

Values-education in context

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In the years 1993, the CIDREE – Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe carried out a survey on Values Education in Europe. An analysis of school practices and references from the literature about principles and methods of values education were gathered through experts from 26 European countries (including USA, Canada and Israel). The general background of values education in Europe turned out to be defined by the following main features:

- Rapid change on a global scale
- Societies in crisis
- Increasing ethnic and cultural diversity
- The pivotal place of religion
- The rise of democracy and renewed emphasis on citizenship
- Growing nationalism

The topics in values education most frequently cited by the contributors from 26 European countries were:

Environmental awareness [14]
 Intercultural education [12]
 International Understanding [12]
 Citizenship [12]
 Democracy [11]
 Peace [11]
 Antiracism [10].

In more democratic countries, there was a continual and often acute debate on a whole range of value issues. This manifests a positive attitude of open and critical participation, but also produces some complications in school education, and is not accepted in other countries. Individualism and relativism are often dominant in the former countries, while the latter privilege communitarian values and social interests: society and its institutions have the priority over the individual even if individual realisation is a valued aim. Differences were common also in the extent and consistency of the

relationships between formal school-based education and informal values education in extra-curricular life, through the family, peer groups and the media.

A history of distinct political and social experiences of the various countries can produce some other differences in their specific value hierarchy and educational agenda: values education is closely tied to the political development of a country, as every Government emphasises different values. Thus, many education systems appear to be more or less in a process of continual reform with respect to values education curricula. They both influence and reflect social and ideological changes, and there is evidence of strong movements towards democracy, secularism and pupil-centred choice. Moreover, many countries have become more ideologically diverse and socially plural. This has resulted in some tensions over values issues and education. These include the tension between the rights and responsibilities of the individual and those of society; the tension between whether values, especially moral values, must be set in a religious frame – which, in a European context, is primarily seen as Christian – not necessarily giving parity to other world faiths; and the tension between the formal idea of democracy and a living, participative democracy.

These issues present critical contemporary challenges to European countries and education. Schools and values education can be used as instruments of oppression or empowerment of ethnic, social, and political minorities. All educators need to be alert to the demands and the responsibilities of their role and the distinction between being in authority and being an authority in the spirit of values education. As Douglas states, the coexistence of diversified ethnic groups and their cultures in the fragmentation of postmodern societies “can hopefully be maintained without the prevailing heavy stamp of cultural or ethnic ‘difference’, but rather by pedagogues respectfully addressing

the complexity and resourceful richness of ideological difference, and by their recognizing the possibilities and potential resources of openly confronting the issues behind cultural diversity in their classrooms". (2000, p. 83) Intercultural education, much the same as education itself, is a progressive "accommodation of incompatible aims that arise from the competing pulls of different ways of interpreting relationships". Then it requires a general framework (not only cognitive but also affective), an atmosphere of caring for ourselves and our values as much as for others and their values, and of feeling motivated to live well and to live together, without negating one's own and others' differences. It implies "going beyond recognition of these differences to facilitation of a deeper understanding of how they are different, including clarification of both the contexts within which the different relationships are psychologically and sociologically located and the boundaries of those contexts as they come into contact with each other." (Boyd, 1996, p.25).

In every society, values are affirmed and transmitted through participation in everyday practices and special collectively ruled situations as rituals, both accurately controlled by institutional "local guardians of the moral order" (Shweder & Much, 1987), such as parents, teachers, priests. Psychological theories on moral development, though differing in a lot of points, share the idea that no individual moral growth or collective form of life is possible without the force of interiorized institutions. But institutions never satisfy only deep natural or cultural needs. As they solve concrete problems of the relation of human beings with nature and among themselves in concrete situations, institutions reflect the dynamics of political, social, economical forces confronting in a given historical period. Thus, by supporting current institutions and defending their legitimacy, some groups defend also such goods as richness, prestige, power and their very existence from dissent and violation. Thus, institutions are always involved in the never ending dialectics between the creative and potentially disrupting drives and dreams arising in concrete interpersonal relationships and individual experience, on one side, and on the other side the fact that individuals, groups and societies can survive only on condition

that they create and defend norms and institutions.

