

A conceptual exploration of values education in the context of schooling in South Africa

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This article is based on the assumption that values education has much to offer to a country that is struggling to overcome a fractured moral landscape. Pursuing a modest agenda, the focus of the article is on values and values education in the context of schooling in South Africa. We suggest that debates about what constitutes values and values education raise important philosophical and pedagogical questions about what values are and which values should be prioritized. We contend that it is unlikely that values education will in any significant way meet the expectations of South Africa's Constitution and its national school curriculum intentions, if it is not underpinned by conceptual clarification of what values are in relation to the role that values education is expected to fulfil in South Africa's schools. Intended as a conceptual investigation, the article explores different interpretations, tensions and assumptions that confront the notions of values and values education. We suggest that the insights from such a conceptual clarification could provide an appropriate platform not only for a coherent approach to values education, but also for the more effectual transfer and take up of values in schools. We favour a pragmatist conception based on the notion 'shared goods' in terms of which values education in schools can lay the basis for dialogical encounters necessary for addressing our country's diverse and even divergent values orientations.

Keywords: conceptual exploration; critical individuation; moral fracture; pragmatist conception; shared goods; socialization; South African schools; values education; values

Introduction

There is arguably a serious decline in moral standards in many societies in general and among the young in particular (see Hill, 1991; Halstead & Taylor, 1996.) Commenting on the reasons for the perceived social moral decline, Weber (1990:89) suggests that

... the problem of pluralistic perspectivism on the one hand and postmodernism's critique of Western reason on the other, undercut the foundation for classical models of education to engender democratic competence and value formation.

It is interesting that Weber ostensibly links moral degradation to the rise of a kind of conceptual relativism that informs our understanding of moral formation. Taking a more global-sociological perspective, MacIntyre (1981) suggests that issues of morality and values formation have to be understood in the light of the complex reorientations of communities and their traditions in a global context. He explains that value formation for the young occurs within a global context that is constituted by the remnants and fragments of deconstructed value and belief systems, cultures, traditions and political arrangements. In this regard young people in South Africa face the challenge of holding in tandem the individual freedom to choose between the exercise of personal values, while retaining, as a priority, commonly prized values in a

democracy. To address the key questions that this article revolves around, we align ourselves with Warnock (1967), who points to the importance of conceptual clarification. We now go on to provide some definitional clarity that we suggest might be able to facilitate debate about values and values education in our country.

The literature indicates that 'values' is a fluid concept subject to different interpretations. Values have been described in everyday language as 'guides to action' or 'the moral compasses by which to navigate our interaction with members of society'. Hill (1991:4) describes values as "beliefs held by individuals to which they attach priority or worth and by which they tend to order their lives". Veugelers (2000:37) understands values as "judgments based on a notion of what is good or bad; they refer to concepts of a just life", while Morrow (1989) suggests that instead of referring to values we could also refer to rules or principles that guide social life. Halstead and Taylor (1996:2) hold that values refer to the "principles and convictions which act as general guides to behaviour, the standards by which particular actions may be judged to be good or bad", while Levy (1993:2) understands values as "preferences for a certain form of conduct".

We agree with Green (2004), who pointed out that the literature does not provide a common understanding of what values are. This lack of clarity leaves room for speculation and misinterpretation. For example, to interpret values in terms of 'beliefs' or 'accepted standards' or 'guides to action' or 'preferences for a certain form of conduct' is not very helpful. We would suggest that a guiding principle is required that will provide conceptual clarity on how to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable forms of conduct.

Some of these interpretations indicate that values are often mistakenly regarded as, and confused with, social norms and traditions. According to Birch and Rasmussen (1989), norms and traditions are social conventions that arise from, and are based on, habitual practices in particular societies. Such social conventions, norms and traditions are most likely to be strongly defined within homogenous social, religious, political or cultural contexts or within specific communities (Veugelers, 2000). So, even though such conventions, norms and traditions may be desirable and strongly held beliefs in particular communities and cultures, they may not necessarily be considered as moral by others. Even if, as Birch and Rasmussen (1989) suggest, values may be moral, non-moral or immoral, there still arise situations in which people differ about whether particular social issues are moral, traditional, customary or social conventions.

