

Values education for all schools and systems: A justification and experimental update

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The article sets out to address two issues, one theoretical and the other experimental. The theoretical issue concerns the appropriateness of values education as a component of all schooling, especially in public education settings. The growing acceptance that this is the case challenges former conceptions about the defined limits of public versus private education. The experimental issue concerns an update of studies around curriculum intervention in values education. Results of a recent study that centred on a formalized international program in values education are compared with those of an earlier study that centred on a less formal, school-based program. Addressing the two issues challenges two commonly held assumptions that have potential to retard the development of values education: first, that values education is not an appropriate component of public education; and, second, that values education is not capable of having practical curriculum impact.

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, each state and territory education system in Australia has been actively promoting its system and teachers as inculcators of the essential values that define being Australian. The Australian Government captured this movement well, and put its own seal on it, in its 'Civics Expert Group' report in 1994 (DEETYA, 1994). Be it under the aegis of civics, citizenship or plain values education, it is now commonly accepted that an essential component of public education's responsibilities is to be found in the work of inculcating values in its students. In short, public education is now defined as a comprehensive educator, not just chartered against cognitive and practical skills but as an inculcator of personal morality and cohesive citizenry. Furthermore, curricula related to civics, citizenship and values education have been designed and trialled in a variety of forms, both freestanding and integrated into mainstream syllabuses. The above state of affairs has not been without its critics both from within and beyond the realm of public education. Criticism has come in different forms. One criticism comes from the belief that public schooling was designed essentially as a haven of values-neutrality. Another comes from scepticism about the capacity of any school to manage, and have impact in, an area that is commonly seen as being totally subjective and therefore untestable. The purpose of this article is to challenge these two chief criticisms.

Public Education and Values Education

Those responsible for the foundations of public education in Australia were sufficiently pragmatic to know that its success relied on its charter being in accord with public sentiment. Part of the pragmatism was in convincing those whose main experience of education had been through some form of church-based education that state-based education was capable of meeting the same ends. Religious and moral education had been at the heart of all forms of church-based education but was especially so within Catholic education where religious orders increasingly made up the major part of the teaching force. For Mary MacKillop, for instance, teaching young people to be moral citizens was a very explicit part of the mission of her Catholic schools in colonial Australia (Modystack, 2000). At that stage, Catholic education was the largest and most comprehensive of the church-based systems and the 'convict Church' was always likely to be the most resistant to state-based, and therefore 'establishment', education. This is not to suggest that the founders of public education did not truly believe in religious and

moral education but merely that these social realities quite likely sharpened their rhetoric around them.

Whatever the precise motives, 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. As an instance, the NSW Public Instruction Act of 1880 (NSW, 1912), under the rubric of 'religious teaching', stressed the need for students to be inculcated into the values of their society, including understanding the role that religious values had played in forming that society's legal codes and social ethics. 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 character as well.

For all the attempts to position public education as the comprehensive educator, and so capable of supplanting the role played by church-based education, the history of both the country and the times was against it. The late nineteenth-century was a time of sharp division between secular and religious forces and, within the religious forces, between Protestantism and Catholicism. For the Catholic Church, the fact that the Protestant churches surrendered their education systems to the state would simply have confirmed the view that the Protestant churches were overly disposed to establishment agendas. As a result, the Catholic system of education went forward on its own, with the Archbishop of Sydney of the time declaring that the new public education system was a godless, secularist option that would see Catholic parents, if not their progeny, in hell if they dared even consider sending their children there (O'Farrell, 1985). It must be said that this was an indefensible and unhelpful view that virtually no educator, Catholic or otherwise, would hold to today. However, in the very sectarian late nineteenth century, this view had the power to skew the way education developed. For one thing, granted that Catholic education was the single largest educational force of the day, its loud self-proclamation as the only legitimate religious and moral educator was bound to affect the charter that developed around public education. Among many practical effects, it seemed that public educators moved away deliberately from their charter around religious and moral education, preferring to leave this to the church.

