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# **The lack of professional knowledge in values education**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of their practice of values education, and to explore their degree of professionalism in this matter. Qualitative interviews with 13 teachers have been conducted and analysed by a comparative analysis. According to their view, values education is (a) most often reactive and unplanned, (b) embedded in everyday school life with a focus on students' everyday behaviour in school, and (c) partly or mostly unconsciously performed. Furthermore, professional knowledge appears to be missing in the domain of values education among these teachers.

## **Introduction**

According to Macdonald (1977), there are two fundamental value questions that curriculum writers and educators have to deal with: (a) what is the meaning of human life? (b) and how shall we live together? He also argues that questions as what is a good society, what is a good life, and what is a good person are a critical part of curriculum. Values education is about an introduction into values and morality, to give young people knowledge of this domain about relating to other people, together with the ability to apply the values and rules intelligently, and to have the settled disposition to do so (Aspin, 2000). According to Taylor (1994) “values education, in its various forms, encourages reflection on choices, exploration of opportunities and commitment to responsibilities, and for the individual in society, to develop values preferences and an orientation to guide attitudes and behaviour” (p. 3). Taylor uses the term values education as an overarching concept including terms such as moral education, civic education, and citizenship education.

## **Values education in Sweden**

Moral education has been part of the school curriculum since the first school started in Sweden. The teaching of Christian beliefs as well as moral values from a patriarchal perspective was the core content of the curriculum for the masses during the 19th century. Nevertheless, at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century the influence of the Church on the Swedish school system gradually decreased. Especially after the Second World War, progressive ideals of democracy and democratic education as well as scientific ideals of rationality and objectivity challenged the traditionally moral values indoctrination in Swedish schools. The ultimate aims became the realisation of the political ideas of democracy, equality, and justice (Kärby, 1978; Orlenius, 2001; Svingby, 1994). According to their current official curriculum policy document (Skolverket, 1998), primary schools in Sweden today have the task of forming, mediating, and firmly establishing democratic values and norms in their students. Schools should strive to let all students develop skills to make and verbalise ethical decisions, to respect the human dignity of others, to oppose and counteract offensive treatment of others, and to help others. Students should develop the ability to empathise with others and the disposition to act in the best interests of others. However, schools in Sweden do not teach values or moral education as a specific subject. Instead values education is more or less integrated in other teaching subjects, especially social studies and religion, but even in subjects such as history and physical education. Furthermore, a national report indicates that teachers undertake values education through conversations of many forms: formulating and implementing common school rules, trying to create a good social climate, handling conflicts between students, working against bullying, and so on (Skolverket, 1999). Nevertheless, survey studies in Sweden indicate that teachers receive poor training in values education in their teacher education (Bergdahl, 2006; Frånberg, 2004, 2006).

## **Teacher professionalism**

According to Colnerud and Granström (2002), there are four characteristics that most professionalism researchers attribute to the academic higher-status professions. The first characteristic is systematic theory, which means that the profession is conducted from a view of a common scientific knowledge base. The professional has acquired a professional language containing concepts and most of all scientific theories and conceptions of the content and practice of the profession. The second characteristic is authority, i.e., the members of the profession have acquired a public and formal legitimatisation (e.g., doctors

and psychologists). The third characteristic is professional autonomy, which refers to the professionals' right and responsibility to decide by themselves which tools and methods they will use in their practice. For example, a school principal cannot make the decision regarding which test a school psychologist should use in a particular case. The fourth characteristic is self-governed professional ethics, i.e., the professional group has developed ethical guidelines or principles regarding the professional practice. In the light of these four characteristics, Colnerud and Granström (2002) conclude that the group of teachers is yet not an academic higher-status profession in a strict sense, but rather semi-professional. Most of all, teachers lack a scientific common knowledge base, and in the daily practice, if they get ill, they can temporarily be replaced by substitutes without teacher training (in contrast to professionals such as doctors and psychologists). A professional language is a meta-language, i.e., a language that helps the professionals to reflect upon their practice and to make predictions and theoretical descriptions and explanations regarding their practice. A non-professional uses very little or no meta-language at all. Instead, s/he uses an everyday language as a working tool, which results in a more unconscious, intuitive, and routinised occupation role. Everyday language starts from concrete incidents and feelings instead of concepts and knowledge from educational philosophy, educational psychology, sociology of education, social psychology, and so on. According to Colnerud and Granström (2002), both metalanguage and everyday language are required if a professional will do a good job.