In an attempt to reach conceptual clarity about the meaning of values we proceed by asking whether drawing a distinction between 'values' and 'virtues' might be helpful, as it seems that in ordinary language these concepts are widely assumed to be synonymous. Williams (1995) challenges this assumption and argues that values and virtues are not synonyms that can be used interchangeably. He distinguishes between values and virtues on the basis that values refer to valuing qualities of things or persons that make them desirable, while virtues refer to good habits and a disposition of the will towards goodness. Williams (1995) concedes that values and virtues may at times intersect, but holds that while values may refer to what is deemed to be desirable, they are not necessarily moral, whereas virtues are moral by definition.

Values education

The umbrella term 'values education' is commonly understood as placing a particular emphasis on civic and moral values (Halstead & Taylor, 1996). Values education is therefore very closely aligned to other terms currently used in the literature, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Lickona (1991) and Halstead and Taylor (1996) refer to character

education, education in virtues and the development of attitudes and personal qualities. The values education literature from the United Kingdom mostly refers to “values education, character education, moral education, personal and social education, and citizenship education” (Lickona, 1991:12).

Munn (1995) and Halstead and Taylor (1996) show that academic publications in the United Kingdom mostly refer to ‘moral education’, while McLaughlin (2001) points out that in European literature the term ‘civic education’ is commonly used. It seems that the umbrella term ‘values education’ could be used interchangeably with other terms as it could refer to human rights education, citizenship education, active citizenship and moral education, which includes attention to attitudes and dispositions (see Bennett, 1992; Kohlberg, 1981; Nucci, 2001; Gutman, 1995).

Kohlberg’s (1981:425) understanding of values as “making decisions which are moral and acting in accordance with them” emphasises the link between decision making and agency (moral behaviour). This provides an understanding of values and values education that resonates with our own. If our aim is to improve moral decision making that translates into moral actions, then logically we should be referring to ‘moral education’ or ‘education in virtues’, but we don’t. Kohlberg (1981:57-58) lends support to this view and demonstrates the importance of getting our conceptual clarification right and that this is not merely a question of semantics. He argues that

... if I could not define virtue ... then could I really offer advice as to the means by which virtue could be taught? Could it really be argued that the means for teaching obedience to authority are the same as the means for teaching freedom of moral opinion ...? It appears then, that either we must be totally silent about moral education or else speak to the nature of virtue.

Veugeliers (2000) points out that the various terms used in the literature each has its own assumptions, epistemology and theoretical framework for values education. As a result of these differences, different models of values education are available which may potentially produce different outcomes. We conclude that, although different terms are being used in the literature that discusses values, the term values education seems to be widely accepted.

We prefer the term values education as it succinctly captures our understanding of values education as a collective, inclusive pedagogic endeavour in which formal and informal knowledges are important for successful values formation. While values education seems to be conceptualized in terms of civics or citizenship education in most countries, South Africa faces unique challenges in terms of how citizenship education is conceptualized. The intention of the Constitution is that citizenship education should enable South Africans to transcend the racial divisions and exclusionary values inherited from apartheid. Citizenship education should provide a basis in terms of which people can engender a common citizenship for all based on respect for human dignity. We now explore how citizenship education in South Africa is conceptualized in response to this intention.

Citizenship education in South Africa

The South African Constitution (1996) refers to critical and democratic citizenship. Ramphela (2008:126) points out that the language used in the preamble to the Constitution affirms a commitment to democratic practice and active citizenship. The key question for us is: how should active citizenship in a democratic South Africa be understood? According to Ramphela (2008: 130), two variants of citizenship dominated South Africa’s moral landscape before 1994, i.e.

the republican and liberal variants. Republican citizenship emphasizes self-governance and active participation in state affairs, while liberal citizenship places the emphasis on the individual rights and responsibilities of citizens. Robertson (2002) points out that what is common to a variety of definitions of citizenship is the reciprocal relationship between rights and responsibilities. Social life does not only consist of the exercising of rights or the acceptance of responsibilities, but is also constituted by moral codes which should guide citizens on how these rights should be exercised and mediated.

