is also worthy of note that on the one factor that did produce a significant improvement over the intervention period, education, there were no significant differences between the sexes, suggesting that possibly this area was more gender-neutral.

The significant improvement for the intervention group on the education factor would seem to indicate that the intervention program was most successful in relation to those issues that related to the specific school/educational environment. By contrast, the program was not so successful in changing attitudes to more generic and perhaps abstract issues of integrity and equity that might not appear to the students to be as relevant to their immediate interests and concerns. On a number of specific items relating to sexism ('Women should be able to do any job they want') and racism ('Liking having people from other countries living in Australia'), the intervention group showed significant improvement over the control group. While these effects were lost when the factor was considered as a whole, the significance of the individual items is worthy of note.

Evaluation instrument

The evaluation of the program using the 17-item instrument mentioned earlier provided valuable feedback not only about how the students enjoyed the lessons but also about the importance they placed on values, their willingness to discuss such issues with friends or in class, and the levels of peer pressure to which they felt they were subjected and which may have inhibited free discussion (3).

In general terms, children were extremely positive about the course, were very strongly of the opinion that values were important in their lives, and believed that they were able to resist peer pressure in the formulation of their values. They were also strongly of the opinion that all children should get the opportunity to discuss these issues in their class. In very general terms, Year 6 students were more positive in their support of the course than the Year 5 students, suggesting an added sense of maturity.

Given the earlier findings of major sex differences on two of the factors, responses to this instrument were also examined to determine whether males and females differed in their perceptions of the program. Because the instrument was not designed to be collapsed into a series of subscales, individual items were analysed. Given the potential for Type 1 errors on 17 individual analyses, those results in which the probability is between .05 and .01 should be treated with some caution. Significant sex differences were found for 13 of the 17 items, with females being more positive about the program than males in every case.

Discussion

A number of major conclusions can be drawn from the modest success (in statistical terms) of the intervention study. The first and most important is that a curriculum intervention in the area of morals and values can produce a statistically significant change in measured attitudes to both broad groupings and specific issues. In other words, the teaching of values can make an appreciable difference to underlying moral attitudes. What makes this finding even more remarkable is the varying level of participation and enthusiasm demonstrated by the teachers. This would suggest that even very limited programs can have an appreciable success, albeit in one specific area of development.

The second conclusion is that, for an intervention to maximise its success, it must focus on the very basic school-related environment of the child. This tends to support the idea that the teaching of values cannot be restricted to abstract moral dilemmas about issues that are removed from the world of the child but can be successful when the issues to be addressed are grounded in the real-life experience of the child. A further point is that teaching on specific issues can have a positive impact but the level of transfer between that specific situation and more general but related issues is minimal. For instance, success in teaching about employment opportunities for women, as demonstrated in the improvement of the intervention group on that one item, does not necessarily transfer to other aspects of sexism.

These findings have also revealed that there are pronounced gender differences in relation to issues of values. This may not seem so surprising to teachers, but it may

highlight the need for a specific set of strategies designed to change the attitudes of males to the whole range of values that society generally might believe to be important.

It is also important to note that students generally enjoyed, valued and endorsed the experience of learning and discussing in this area. Indeed, it is fairly unusual to find such strong endorsement from this age group for an exercise like this which was, after all, purely classroom-based and essentially cerebral. Responses to the evaluation instrument would seem to indicate that the program was regarded as a novel and welcome exercise and one that might be further exploited by the education system.

The gender differences evident in the evaluation are in line with, but more pronounced than, the gender differences in the overall program. While much of this can be attributed to the greater moral maturity of girls at this age, it highlights the need for some specific emphasis on the moral development of boys. Given that the preponderance of crime is committed by males, an educational emphasis on values and moral decision making at this age is, at least, likely to be cost-effective and, at best, of considerable benefit to the future cohesion of society.

Finally, the study is proceeding with a sample size which is double the size of the one described in this study. The intervention package has been revised in the light of feedback received, mainly from teachers, and regular support and follow-up is being provided for teachers in an attempt to institute some uniformity in coverage. In addition, a second intervention group, consisting of a cohort receiving both the school-based intervention and a home-based intervention, has been introduced to the study and this group will also be receiving regular follow-up material. This will allow for a three-way comparison between this cohort, the cohort receiving only the school-based intervention and, finally, the control group.

Notes

1. A full list of items and their factor structure is available from the authors.
2. Data are available from the authors.
3. Full details of mean scores and standard deviations are available from the authors.

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