### **The aim of the study**

Values are expressed in the way teachers organise and manage classroom activity, in the way teachers present, value, and choose educational content, in what teachers choose to permit or encourage in the classroom, in their teacher style, disciplinary procedures, attitudes, treatment of and relations to the students, and in how they relate to school rules, etc. (e.g., Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001; Gudmundsdottir, 1990; Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993). According to Halstead (1996), the values expressed in school are not fully explored or articulated, at least partly because these values are deeply embedded in school and in teachers' taken-for-granted world view, and because teachers have to make so many day-to-day decisions in the classroom without any further reflection. Very little research has been conducted in order to examine values education in the view of the teachers (for exceptions, see Powney et al., 1995; Stephenson, Ling, Burman, & Cooper, 1998). The aim of this study is to investigate teachers' perceptions of their practice of values education, and to explore their degree of professionalism in this matter.

### **Method**

This interview study is part of a larger ethnographic research project on values and norms in the everyday life at school conducted in two primary schools in Sweden (a K-9 school and a K-6 school). The data for this paper are derived from individual qualitative interviews with 13 teachers. The interviews ranged in duration from 40 to 90 min. Of the 13 participants, 10 were women and three were men. Twelve of them were qualified teachers; one was not ("Torbjörn"). Three of the 12 were preschool (kindergarten) teachers, five were primary teachers, three were recreation instructors (a particular teacher category in Sweden, working both in classroom settings and in after-school centres), and one was a music teacher. The 13th teacher (who was not a qualified teacher) worked mostly as a physical education teacher, but also as a teacher in religious education in one of the six classes involved in the study. The interviews were recorded on a portable mini-disc recorder. The analysis procedure was inspired by grounded theory (e.g., Strauss & Corbin, 1998) but with a greater emphasis on

abductive processes and more open to inspiration from established theoretical concepts and other research (cf., Kelle, 2005; Willis & Trondman, 2000).

### **The main focus on students' behaviour and personality**

During the interviews, when teachers talk about values that they think are important to teach their students, they usually talk about values in terms of (a) behaviour and rules/norms (how to behave), and (b) personality and character (how to be as a person).

Those small simple things in everyday life. How to behave. How to conduct oneself in relation to other people. We work a lot with these issues. And you can actually say that all the efforts included in values education are about these things, and that is the reason why we have all these rules (Urban).

The teachers frequently talk about learning objectives of values education in terms of how to be and to behave in relation to other people, e.g., to be kind and nice to each other, to show other people respect, to take care of others, generosity, empathy, that it is not allowed to hit or kick others, etc.

Viveka: The most important [values to teach], I think, is how you treat others.

Interviewer: How do you mean?

Viveka: How you are as a friend. What you do and what you don't do to others. To respect each other, to leave others' property where it is, and to keep yourself in order. To behave in a good manner.

Hence, teachers usually articulate "values" they want to mediate in values education as behaviour, norms/rules, and character. Furthermore, when the teachers describe their practice of values education, a main theme is their efforts to influence students' behaviour in day-to-day school life, in accordance with their view of "values", e.g., to be prosocial and nice, to behave well in classroom as well as on playground, to comply with rules, etc. According to some of the teachers, the set of common school rules works as an important basis for the common values education in the school. Class teacher Ellen argues that these rules are about "the common values education in our school, that those of us teaching in the school are working towards the same goal, to teach the children how to behave, to be nice to each other, to use good language, and the fact that it is wrong to call each other names". They want to influence students to behave well in classroom as well as in other school contexts. Thus, in a teacher's view, values education appears to be in a great extent fused with and reduced to school discipline and classroom management.