In line with democratic practice, a liberal-communitarian view allows each individual to pursue his or her personal interest, but it should be pointed out that liberal democracies also depend on active citizenship, i.e. the engagement of citizens in social and political processes, consideration for the welfare of others and strong moral codes for their continued existence. Waghid (2004) acknowledges this point when he argues that citizenship education in South Africa is guided by a combination of liberal and communitarian views of citizenship, but that this guiding principle is inadequate in itself to produce the desired outcome of active citizens who possess the mindsets, attitudes and values that enable democracies to thrive and to effect social transformation.

Gultig, Hoadley and Jansen (2001:10) alert us to the significance of conceptual clarity in the fostering of moral learning;

... if we are to intervene in the schooling process in order to foster moral learning and to improve its quality, to encourage its diversity and enrich its outcomes, to mediate and facilitate it, we need to develop an understanding of it.

A key question that arises is; what should the nature of values knowledge be that will empower learners to become active moral citizens in a democratic society? It is to a consideration of this that we now turn.

What is the nature of values knowledge?

Aristotle (1947) provided a framework in which he distinguishes between three different forms of knowledge: theory (know that), technique (know how to) and moral insight (know why). The latter he also referred to as contextual knowledge (*phronesis*) which in his view, acted as a moral framework for the way in which knowledge is used. Ryle (1971) developed an analytical framework for the classification of the nature of knowledge which exhibits strong Aristotelian influence. The framework adapted by Mason (1997) is particularly useful in understanding the categorization of knowledge embedded in South Africa's curriculum. Mason distinguishes between propositional, procedural and dispositional knowledge, which relates to 'knowing', 'doing' and 'being', or in the language of outcomes-based education: knowledge, skills and values. We acknowledge that 'knowledge' is a complex phenomenon and perhaps not so easily categorized, but still consider these frameworks as useful analytical tools to understand the distinctiveness of the knowledge of values.

Kerr suggests that each of these categories of knowledge translates into different approaches and theoretical content that have implications for how citizenship (values) education is conceptualized and transferred. According to Kerr (1999:22-29), these categories are:

- Education about citizenship which involves understanding of the governing structures and constitutional processes of civil society (propositional knowledge);
- Citizenship through education which prepares for active involvement and participation in community life (procedural knowledge);
- Education for active citizenship includes all of the above, but also aims to equip learners

with values to prepare them, as Waghid (2004) has pointed out, for compassionate citizenship.

The first approach has been criticized by Osler and Starkey (1996) as limited, because of its strong emphasis on propositional knowledge to the exclusion of other dimensions of knowledge such as human rights (citizenship education.) Tibbuts (1995) emphasized the second approach, but maintains that accompanying skills and values should be included. Reardon (1995) stressed the need for values to centrally inform human rights, as she believes that the moral aspects of rights are crucial to an appreciation and valuing of human rights, a view which is consistent with the third approach.

Turning to the South African context, the mandate “to infuse human rights into the national curriculum” was far from clear, according to Carrim & Keet (2005:99), who were members of the Human Rights and Inclusivity Working Group (HRIWG) involved in developing the Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS). They explain that this working group found it difficult to infuse human rights into the OBE curriculum, which prioritized procedural knowledge (Carrim & Keet, 2005: 99). Gultig *et al.* (2002:115) explain that “this focus on demonstrated, visible performance has the effect of emphasizing procedural knowledge at the expense of propositional knowledge”. Mason (1997) corroborates this position by highlighting that the learning of propositional and procedural knowledge without a firm grounding in a set of shared values creates unthinking technocrats. Gibson (1986:1-19) describes technocratic rationality as “a kind of intellectual activity which actually results in the decline of reason itself and therefore stultifies, distorts and limits individual and social growth”.

There is agreement in the literature that the development of strong moral codes is a necessary condition for active citizenship. Writing from a social constructivist approach, Haydon (1987) maintains that one of the most important aspects of morality is its concrete social reality. He explains that morality is not only embedded in abstract ideas (propositional knowledge) or knowing how to do things (procedural knowledge), but in the everyday lived realities of people as they engage in relationships in their social practices. If morality is exhibited in the way we live, as Haydon (1987) suggests, then we need to ask: what does it mean to live as an active moral citizen in South Africa?

