

The national framework for values education: Implications for teacher research

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In order for values education to become part and parcel of mainstream schooling, especially in public systems, the closest possible links need to be found between it and the world of teachers and schools. Teaching, once a profession whose systems focussed preponderantly on the more academically selective portion of the population, especially towards the top end where the more academically gifted set the practical benchmarks for goals, objectives and outcomes, is now a profession whose systems have to find the point of relevance for education of all comers because the social agency role of schooling has expanded beyond even the very lofty goals of its foundation advocates.

Teaching was once a profession in Australia that was geared unapologetically to the learning and cultural preferences of the hegemonic white, largely Anglo-Celtic, Christian or Jewish population. It is now a profession that has to accommodate the languages and cultural norms of one of the world's great polyglot societies, including the indigenous portion of that society. It also has to accommodate the religious beliefs of traditions with a dominant history of conflict within and between themselves. In some cases, increasingly on the edges of our major cities, we find the kinds of cultural melting pots that once characterized the peculiar charm of Beirut, Barcelona and Kosovo. In their midst, we find the modern teacher and the modern challenge of teaching.

As well, teaching was once a profession with a seemingly containable set of responsibilities. Essentially, the teacher's job was to inculcate the literacies of language, mathematics, science, history and the arts. Especially in the public setting though, in my own view, not so differently in religious and independent schooling, there was a tradition, if not policy, of segregation of the academic from the private. Public school teachers dealt with the academic as it was part of the world of public knowledge. They did not, however, venture into the private domain of personal morality, belief and practical conduct, unless the latter brought students explicitly into conflict with the rules of the school. If any agency had a right to enter the private domain, it was exclusively the family and perhaps the church. This too has changed. With the greater breakdown of family life as once known, the greater fluidity of the moral authority of religion over the mainstream population, and in the face of what are seen to be the more complex social issues of a heterogeneous society as well as the global issues of a divided world with powers of self-immolation, the role of the school and the teacher is turned to increasingly as a major socializing force, beyond that of academic tutelage, with assumed power to be able to make some difference around these things. Teachers now often find themselves playing the roles of stand-in parent and even counsellor at the local level, as well as semi-public intellectuals about world events.

Clearly, these changes, that have nothing to do with values education *per se*, have nonetheless created an environment more conducive to the acceptance of values education as a natural attachment to the roles of the teacher and the school. Moreover, the environment is not only conducive to values education as an academic exercise but to it as a practical agency of moral

formation. Whether they like it or not, teachers cannot stand wholly apart from this role any longer. The only questions now are around the extent of the role, the kinds of strategies (including curricula) that the teacher should use in playing this role and, of course, performing evaluation studies that allow us to know how effective or not these strategies are in inculcating the ideas and behaviours associated with moral formation.

It is at this point that one will tend to run into opposition from a large slice of the education community. So fixed is it in the mind of many teachers and executives that the role of the teacher is a more limited one many will not easily accept the idea of stepping into the private domain where teachers make the kind of difference that can actually “change one’s stars”, not just in an academic sense but in a personal and moral sense. Here again, we find there are events occurring quite independently of values education that may well create quite different expectations in the next generation of teachers.

Especially for those teachers trained in the 1970s and 1980s, there was a dominant credo that limited teachers’ self-perception of their role. It was captured well in the words of the educational sociologist, Christopher Jencks. Jencks proposed that ‘...the character of a school’s output depends largely on a single input, namely the characteristics of the entering children.’ (1972: 256) This was the classic “you can’t make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear” kind of belief. In other words, there is not much that a teacher can really do to change the stars that have already determined the fate of one’s students, primarily through their physical and familial heritage, and one shouldn’t beat oneself up too much trying to achieve the unachievable. Now, if this belief related to the teacher’s incapacity to make much of a difference even around the business of academic prowess, how totally incapacitating was the belief around issues of instilling personal and social morality. If teachers could not even rely on their role to take a student struggling with literacy and numeracy to truly new standards of achievement, then what hope could there be of convincing them they could play a determinative role in moral formation?

In the 1990s, however, the Jencks thesis was well and truly challenged by a raft of educational research around the notion of “quality teaching” (cf. Newmann, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997). This was highly interventionist research designed to show once and for all whether the power of the teacher was in fact as minimal as Jencks had supposed or whether it could effect change in students’ prospects. A number of key researchers conducted some of the most wide-ranging research ever held in trying to determine this central question. In short, what they discovered, and what is now generally held to be true, was that the power of the teacher to effect change was limited only by the extent to which one did not fully utilize all the capacity one had, or perhaps to the extent that one’s training had been deficient.