These findings can be compared with a study from Scotland about values education in primary school (Powney et al., 1995). According to that study, the majority of the interviewed teachers seemed to speak of day to day fostering of values as the promotion of harmonious social relationship. The teachers' main focus in their values education was on students' behaviour. When the teachers report how they foster values among the pupils the most frequent methods reported were classroom management and to use incident as the catalyst for fostering values, which indicates an emphasis on real-life examples. Behaviour seems to be so essential to these primary teachers' understanding of values that they in fact list certain types of behaviour as "values", which can also be seen in my study. Also a Swedish report on how 32 Swedish schools practice values education shows that rules are a part of this practice, even if teachers have different views about values—from more

authoritarian to more democratic views. However, rules perceives in many of the schools in the report as a way of making the common basic values concrete (Skolverket, 1999). For the teachers in my study, values education is about fostering students into good manners, characters, and behaviour, to maintain rules in school and in classroom, to manage conflicts between students, and to help students develop social skills.

And all these conflicts for example are about teaching the children about how to behave, that you don't kick or swear at someone else, that you should listen to each others and show respect and so on (Urban).

In their interactions with students the teachers try to explain why certain behaviours are good and why others are bad. Essential tools in these teachers' practice of values education are, according to interview data, school and classroom rules, discussions and explanations, conflict management situations, class meetings, themselves as role models, and their efforts to construct a fair school milieu. Teachers define values education as a practice in which they attempt to teach students to be nice and kind to others, to behave well, and to understand and follow rules. This kind of values education can be related to the concept "studentizing", which Sherman (1996) calls the process of socialisation into rules and routines in school. Compliance with authority, rules, time-keeping, routines, and so on ensures children's inclusion as a student in the school world as a preparation for the world of work. This practice is a regulative discourse, which constructs the rules of social order in school, and therefore a moral discourse, Bernstein (2000) argues, because it creates the criteria which give rise to character, conduct, manners, etc. In sum, to produce nice students who do as they are told and behave in accordance with school and classroom rules is the teachers' main concern of their practice of values education.

### **A lack of professional knowledge**

Moreover, in my study, behaviour and personality, as well as rules and virtues, are fused together in teachers' reports (values and norms about how to behave and how to be), but without explicit references to moral philosophical, moral psychological or moral educational theories. Neither do they refer to theories or research in philosophy, psychology, sociology, education, or other academic disciplines when they describe their practice of values education. Hence, the teachers actually appear to lack professional knowledge in a strict sense in this field, i.e. a common formal ethical language as well as knowledge based on educational and behavioural scientific theories and research (cf., Colnerud & Granström, 2002). According to the teachers, the values, ideas, and conceptions, which guide their values education, are personal. When I ask them about how they have received or appropriated the values they see as important to mediate to the students, they refer to their own childhood, their personal experiences as children and adults in relation to or interactions with others (their parents, friends, colleagues, and others), and to sources like common sense, personal worldviews, emotions, and personal conceptions. "My parents a lot, I think, but also my teachers and friends [in my childhood] of course, and—, but where comes the moral from? I actually don't know" (Karin). The question corners some of the teachers and they tell me that they actually had not thought about it, but then they start to reflect upon it during the interview.

Interviewer: Where did you get these values?

Marianne: Well, from where [silent]?

Interviewer: Well, you have got them from somewhere, haven't you?

Marianne: Yes, I have got them from somewhere. It's sort of things you don't daily think about, so I have to reflect upon why.

Interviewer: How come that you have chosen these values and think they are important?

Marianne: From my own child experience at school of course. I could see these things even then, what were good and what were bad.