Ramphela (2008:10) sees it as living with the “ghosts of the past”. Our contention is that being an active moral citizen in South Africa also means living with ‘the nightmares of the present’. South Africans are confronted by the HIV and AIDS pandemic which has left in its wake thousands of orphans, massive unemployment, poverty, displaced people and illegal immigrants who are desperate for scarce job and educational opportunities, and many other social ills. According to Ramphela (2008:12), we now live in a society permeated by a culture of personal entitlement, personal enrichment, corruption, moral relativism parading on the crutches of cultural pluralism and many other visible signs of the ‘I, me and myself’ pathology that should be a matter of concern for all.

Waghid (2004:528) picks up on this challenge when he warns that “individuals cannot simply pursue their own self-interest without regard for the common good”. The point is that members in a democracy usually value, claim and defend their individual freedom of choice in respect of their personal value choices, but they ought to equally value a society where there is adherence to the common good. This is a challenge for all democracies, including South Africa. As Waghid (2004) suggests, the promotion of the public good depends on citizens’ active participation in the political process. Kymlicka (2000:285) maintains that “without citizens who possess these qualities, democracies become difficult to govern, even unstable”.

In his critique of the republican view of citizenship, Kymlicka (1999:883-905) points out

that “citizenship education is not simply a matter of knowledge of political processes and functions of social institutions. It is also a matter of how we think about and behave towards others”. Waghid (2004:44) advocates a similar view when he says that “learners are educated to act responsibly ... yet this would not necessarily guarantee that learners would become morally just”. The implication is that our current understanding of citizenship education might be impoverished and too narrow, and that it could potentially be extended beyond simplistic expressions of rights and responsibilities to include active participation of citizens in political processes as well as addressing how we treat and behave towards others.

Following from this, the next point to consider is whether individual or common values should be given priority in institutions of education and at what stage a critical disposition towards values education as socialization or critical individuation should take place. The focus in the next section is to open up conceptual space for a more plausible account of education for active citizenship.

Values priorities in education

Kohlberg (1981) sees moral development as part of a maturation process that can be facilitated but not unduly hastened. His account of how people develop through this process is linked to Piaget’s theory of cognitive development. Kohlberg (cited in Nucci, 2004) rejects the idea that values education could be comprised of a moral agenda handed to educators that spells out lists of values to be learnt without due consideration of the stage of moral development that learners have reached. Rorty (1990) reminds us that we should not lose sight of the fact that (values) education involves two distinct but equally necessary stages or processes: socialization and critical individuation. For Rorty, the issue of the stage at which a critical disposition towards values education as socialization or critical individuation should be developed entails understanding the purpose and nature of these processes. In everyday parlance ‘socialization’ refers to a continuing process whereby an individual acquires the norms, values, behaviour and social skills of her society. The purpose of this process is conscious social and cultural reproduction, that is, induction into the norms, values, customs and traditions valued by this society (Rorty, 1990).

Dewey (1964) sees socialization as a process of shaping an ‘animal’ into a human being, followed by the self-individuation and self-creation of that human being through his or her later revolt against and questioning of that very process. Balibar (2004), in support of Dewey’s position, maintains that the school holds a particular ‘place of transition’ between private and public life. He believes that one of the functions of schooling is to prepare students for entering the public sphere of citizenship. It involves a process of adjusting their primary identities as private individuals to assume a secondary identity as citizens of the modern state. Balibar (2004:358) explains that in this process the school

... has to virtually detach individuals from their primary identities ... (which is a violent process ... — a sort of dismemberment, a separation from their identities), but which then ideally allows these identities to be claimed ... in terms of a common political identity.

Detaching individuals from their socialized identities depends on cultivating a critical disposition towards, and having deliberative discussions about, the accepted rules, norms and values (received ideas) of society, which, according to Bak (2004:45), can already begin at primary school level. The aim of this deliberative attitude towards learners’ socialization is to empower them with thinking tools to make sound moral decisions and engage in moral behaviour.