If the move to values neutrality in public education was an aberration, then the efforts of the 1990s and early 2000s could be regarded as a corrective. Responding both to community pressure and the realization that values-neutrality is an inappropriate ethic for any agency of formation, every state and territory has re-stated the original view that public education's charter includes responsibility for personal integrity and social justice. This movement has been evident not only in government reports but in academic and professional literature. As an instance, the 2002 Yearbook of the supreme professional body of teachers, the Australian College of Educators, was devoted to values education (Pascoe, 2002). The pinnacle of the movement, however, was seen in the 2003 Australian Government report on values education. The Executive Summary re-states the positions of the nineteenth-century charters of public education in asserting that values education '... refers to any explicit and/or implicit school-based activity to promote student understanding and knowledge of values, *and* (emphasis ours) to inculcate the skills and dispositions of students so they can enact particular values as individuals and as members of the wider community.' (DEST, 2003 p.2)

The Government report was initially endorsed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), a group that represents all state and

territory Education ministers in association with the Federal Minister. At the meeting that endorsed its terms of reference, MCEETYA noted the following:

- that education is as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific skills;
- that values-based education can strengthen students' self-esteem, optimism and commitment to personal fulfilment; and help students exercise ethical judgment and social responsibility; and,
- that parents expect schools to help students understand and develop personal and social responsibilities. (DEST, 2003 p. 10)

The final report was preceded by 50 funded projects designed, in part, to serve as the case study data for the report. While these projects differed markedly from each other and functioned across all systems of education, most of them had in common a focus on practical behaviour change as an outcome. The report states that, for the most part, '... the 50 final projects (which involved 69 schools) were underpinned by a clear focus on building more positive relationships within the school as a central consideration for implementing values education on a broader scale.' (DEST, 2003 p. 3)

The preamble to the draft principles which were developed as a result of the study states explicitly that education is '... as much about building character as it is about equipping students with specific skills. They (the principles) also recognize that schools are not value-free or value-neutral zones of social and educational engagement.' (DEST, 2003 p. 12) Among the draft principles is one that speaks of values education as part of the explicit charter of schooling, rather than in any way incidental to its goals. It also makes it clear that it is not designed merely as an intellectual exercise but is aimed at changing behaviour by promoting care, respect and cooperation. Another principle speaks of the need for values education to be managed through a '...developmentally appropriate curriculum that meets the individual needs of students' (DEST, 2003:12), while yet another addresses the need for '...clearly defined and achievable outcomes...(being) evidence-based and ...(using) evaluation to monitor outcomes.' (DEST, 2003 p. 13) The first principle identified above clearly re-establishes the charter for values education as part and parcel of all education, while the latter two principles are directly pertinent to the empirical studies which will be outlined in the second section of this article.

With the Australian Government report, the aberration of values-neutrality in public education has finally been put to rest in complete fashion at the highest and most representative levels of Australian education. Appropriately, the report does not differentiate between public, private and religious systems of schooling, nor do the case study analyses find any substantial difference in the directionality or outcomes of the projects that operated across these systems. On the basis of this evidence at least, public and private education systems are as one in their charter around values education and in their capacity to implement it. At the same time, the report has thrown down the gauntlet to all education systems to design and implement practical curricular means of effecting and evaluating values education. This brings us to the second consideration of this paper.

Curriculum Intervention in Values Education: A Comparison of Studies

In earlier curricular interventions around values education undertaken by the authors (Schofield & Lovat, 1991; Lovat & Schofield, 1998; Lovat, Schofield et al., 2002), the intervention materials were school-based, designed by the researchers in conjunction with teachers from the intervention schools. In one study, additional resources were developed for parents to use with their children in order to reinforce the message being given in the school. In all cases, while some of the lessons were initially devised as separate entities, the message given to all

participating teachers was that the lessons were intended to be integrated into normal classroom lessons, so that values education was not seen as a separately timetabled entity. The reason for the preference towards an integrated approach related to a growing trend for the values component to be integrated into mainstream curricula. While much of this trend was not formalized in New South Wales until the later years of the 1990s, it was nonetheless an obvious trend from the early 1990s.

The program, *Living Values Education Program* (LVEP, 2001), is an international values education program which operates in over 80 countries, many of them non-Western. It was produced under the auspices of UNESCO, is sponsored by the Spanish National Committee of UNICEF and was managed initially by the international association, the Brahma Kumaris (BK) (Whaling, 1995). The various national coordinators of LVEP have met annually at Nuneham Courtenay, near Oxford, England, to monitor progress and engage in training and re-training. The Australian LVE Association was formed in 2003 in Newcastle, allowing the authors ease of access to both the materials and the coordination group.

LVEP is designed to be taught in primary schools and anecdotal evidence from members of the group suggested that it had been well received internationally. The material was judged to be well produced and of apparent high standard. It did not seem to be overly controversial, nor significantly at odds with material that might be used in a normal NSW primary school classroom, yet it clearly had a focus reflecting its cross-cultural and global roots. The program structure was built around a series of eight discrete units which could be taught in any order, with two units being recommended for each year of the four years of upper primary schooling. The LVE association had been offering regular two-day training sessions, wherein induction into LVEP was provided free of charge to participating teachers. Teachers participating in the intervention component of the study at hand were offered this training option and accepted.