The teacher Marie, for example, refers to her own basic values, her demands on herself and others, and Liselott argues that her outlook on mankind influence to a great extent her values and "basically I think it's my own basic outlook, things you have in your heart". Thus, values that teachers intend to teach or mediate to students by their practice of values education are personal rather than professional. Nevertheless, a meta-language in terms of knowledge in ethical theories should be viewed as a significant foundation of both moral education and professional ethics within a teacher profession. "When teachers pay attention to their moral conduct, however, they have a double set of reasons for doing so; partly the same reasons as other professionals who work with people and partly pedagogical reasons, influencing pupils so that they embrace the values and norms that lead to respect for others" (Colnerud, 2006, p. 373). Furthermore, evidence-based programmes such as Just Community Approach (Power & Higgins, 1992; Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989), CDP (Battistich, 2003; Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004; Battistich, Watson, Solomon, Schaps, & Solomon, 1991), Teaching Students to be Peacemakers (Johnson & Johnson, 1995, 2006), and ART (Goldstein, Glick, & Gibbs, 2004; Goldstein, Nense'n, Daleflod, & Kalt, 2004; Gundersen & Svartdal, 2006), are not mentioned by the teachers. It is hard to find any professional tools or concepts related to behavioural or educational scientific theory and research in their descriptions how they conduct values education in school. Instead they use an everyday language (for a further discussion on variables that may have positive effects on students' moral development, see for example Berkowitz & Bier, 2006; Solomon, Watson, & Battistich, 2001).

### **Reactive and unplanned**

According to the teachers, values education is, to a great extent, about intervening when things happen, i.e. reactions to students' behaviour. Examples of such incidents are conflicts or fights between students, when students break rules, are mean, and so on. Thus, a significant part of values education is, teachers argue, unplanned, occasional, reactive, and situated. For instance, when I ask Karin how she works with values education, she tells me that "I actually don't have a conscious strategy, that I will do this or that, but instead I deal with a lot of things as they happen". An interview study conducted by Klaassen (2002) also indicates that teachers approach values education in a reactive ad hoc manner, wanting to make use of concrete incidents that occurs in the class. "This really means that teachers are forced to wait and react when things have already gone too far" (p. 156).

Furthermore, research has shown that in disciplinary practice and classroom management as well as in values education, preventive or proactive approaches are significant in the effectiveness of these practices, such as designing and implementing clear rules or behavioural standards and expectations as well as procedures in the classroom (for a meta-review, see Marzano, 2003), creating a sense of community among students, i.e., students' perceptions that their classmates are supportive and mutually concerned and perceptions that students actively participate in classroom decision making and norm-setting (Solomon et al., 2001), and creating a school-wide positive climate (Freiberg & Lapointe, 2006) in which social skills and other expected behaviour are explicitly taught, focused upon, and effectively

reinforced (Lewis, 2001; Lewis, Newcomer, Trussell, & Richter, 2006; Nelson, Martella, & Galand, 1998). A reasonable interpretation is that the teachers' predominant reactive approach to values education in my study is, at least in part, related to a lack of knowledge of theory and research in values education (as well as in classroom management)—it appears to be an expression of a personal self rather than a professional self, guided by an everyday language rather than a professional meta-language.

### **A constantly ongoing informal curriculum**

The teachers also report that values education most often is expressed within the domain of the informal curriculum. It is embedded in everyday life of school. Interviewer: What concrete things do you do in your work?

Viveka: With values education?

Interviewer: Yes.

Viveka: It is all those small things all the time in everyday life. All the talking to the children. We tell them that “we don't do that”, “we speak nicely to each other”. We manage and control them the whole time and explain to them what you should do and what you shouldn't do. And praise them when they do something good.

The teachers view values education as an everyday informal and ongoing process rather than as formal curriculum aspects of school subjects. It happens all the time. “I don't think it's something I take up for an hour a week or so, but it's the continuous work that you have with the children, so it's constantly there, I think, constantly going on” (Ellen). This can be compared with the ethnographic classroom observations conducted by Jackson et al. (1993). Their findings indicate that much of the values or moral influence that teachers have on their students seems to be deeply embedded in the daily life of the school and may, more or less, occur without teachers and students being aware of it. “Irrespective of whether or not moral education is an explicit and intentional part of the curriculum, values education is embedded in the fabric of classrooms and instructional practice” (Narvaez, 2006, p. 705). Thus, values education appears, to a great degree, to take place in the domain of the hidden curriculum, influencing children to develop values which may be different from those the school officially intends to uphold and foster (Halstead, 1996). The problem with the hidden curriculum is, Broady (1987) argues, that the teachers usually do not investigate what the students learn in classroom or in school above the content of the school subjects. Moreover, without a professional metalanguage, such investigation and critical self-reflection processes seem to be rather impossible to conduct.