Studies were conducted that pitted virtually every category of disadvantage (cf Jencks) against the power of “quality teaching”. In many cases, the studies were around comparisons with equivalent non-disadvantaged cohorts matched with what came to be known as “ineffective teaching”. To the astonishment of a sceptical public, in virtually all cases the results showed that where the disadvantaged (including even disabled) cohorts were facilitated by quality teaching, and their non-disadvantaged equivalent cohort was being supported by ineffective teaching, it was the disadvantaged who were shown to achieve at a greater rate. In short, when faced with all Jencks “chestnut” barriers to learning, be they based on gender, class, language or even disabilities of sorts, quality teaching had the power to overturn the disadvantage. The power of

quality teaching had been demonstrated almost beyond contention. This now almost truism is to be found in the thinking of most systems, including in Australia, effectively replacing the earlier Jencksian thesis with a new anthem around teacher quality (Rowe, 2004). In Queensland, the *New Basics* project was run out in the late 1990s around the belief in the power of “productive pedagogies”, a concept that captured a central belief in the comprehensive power of positive teaching to impact on student learning across a range of indicators (Qld, 1999). In WA, Loudon et al., (2004) have engaged in intensive analyses of classroom practice that illustrate the relative effects of socio-economic readiness in the face of the overwhelming effects of quality teaching. In NSW, we have experienced the rollout of the system’s Quality Teacher Program (NSW, 2000; 2003), with the dominant assertions in its foreground: ‘The quality of student learning outcomes is directly dependent on the quality of the teacher.’ (NSW, 2000:2) and ‘(it) is the quality of pedagogy that most directly and most powerfully affects the quality of learning.’ (NSW, 2003:4)

But what is quality teaching? It is in probing this question that the inherent connection with values education becomes particularly and perhaps surprisingly stark. Quality teaching has been defined in various ways within different projects. Among the differences, however, there is a discernible pattern that has stretched the conception of “teacher” beyond its former constraints. Beyond the expected criteria related to qualifications and updated skills, there are more subtle features that speak, for instance, of “intellectual depth”. This is a concept that identifies the need not only to drive students towards dealing with the full array of facts and details related to any topic (in other words to avoid surface factual learning), but to induct students into the skills of interpretation, communication, negotiation, and reflection. In a word, the teacher’s job is well beyond preparing students for “get the answer right” standardized testing, but to engage the students’ more sophisticated skills levels around such features as “inter-relational capacity” and “self-reflection”. Inter-relational capacity takes in many of the dispositions necessary to a highly developed social conscience and self-reflection may be taken as the basis of a truly integrated and owned personal morality. In other words, it is not just the surface factual learning so characteristic of education of old that is to be surpassed, it is surface learning in general that is to be traded in favour of a learning that engages the whole person in depth of cognition, emotion and self-knowledge.

For those who know his work, it will not be surprising to learn that the thinking of Jurgen Habermas (1972; 1974; 1990; 2001), the German philosopher, has been instrumental in much of the educational thought that lies behind the moves towards deepening the learning of our youth and stretching the role of the teacher. I say now of these moves what I said about Habermas when first studying him for my own PhD a quarter of a century ago: it all reminds me of the work of the mystics, the mystics of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and of the profound spiritualities of personhood to be found in the likes of Hinduism and Buddhism. For Habermas, the alleged agnostic, it is quite a feat to have brought to life in modern education these forms of mainstream spirituality. Beyond the importance of base technical learning (that is, the knowledge of facts and figures), Habermas spoke when it was entirely unfashionable of the more challenging and authentic learning of what he described as “communicative knowledge” (that is, the knowledge that results from engagement and interrelationship with others) and of “self-reflectivity” (that is, the knowledge that comes from knowing oneself). For Habermas, this latter was the supreme knowledge that marked a point of having arrived as a human being.

There is no knowing without knowing the knower, he would say, and the knower is oneself. In a sense, the ultimate point of the learning game is to be found in knowing oneself.

There have been several attempts in the English-speaking world to capture some of these thoughts and find their application to the formalities of schooling. Stenhouse (1975) was one of the first curriculum theorists to stretch earlier work done by Bloom (1956) and Krathwohl et al. (1964) around taxonomies of learning and to make application to the practical world of curriculum planning and design. Stenhouse did not resile from the importance of instilling strong foundations in children's learning, foundations which were best managed by learning functions he described as "training" and "instruction". These were hardly new concepts in the exploration and elaboration of learning. The important balance of Stenhouse, however, was in his estimation of training and instruction functions as constituting only the beginning of learning. His great contribution was in reminding educators that the grand vision of learning was way beyond those technical detailed, facts-and-figures goals that occupy so much space in the average curriculum. Instead, the true end of learning was in drawing people into the higher learning functions of what he described as "initiation" (where one grasps and truly understands for oneself) and "induction" (where one comes to own, value and believe for oneself).