In the context of the intervention study, two units were selected to be taught across the school year. Nine schools agreed to be part of the project, with four randomly allocated to the control group and the others to the intervention group. A tenth school had already been teaching the program for a year, so its involvement was restricted to a validation study and all data was kept separately. The other nine schools all claimed to have no free-standing values education program in place, although all indicated that they conformed to NSW Department of Education and Training (NSWDET) guidelines on the integration of values education in the mainstream curriculum. This latter fact would present as vital when the results of the study became known.

A new evaluation instrument was devised, one that was based on the specific content of the two units which were being taught. The process from the earlier study of settling on a suitable instrument was replicated in that an original item bank of 40 statements was trialled on a small group of students of similar age to the target group. Items which were too complex, or which the trial group of students indicated were not representative of language used by their peers, were excluded. This left 22 items to be used, though later factor analysis further reduced the number to 19 items, under three factors labelled as 'respect for others', 'self respect', and 'interpersonal peace'. These 19 items then comprised the quantitative instrument for pre and post-testing. It was similar to the instrument used in the earlier study, but this time was adapted to suit the LVEP curriculum.

A total of 819 students were pre-tested early in Term 1 across the ten schools. Prior to testing, permission was required from parents for the testing to take place, although permission was not required for involvement in the program as this was considered by the schools to be an integral part of their curriculum. Training for teachers was also undertaken early in Term 1, with relief teachers being supplied to enable the participating teachers to attend the training session. The actual teaching of the program began approximately half way through Term 1, immediately after

pre-testing was completed. In the spirit of what is recommended for the program, the program was intended to be taught as a series of discrete lessons, with integration being at the discretion of the individual teacher. This represented a change of direction from the earlier study, where the preference had been towards integration into the mainstream curriculum. Post-testing began in week 6 of Term 4, allowing for an intervention period of approximately three of the schools' four terms. Again, parental permission was required for the post-test.

As the authors were at pains to say of the earlier study, any findings regarding the efficacy of the intervention must be considered with caution. The caution relates to the general difficulty of avoiding contamination in the complex and 'message-noisy' world of schools, to the more specific issue of limited sample size, and, especially, to the lack of clear differentiation between intervention and control groups. Owing to a number of exigencies, the authors finally settled on there being three groups requiring differential analysis, namely, control, intervention and what was finally described as 'suspect intervention', where a range of practical matters had interfered with the intended 'purity' of the intervention. The effect in this last group was that it was in many ways closer to the environment of the control group, though some measure of intervention needed to be factored in.

Separating the 'suspect intervention' group out from the other two more regular experimental groups seemed to allow for clearer analysis of findings. From this, it became clear that the post-test results of students from the 'pure' intervention group did not show any significant change for any of the three variables, seeming to suggest initially that the intervention had not had any direct effect. However, the post-test results of students from both the control group and the 'suspect' intervention group did show significantly higher scores across all three variables. In other words, when left to their own devices (or largely so, as was thought to be the case for the 'suspect' intervention group), teachers were apparently teaching, and students were learning about, values in ways that impacted positively across three terms of a year. In this context, the international program did not seem to have the same direct impact, at least as far as the instrument was able to measure it.

While the results from the study were not as originally anticipated, they were nonetheless encouraging and challenging for a number of reasons. In particular, they suggested that the move over the last decade or so to incorporate values education into every aspect of the curriculum might be bearing fruit. In the earlier study, it was fairly safe to assume that a control group was not being exposed to a curriculum in values education in any other form. In this later study, this was clearly not the case. The acknowledged conformity of the curriculum of all the schools to NSWDET guidelines on the integration of values education into mainstream curricula was apparently having a positive effect. While excellent news for those advocating values education, it nonetheless presents a new challenge to those researching it. It may be that the instrument being used, largely replicating one used in the earlier study, was simply not sufficiently fine-tuned to capture this new situation. Also, it is important to say that the instrument might not be well-tuned to detecting the effects of LVEP, which is a program aimed heavily towards self-reflection and self-awareness, with specific outcomes seen as a more distant goal. In this respect, the program is different from the earlier school-based one which may have been more accommodating of quantitative analysis.