### **Unconscious dimension**

In addition, according to some of the teachers, their values education practice is mostly or partly unreflective or unconscious. “Well, it's conscious to some extent, but many things also happen unconsciously, and I hope that I mediate values I want to” (Kristina). A reactive, ongoing and everyday life-embedded practice seems, at least in part, to be unreflective or unconscious because it is routinised—it takes place, more or less, without any conscious considerations and without any larger pedagogical attention. Values education happens without the teacher thinking a lot about it. It has more or less been a taken-for-granted-pattern of habits or an implicit structure in the everyday life, and can, as I wrote earlier, be described in terms of a hidden curriculum, i.e., a “set of implicit messages relating to knowledge,

values, norms of behaviour and attitudes that learners experience in and through educational processes’’ (Skelton, 1997, p. 188). One aspect of values education, according to some of the teachers, is that they act as role models (cf., Klaassen, 2002). However, they also argue that they influence students without always thinking about it. ‘‘How to talk to students, what you say, how you solve conflicts, how you treat them, how you listen to them and so on. Things you just do without thinking a lot about it. And of course these things have an influence on them. You are a role model as an adult even if you do not always think about it’’ (Kristina).

Hence, this unconscious practice of values education runs the risk of actually counteracting those values the teachers think are important and intend to mediate to their students. ‘‘Moral influence is constantly present in the classroom; it is often tacit and for this reason it often leads to questions about the significance of being aware of the moral influence exerted by teachers over pupils. I would seem likely that pupils are influenced without being aware of it. But teachers who exert an influence without being aware of it are a larger problem’’ (Colnerud, 2006, p. 373). Research has for example shown inconsistencies in school rules and teacher behaviour (e.g., Duke, 1978; Jackson et al., 1993; Thornberg, 2007b), resulting in unfair treatment (e.g., Devine, 2002), moral dilemmas and uncertainty among students (e.g., Thornberg, 2006, 2007b), and criticism among students (e.g., Devine, 2002; Tattum, 1982; Thomson & Holland, 2002; Thornberg, 2006, in press). Simultaneously, the teacher interviews in this study also express elements of more conscious considerations and reflections in values education, such as consciously working with rules, trying to get students to reflect upon their behaviour and its consequences to others in particular situations, having class meetings and so on. Hence, the teachers’ report of their practice of values education can be related to implicit as well as explicit values education. While explicit values education refers to schools’ official curriculum of what and how to teach students values and morality, including teachers’ explicit intentions and practice of values education, implicit values education is associated with a hidden curriculum and implicit values, embedded in school and classroom practices (see Cox, 1988; Halstead, 1996; Thornberg, 2004).

## **Discussion**

According to teachers’ view of their practice of values education in this study, values education is (a) most often reactive and unplanned, (b) embedded in everyday school life with a focus on students’ everyday behaviour in school as a constantly ongoing informal curriculum, and (c) partly or mostly unconsciously performed by the teachers. To a great degree, in their view of values education, teachers appear to be preoccupied with classroom management and disciplinary practice with the aim of making students to be nice and complaint, minimising all kinds of student misconduct that are likely to disrupt activities or cause injury, and controlling student behaviour in the classroom in order to create and maintain an environment conducive to learning. This focus on student behaviour, discipline, and classroom management in teachers’ practice of values education has also been found in research from other countries, such as Australia (Powney et al., 1995; Stephenson et al., 1998), England, Ireland, Israel, Slovenia (Stephenson et al., 1998), and Trinidad and Tobago (Kutnick, 1990). Nevertheless, this main concern among the teachers in the study risks in turn results in a confined focus on students’ short-term behaviour in school and at the same time losing sight of the far-reaching influence of morality they have on their students beyond the school (cf., Boostrom, 1991).