The school is one of the first socialization agencies, and a primary socialization agency in the formative years of pre-adolescence and adolescence. It represents the first non-familial authority and represents the larger societal system to its pre-adult members.

Schooling's influence comes not only from the formal curriculum, (textbooks, teaching and learning methods, rituals practices), but also from the hidden curriculum (structures of school decision making, authority relationships within the classroom, composition of the school population, general relationship climate, or what could be defined the "school ethos", including teachers' attitudes toward achievement, fairness, competition, cooperation, obedience, expression of critical points of view). The educational profile of a school depends to a great extent on its formational ethos, whether, for instance, there is a commonly held educational philosophy among the staff which is reflected and accentuated in the organization and everyday practices of school life.

According to Oser, when we refer to teachers as professionals, as well as any other professional group, we have to distinguish three kinds of morality. Normative morality – Refers to reasoning about hypothetical courses of action in moral decision making situations. A major characteristic of this type of moral reasoning is that it is insufficient in itself to generate action in a concrete situation. This type of hypothetical reasoning tends to be justified by the subject's most optimal cognitive means, and is characterised by its prescriptivity (i. e., reference to moral norms).

Situational morality – Is crucial in real life situations where the individual is required to act. Conduct has a particular form: moral action is action with respect to certain normative standards (do not lie, do not hurt, do not destroy life, etc.). Every concrete course of action has to be justified – especially in the case of normative transgressions. Now this justification is much more complicated than in hypothetical dilemmas because situational facts (social, psychological, political, economic aspects) play their role and influence moral reasoning.

Professional morality – Is connected to non-moral, functional, professional acting. When a teacher assigns grades ... when a salesperson offers a certain musical instrument, when a craftsman renovates the front of a building ... - all these situations are instances for types of actions that refer to professional standards and that, at first sight, don't touch moral standards. All these situations, however, are also potentially conflictual by their very nature.

The teacher must assign a bad grade if the student's performance was too poor – though the student might have strived very hard ... The teaching profession normally is oriented to children's academic success and to supporting learning conditions (class climate, etc.) above all. But as soon as teachers have to give grades and to select students (which means to affirm or to deny short-term and long-term career chances), as soon as they make an effort to integrate a handicapped child in their class (or fail to make that effort), as soon as they have to decide whether to act against the parents' will; in other words, as soon as the normal routines of instructions are interrupted, it becomes blatantly apparent that ethical standards have their significance for the teaching profession, too. In many conflict situations teachers must be mindful of some sort of comprehensive principle that helps establish appropriate criteria for solving problems of this type.

The use of the dilemma method in a lot of different contexts demonstrated that it can contribute to promoting not only moral development, but also some cognitive, communicative and affective capacities that are basic to a democratic discourse and culture, focusing on multiplicity of values, tolerance, negotiation, avoidance of conflict.

While hypothetical dilemmas of a Kolberg's kind focus attention to the moral-cognitive dimension in a more disengaged and abstract way, dilemmas specific to the family or/and school context can be used to highlight the whole set of moral implications together with clear factual information and background knowledge about the context, causes and developments, possible alternative courses of action, institutional solutions, etc. In that way, the method can help:

- Becoming aware of and reflecting on one's

own sense of values, norms and motives ·

Expressing and justifying arguments ·

Recognising social conflicts, value and norm conflicts, and the competing demands accompanying them

- Coming to terms with dissent and controversy

- Questioning the premises and implications of the relationship between actions, decisions and their justifications

- Comparing positions, actions and decisions and evaluating them against credible criteria

- Being aware of and taking into account the effects on the others ·

- Experiencing the efficiency of discursive strategies of resolving conflicts in a democratic way.

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