If the difference between the impacts found in intervention, suspect intervention and control groups can be taken as significant in any way, it may be confirming the hypothesis of the earlier study that the optimal approach in values education is to integrate it as far as possible into the mainstream curriculum, rather than encasing it in a separate program. Certainly, the strongest finding from the earlier study was that the most obvious impact came in those values dimensions which related directly to the students' experiences. From this, it is surmised that, as

values and morals for young people tend to revolve around the particular concerns of their own fairly limited world, the business of teaching about and inculcating values must be done in a way that connects to that world. While there may well be a debate around the relevance of the mainstream curriculum generally to that world, at least within the context of the school, the mainstream curriculum is part of their world, for good or ill. Within that reality, learning issues of all kinds can be dealt with, including learning about values. Care must be taken therefore to embed the content and the language of values education within the fabric of the students' daily lives and to ensure that the values in focus are translated into concepts understandable and relevant to any young person and, specifically, to the young people taking part in the study. This must be the case whether the curriculum is school-based and localized or one drawn from a wider context.

It is hardly a new finding for educators that immediate relevance is one of the keys to engaging student attention and contributing to student learning. However, it is a finding that may need to be underlined when dealing with programs generated from beyond the school, and especially when dealing with a program pitched to a global audience. Getting the balance right between the school-based and the global curriculum would seem to be an important goal for values education. The former clearly has the greater potential for immediate relevance, but the latter carries the overwhelming value of conveying a cross-cultural, non-partisan and wider world view.

In summary, a central lesson to be learned from the study is that teaching and evaluation around values education must be carefully targeted to the more restricted world of student concerns. Allied to this is the probable lesson that more sophisticated packaging with an international focus does not necessarily equate to a more effective teaching and learning experience. Indeed, it is possible that, without care to make the links with the practical worlds of student concerns, an international focus may actually exacerbate a sense of irrelevance. There are fine lines to be drawn for teachers and curriculum designers in all fields in order to capture that middle ground where students can engage with learning that both speaks to their concerns yet draws them out to consideration of realities beyond those concerns.

Other findings from the study at hand seemed to confirm earlier findings that values education has potential to engage staff and students in meaningful and enjoyable work. Certainly, in the earlier study, the most enthusiastic responses came through the course evaluation, where both staff and students commented positively about the then rare experience of being engaged in a values education program. While the same formalities were not followed in evaluating LVEP, nonetheless, anecdotal reports from the site of the 'pure' intervention group were that things went well. Both teachers and students seemed to react positively to the challenge of working with the international program, including dealing with issues of global concern. These results in themselves remain positive and encouraging to those advocating the importance of values education.

It would seem to be important for Australian educators to make use of an international program with the credentials of LVEP, however, this will need to be done in a way that ensures it fits maximally not only with the general world of global concerns but also with the curriculum worlds of its participants. It may be that this study has provided some rare indication that values education is alive and well in its integrated state within the mainstream curriculum. However, it is unlikely that what is occurring is sufficient, granted the high stakes being claimed for values education by governments, the teaching profession and the community. The curricular vehicles are still far from comprehensive or definitive. In this context, it would seem that LVEP has much to contribute but simple insertion of it into the student day, without ensuring its fit within the mainstream curriculum, is unlikely to be the most satisfactory way to move forward.

Conclusion

The article set out to challenge the commonly held assumptions that values education is not an appropriate component of public education nor capable of having practical curriculum impact. These assumptions, if left unchallenged, have potential to constrain the natural evolution of values education, especially in the public education setting. Regarding its appropriateness to public education, the article has drawn on governmental documentary sources from the beginnings of public education to today in asserting that values education should always have been, and must be today, seen as part of the charter of public education as well as clearly being a proper attachment to private, and especially religious, schooling. Regarding its potential for practical curriculum impact, the article has demonstrated that values education curricula can make a measurable difference in students' responses. It has done this now via data emanating from two different studies, one built around a school-based and localized curriculum intervention, and the other one a curriculum professionally developed and international in its focus. While there are idiosyncratic differences in the nature of the outcomes from these two studies, these differences may be able to be explained by the nature of the very different types of curricula being used in the two studies, and possibly by the fact that the evaluation instrument was more suitable to one of these programs than the other. Regardless, the very important common feature to be found across the two studies is that values education does not leave students where they began. In every trial to hand, the evidence is that values education has capacity for practical curriculum impact. In conclusion, values education is increasingly being regarded and practised as a standard feature of all schooling and its curricula, with the allied need to be subjected to normal regimes of design, development and evaluation, including through increasingly comprehensive and sensitive research.

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