Moreover, this practice is personally, not professionally, grounded among the teachers. They never refer to theories or research in education, psychology, sociology, philosophy, or other

academic disciplines when they describe their practice of values education. Instead they refer to their own childhood, personal experiences, common sense, personal emotions, and personal worldviews as sources of important values to teach the students. Thus, what Colnerud and Granström (2002) mention as “systematic theory” appears to be missing in the domain of values education among these teachers. My findings confirm a survey study conducted in Australia, Ireland, Israel, Slovenia, and England, which indicates that teachers, in many cases, were unable to reflect critically on and to articulate their attitudes to values and values education (Stephenson et al., 1998). As in the beginning of Sockett and LePage’s (2002) intervention research project, the teachers in my study lack a moral language to describe their work. Sockett and LePage argue that without a moral vocabulary, it is difficult to see how teachers can (a) address the complexity of moral judgments they must make with either confidence or competence, (b) develop an adequate professional foundation of moral understanding, and (c) teach children to think about and reflect on moral issues. Nevertheless, Sockett and LePage report how teachers actually develop a moral language by an implementation of an educational programme with an explicit moral base, introducing teachers to ethics of principles, ethics of virtues, ethics of care, and pragmatic views of negotiating moral understanding as a social engagement in which the need of democratic citizenship education is emphasised.

Without professional language containing a scientific knowledge base about the content and practice of professional values education (including knowledge of ethical theories and concepts), teachers’ efforts and outcomes in this pedagogic matter seems to be rather arbitrary and haphazardly. Powney et al. (1995) draw similar conclusions based on their research findings. “The lack of precise language to explain it [values education] must make it difficult to accord professional status to the enhancement of values education skills. It is apparently something everybody does but not something everybody has the tools to think about” (p. 17). Teachers’ uncertainty to cope with critical moral situations in schools has been showed in many studies (e.g., Colnerud, 1997; Klaassen, 2002).

Some notes of caution, nevertheless, need to be sounded regarding the findings in this study. The sample in the study limits transferability, since it is sampled from only 13 teachers from preschool and primary school classes in one Swedish town. According to dominant theories and research on moral development, children at these ages are capable of understanding rules and morality focused on notions of fairness and reciprocity, but not yet ready for more advanced values education (for a review of moral development, see Killen & Smetana, 2006), and the teachers in the study may view a main focus on behavioural rules as appropriate regarding the developmental level of their students. However, the teachers in the study do not refer to theories and research in this matter. Furthermore, other researchers have challenged traditional developmental theories, and instead focusing on children’s competences and active participation in their own socialisation processes (see Wyness, 2006). Nevertheless, interviews with teachers at higher grade levels might have found a somewhat different picture. Further research in other schools, in additional grades, and in different countries should therefore be conducted to further investigate teachers’ knowledge in and practice of values education.

In the light of the findings in this study, the practice of values education can be problematised in some aspects. Firstly, the lack of a common ethical language and knowledge of relevant theories and research in educational and behavioural sciences is an obstacle to teachers’ professional development and to the practice of values education. Knowledge of and skills in values education and related topics such as conflicts and conflict management, bullying and

bullying prevention, moral development, aggression, social influence and group processes, ethics, citizenship, and so on, should, in addition to knowledge of and skills in teaching subjects, learning processes and teaching practices, be seen as essential parts of teacher competence, and therefore significant parts in teacher education. However, according to some teachers, their teacher training did not prepare them for this situation. “Well, it’s odd that you didn’t get anything from teacher training. I mean, every day we have to confront students who don’t take their responsibility, break the rules, don’t listen to grown-ups, are violent to each other, get into conflicts, call each other names. And we get no training in these situations” (Karin). For instance, according to a questionnaire-based evaluation of teacher training in Sweden, only 14 percent of teacher students report that they get any satisfactory training in conflict management, while 48 percent report that they think that they did not receive any training at all in this issue (Lärarnas Riksförbund, 2004). In another Swedish survey, very few teacher students report that they feel prepared to teach ethics and work with values education in school (Frånberg, 2006). Furthermore, very few teacher educators in Sweden report that they educate teacher students in ethics to cope with ethical dilemmas in school (Bergdahl, 2006; Frånberg, 2004), which confirm teacher students feelings of lack of preparedness in this matter. A case study of a teacher education institute in Netherlands (Willems, Lunenburg, & Korthagen, 2005) indicates that the process of preparing student teachers for moral education remains largely implicit and that “the practices of the teacher educators are hardly directed by any systematic and critical analysis of the relations between goals, objectives, teaching and learning methods, and outcomes” (p. 214). Moreover, their findings suggest that there had been little discussion among the course designers over what they meant by “preparing student teachers for moral education”. Based on a survey of 26 European countries, Taylor (1994) concludes that training teachers in teaching methods appropriate to values education is widely lacking.