If one takes on board the views of Rorty, Dewey, Balibar and Bak, then schools should provide the appropriate environment for socialization augmented by critical individuation,

which is a process of inciting doubt, stimulating the imagination and inducing critical thinking, thereby challenging and removing the barriers that socialization inevitably imposes. We therefore contend that education for active citizenship in schools ought to extend beyond an emphasis on rights and responsibilities and the symbols of citizenship. It ought to empower learners to recognize and engage with present-day challenges facing society in order to foster a commitment to developing a reorientation away from the values and practices defined by racism, a lack of respect for human dignity and devaluing of diversity. Enabling students to contribute actively to the common good beyond minimalist liberal citizenship expectations is necessary, but education cannot succeed in doing this alone; it needs support and sanction from society. Morrow (1989) alerts us to the importance of a societal culture conducive to complementing and underpinning a vigorous critical educational platform. He explains that “immature human beings are dependent not only for their survival, but also for development into rational beings on the benevolent (compassionate) actions of the human beings amongst whom they live” (Morrow, 1989:117).

Implications for values education in South Africa

In the light of these views, what are the implications for values education in South Africa? We believe that the debate about values education in South Africans should acknowledge the different interpretations of ‘values,’ ‘values education’ and ‘citizenship education’, and work towards a pragmatic and shared inter-subjective understanding of the meaning that should be ascribed to these notions. Morrow (1989:176) provides some insight into such a pragmatist position when he alerts us to the importance of values as ‘shared goods’. He suggests that,

... shared goods are not merely the convergence of various interests, but articulation of principles which give unity and direction to the life of the community ... their common appreciation is constitutive of them ... what binds a community together is shared goods.

Without these shared goods, processes of generating social cohesion would suffer the loss of a sense of common purpose and a shared future. Morrow’s view alerts us to those moral positions that minimally bind societies and help to lay out the terrain for inter-subjective generative processes. Observance of the rule of law and respect for diversity, for example, are regarded as shared values or moral dispositions that every South African is bound to observe. Failure to do so would continue to lead to speculation, conceptual confusion and conflicting opinions as to what values are and the role of values in society. Furthermore, the distinction between values and virtues — what is desirable and what is moral, or in simplistic terms what is good or bad or right or wrong — is crucial as a guiding principle for negotiating and navigating the confusing maze of relations that constitute social life.

The national curriculum’s preoccupation with procedural knowledge appears to be incongruent with the Constitution’s expectation of generating an active, critical citizenry. It is apparent, therefore, that the curriculum as the ‘social instrument’ meant to facilitate values acquisitions is conceptually misaligned with the Constitution. As Kymlicka (2000:888) pointed out “citizenship education is not simply a matter of knowledge of political and constitutional institutions (procedural knowledge). It is also a matter of how we think and behave towards others”. We would thus argue that the school curriculum should be conceptually aligned to a broader conception of values that combines propositional, procedural and dispositional knowledge orientations. This, we suggest, will open up conceptual space for a critical and active citizenship orientation to values education in our country’s schools.

We advance the view that a commitment to values education in schools, alert to the requirements for building a shared understanding about which values might be best fostered in

classrooms, informed by an appreciation of how values may be properly taught at the different levels of the schooling system, remains the key to generating a questioning and productive citizenry in South Africa. Values education has much to offer to a society that is experiencing an increase in moral arbitrariness, a lack of understanding of what is moral action is, and incipient relativist views about our commitment to eradicating gender, class and racial inequalities. Informed by an ethics of mutuality, values education in schools could lay a basis for dialogical encounters that can engage our fractured values orientations.

Conclusion

This article sought to address what is meant by values and values education in the context of South Africa's education system. Our position is that it is unlikely that values education will in any significant way meet the expectations of the Constitution and the revised school curriculum if it is not informed by careful clarification. An important conclusion drawn from this article is the need for further ongoing discussion, intelligent deliberation and reconceptualization of values education in South Africa's national curriculum. We are aware of the fact that there remain unexamined aspects and challenges relating to values education that still need to be resolved. We acknowledge that the current policy orientations of the government fall short in providing a basis for productive values education in schools. We believe that the resolution of these shortcomings is a precondition for a coherent policy for values education.

The final issue that we raise relates to the silences, gaps, challenges and unresolved issues between the expectations set forth for values education in the Constitution and the lived reality of values education in the context of South Africa's schools. If the expectation is that values education should prepare learners and students for active citizenship, then the curriculum should be aligned to this expectation. It should be geared towards preparing them purposefully and adequately to acquire the conceptual tools needed for active citizenship in a democratic society. This article has aimed to provide one response to the ongoing investigation and elaboration of the best way to address these issues.

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