While quality teaching research is often said to have revived the importance of training and, especially, instruction (Fallon, 2003), it has, far more importantly, ratified the grand vision of Stenhouse. Quality teaching research has illustrated the true and full power of the teacher to make a difference in student learning not only around the technical (or factual), but around the interpretive (or social) and reflective (or personal) as well (after Habermas, 1972; see also Lovat & Smith, 2003). The notion of "intellectual depth" is teased out to illustrate that the teacher's job is far more than simply preparing students for "get the answers right" forms of testing but to engage the students' more sophisticated skills levels around such features as "inter-relational capacity" and "self-reflection" as well.

In the USA, it was the Carnegie Corporation's 1994 Task Force on Learning (Carnegie, 1994) that in many ways impelled the modern era of Quality Teaching. It represented a turning point in the dominant conceptions placed on the role of the school and, in turn, on the power of teaching to effect change in student achievement. It also played a part in identifying the range of learning skills that should constitute student achievement. Beyond the more predictable aspects of intellectual development, the Task Force report introduced for the modern era notions of learning concerned with communication, empathy, reflection, self-management and the particularly intriguing notion of self-knowing. It is also explicit in making the point that, while heritage and upbringing can make a difference to the ease with which these forms of learning can be achieved, they are in no way certain predictors of success. Consistent with the era of Quality Teaching which the report in some ways ushered in, the final onus is placed on the school (especially the early years of school) and the teacher in making the bigger difference.

There are other criteria found commonly in the literature of quality teaching that merely serve to support and affirm the above essential positioning of education and the teacher. One of these is "relevance". The quality teacher is one who can find the point of relevance for students around any topic. The notion of relevance is teased out to illustrate that teaching is not about imposing fixed ideas from on high but entails the art of connecting and being seen to connect with the real

worlds of students. The quality teacher is one who is able to enter these worlds with comfort and conviction and win the trust of the students in his or her care.

Another criterion is variously titled “supportiveness”. It further reinforces the notion that the quality teacher will be at pains to construct a positive and conducive environment. It builds on the fundamental notion that people will learn best when they feel comfortable, secure and affirmed. It goes to the heart of the relationship between the teacher and the student. The teacher is not merely one who deals with students’ intellectual capacities but one who relates to the whole person and the whole person’s needs and development.

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

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

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

So what of teachers against this mosaic? First, teachers must be trained around the criteria of quality teaching. While values education will be just one feature of the total curriculum to benefit from this, values education will be forever marginal without quality teaching as its basis. With the criteria of quality teaching in place, the focus of good teaching titled values education will fit well and be at one with the underpinnings of teacher practice. Intellectual depth will ensure that values education never settles for its own surface learning (a distinct possibility). Impelled by intellectual depth, *à la* Habermas, values education will be building on any factual knowledge (about values) to develop in students the kind of inter-relational capacities, interpretive skills and powers of negotiation that are at the heart of a social conscience, and, moreover, the reflective and self-reflective growth that is the foundation of a personal morality. Similarly, the criterion of

relevance will serve to ensure that values education is always connected with the real contexts and concerns of the students and the criterion of supportiveness will underpin the credibility of the values educator as being someone who practises what they preach, as an authentic and live model of the care, respect and love they are proposing as the basis of personal morality and social citizenry.

Of course, there are other foundational components of teacher readiness that proposes to induct the values educator. These include a knowledge of ethics as a field of intellectual endeavour, a personal commitment to the ethical proprieties that govern the rules of conduct of the teaching profession and a conviction that not only quality teaching as a generic force but values education as a specific curriculum force can make a difference. Let me take each of these three in turn.

The values educator should be literate about the history and range of ethical thought. From the great ethical debates of the ancient Greeks about whether the good life is taught or caught, through the rise of Christian and Islamic ethics, more latterly those of the renaissance and enlightenment and, finally to the ethical moment in which we find ourselves at the birth of the twenty-first century, all of this history captures the parameters and positions held about ethics through the ages. Being exposed to its vastness, the teacher can begin to see the scope of the field, to know that morality is not something easily defined or grasped. It is complex and, like all things that pertain to the human community, it is characterized by difference.