Secondly, this lack of professional skills in values education can also, at least in part, explain the reactive and unplanned characteristics of the practice. With a lack of professional tools based on a common knowledge base, teachers appear to be left to their own personal resources, without any guidelines from ethical theories and educational and behavioural sciences. Ling (1998) draws a similar conclusion from her colleagues’ and her own research project on values education:

It has been stated in the findings which have emerged from this study that it appears that educators lack a discourse to express their ideas about values and to conceptualize the area of values in education. This stems, largely, from the lack of theoretical knowledge and experience educators possess in this area. While there is much in the literature of education especially in the area of philosophy and moral education, it is not an integral and explicit part of the training which most teachers undergo (p. 210).

Thus, a large part of values education is deeply embedded in everyday school life (cf., Jackson et al., 1993), and seems to be left within the domain of the hidden curriculum (cf., Halstead, 1996), and thus with very little awareness and control over what values students actually learn in school. Finally, the heavy focus on rules, behaviour, and characters of being a compliant, nice, and well-mannered person in values education can be problematised in terms of reducing ethics to an issue of (deficient) norm transference and lack of rules. If ethics are seen as a matter of rules, the complexity of ethics is diminished (Orlenius, 2001). Moreover, an over-emphasis on rules and obeying rules can, according to some theorists, undermine the goal of fostering self-discipline, critical thinking and democratic skills in children. Instead, an over-emphasis on rules may just lead to superficial order and blind compliance (Render,

Padilla, & Krank, 1989; Schimmel, 2003). For instance, sometimes common classroom rules appear to inhibit students to behave in a prosocial manner when they see a classmate in need (Thornberg, 2006, 2007a), which reminds us about the problems of moral dilemmas created by conflicts between different principles (Colnerud, 1997; Ross, 1930), domains (Nucci, 2001), or ethical perspectives (Husu & Tirri, 2003), and the need to educate students to see and cope with real-life moral complexity and pluralism by considering many ethical aspects (e.g., Katz, Noddings, & Strike, 1999) and feeling a moral responsibility of considering the consequences the behaviour of self have on others rather than thoughtlessly just following rules (e.g., Bauman, 1993; Milgram, 1974).

Moreover, the characters teachers view as important to form among the students in my study are to a great extent expressions of virtues of obedience and could be problematised as morally repulsive, “inclined to fasten upon what is rigid, inflexible and superficial in our understanding and appreciation of the nature of values, ideals and principles” (Carr, 1993, p. 196), with no room for moral deliberation and choice, and with an initial assumption that we can have knowledge, possibly infallible, of what is true or right with regard to value judgments. Values are viewed as “cut and dried objective truths about how it is absolutely best for human beings to live in the world which simply invite the unquestioning obedience of people to the voice of informed authority” (Carr, 1993, p. 202). This is especially highly problematic in late-modern democratic pluralistic societies. To what extent values education can promote and empower students to develop democratic skills and more complex moral reasoning and understanding depends on the students’ abilities to participate in rule-making as well as the extent to which values education considers other things than rules and characters guided by virtues of obedience. This, in turn, requires confident teachers with a professional competence in values education, including a well-developed moral language as well as knowledge in moral psychological, social psychological, and values educational theories and research.

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