Teachers will also need to be inducted into the moral codes of conduct of their profession, codes which are becoming more explicit with the development of such phenomena as a national standards framework and registration and de-registration measures. Teachers need to be alert to the grand ethical principles that have guided professional practice since the ancient Pythagorean, Hippocrates, laid down clinical guidelines for ethical procedures in the healing profession. Among these, non-maleficence (above all, do no harm!) was foundational, with beneficence as its counterpoint. In other words, above all, never use the power of your profession to commit any harm to those in your care; always use it to achieve positive benefit. This is the twin principle of “duty of care”. Then there was the principle of justice; with its central notion of equity and fairness in the way one distributes the goods pertaining to one’s profession. Finally, was the principle of autonomy, that principle that reminds the professional that the person in their care is a human being with rights that forbids any subjecting of them to inhumane treatment or impositions that deny them these inalienable rights (cf. Mitchell et al, 1996).

While these principles were formulated a long time ago, with particular focus on the healing professions, they have come to have rejuvenated meaning for schooling in an era of quality teaching and values education. Ken Rowe (2004), one of Australia’s leading educational researchers, notes that of all the qualities nominated by students who achieve best at school, that “this teacher cares” about me/us is first and foremost, with “knows her/his stuff” a poor second and “makes things interesting” a distant third. In other words, the content and substance of Values Education has potential to go to the very heart of the power of quality teaching by focussing teacher attention on the feature of their professional practice that has most impact, namely the relationship of due care, mutual respect, fairness and positive modelling established with the student.

Above all, teachers must be exposed to the data and experiences that will allow for conviction that areas of the curriculum like values education not only have a place but they have a central role to play in the regimen of the modern quality teacher. The quality teacher of the type described can make a difference in the lives of their students, not only a difference in basic knowledge and skills development but in students' social and personal development as well. However, as with any area of impact by teachers on students, a mechanism must be in place. In the area of social and personal development, the central mechanism is the curriculum area known as values education. The hard evidence before us is that, in spite of a traditional scepticism about its potential to impact, an explicit curriculum around values education, taught using the criteria and parameters of quality teaching, can make a difference to the ways students speak about moral issues and, it would seem, how they behave as well.

If I could just go to one strand of evidence to support the above assertion, I will quote a school principal whose school was in the trial group for a study focussed on the implementation of the UNESCO-sponsored *Living Values Education Program* (LVEP):

There was the issue of time ... some teachers complained of already having too much to do (how predictable! Isn't this always the teacher's defence from trying anything new). But for us, LVE has meant that we have more time. Our school is a more peaceful place, we have less interruptions and discipline problems now, and this means we can do more teaching in all aspects of our classroom.

Hence, to conclude: 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 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 around structures, curriculum and resources, Values Education is more clearly than anything I could point to in contemporary education premised on the power of the teacher to make a difference. While the artefacts of structure, curriculum and resources are not denied, the focus is, appropriate to the insights of the day, on the teacher's capacity to engage students in the sophisticated and life-shaping learning of personal moral development.

Perhaps I should give the last few words over to John Hattie of the University of Auckland. Hattie has performed what may well be the vastest meta-analysis of half a million research studies relevant to quality teacher research. He says:

When I review the initiatives of the previous Ministries of Education up to a couple of years ago, and when I review the policies in so many New Zealand schools, I note that the focus of discussions are more about the influences of the home and the structures of schools. We have poured more money into school buildings, school structures, we hear so much about reduced class sizes and new examinations and curricula, we ask parents to help manage schools and thus ignore their major responsibility to help co-educate, and we highlight student problems as if students are the problem whereas it is the role of schools to reduce these problems. Interventions at the structural, home, policy, or school level is like searching for your wallet, which you lost in the bushes, under the lamppost because that is where there is light. The answer lies elsewhere—it lies in the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act—the person who puts into place the end effects of so many policies, who interprets these policies, and who is alone with students during their 15,000 hours of schooling.

I therefore suggest that we should focus on the greatest source of variance that can make the difference—the teacher. We need to ensure that this greatest influence is optimized to have powerful and sensationally positive effects on the learner. Teachers can and usually do have positive effects, but they must have exceptional effects. We need to direct attention at higher quality teaching, and higher expectations that students can meet appropriate challenges—and these occur once the classroom door is closed and not by reorganising which or how many students are behind those doors, by promoting different topics for these teachers to teach, or by bringing in more sticks to ensure they are following policy.

I suggest that the nature, shape and intent of Values Education has potential to re-focus the attention of teachers and their systems on the fundamental item of all effective teaching, namely the teacher her or himself, the quality of the teacher's knowledge, content and pedagogy, but above all the teacher's capacity to form the kinds of relationships with students which convey their commitment to them as individuals and to playing their part in forming personal character and tomorrow's citizenry. I know it's a challenging thought for many who, rightly or wrongly, were trained to think differently about the role of the teacher and the social agency of the school. However, Values Education or no Values Education, we live in a society that is shouting out a new charter to us. Values Education is merely an artefact, a way of conceiving of our role, that might actually help us to achieve it.

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