

WHAT IS VALUES EDUCATION - AND SO WHAT?

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The reader may well be wondering why I have included "- and so what?" in the title of this paper. Showing why this phrase is important requires some background explanation. I remember an incident in August 1990 during my interview for the position of Chief Executive of the Gordon Cook Foundation (a charity charged with promoting values education in the United Kingdom)¹. I asked the following question of the Trustees, some of whom are very senior and well-known figures in Scottish education: "*If the Chief Executive's main responsibility is to promote values education, how do the Trustees define it - what does the Foundation perceive values education to be?*"

There was an awkward silence until the wise and experienced Chairman at the time, Sir Maitland Mackie, suggested we discuss it over lunch.

On taking up the post in November 1990, it took almost eight months to state with reasonable confidence what values education is. After examining the Foundation's literature; some of the literature on values education in the United States (literature on the UK experience was very limited); and a preliminary investigation of how Scottish schools perceived values education², the following definition was accepted by, the Trustees:

values education is an activity during which people are assisted by appropriately qualified adults, in schools, homes, clubs and religious and other youth organisations, to make explicit those values underlying their own attitudes; to assess the effectiveness of these values for their and others' long term well-being and to reflect on and acquire other values which are more effective for short term and long term well-being.

After leaving the Foundation and initiating CAVE in 1993, further study of values education led me to an improved definition: this is given later in this paper. Over the years, I have been surprised and disheartened at the many educators and educationists who claim that definitions are a waste of time; that definitions of education and values education are impossible; and that struggling to define, and improve initial definitions, prevents action. I have been surprised at how many colleagues are prepared to talk and write about values education³, without first attempting to state what they mean by it. This is why I have added, "- and so what?" to the title of this paper.

In my experience, there is much talk about values education and not as much practice. In addition, where people are practising what they claim to be values education, the results are not as effective as expected or wanted. For me these

¹ The Gordon Cook Foundation, Hilton Place, Aberdeen. AB24 4FA, was founded by Robert Charles Victor Cook (31/8/1897 - 15/3/1990) by Trust Deed 2710 on 27th February 1974.

² Results of the perception of some Scottish schools are given in Robb (1991a).

³ Of course, the same could be said for religious education, moral education and spiritual education, for example.

difficulties arise because just what values education is, has not been described adequately. Consequently, before describing in some detail what I have found values education to be, I would like to explain why it is so important to define values education.

Defining values education: essential for progress

Many words are used to name things, and "values education" names something or some things. For me, a definition is the best possible condensed description of something at a given time - a description which contains the essentials as currently understood. This means that definitions about human phenomena cannot be cast in stone. Even the definitions of many strictly material things (the atom, for example) change as more is discovered about them.

However, the fact that definitions change does not mean that it is a waste of time seeking them. On the contrary, in my experience some of the debates in education and philosophy are false - they would not be happening if the "opposing sides" had taken the time to define in detail the words they use. A prime example of this is the debate about what adult education is, arising because people have not defined what they mean by "adult"⁴.

I usually find three major objections to defining values education:

- Values education, like education is an essentially contested concept - it cannot be defined because it has so many meanings;
- An individual has no right to force his or her definition on others - there are many definitions - no one can claim to have the right definition;
- Defining is just playing with words: it is a semantic game that takes us away from practical action.

These objections can be explained away quite straightforwardly. However, the reader will detect that seeing through these objections requires penetrating to the very roots of what philosophy is all about. Consequently, the following response to the three objections is only an outline.

What does it mean to say that values education has many meanings? It means that we use the same word ("values education") to identify (to name) many things. For example, the word "education" is used to name at least four things:

- 1 The relationship between educator and educand;
- 2 A subject of study and research in college and university;
- 3 The whole infrastructure or sector comprising schools, colleges, universities, curriculum councils, examination boards, local authority departments of education and so on; and
- 4 A product - as in "I had a good education".

For me, naming four different things with the same word hinders understanding. In scientific study, a word should be used to name only one thing. Part of the benefit of defining is that multi-naming becomes evident and the confusion caused by it can be tackled.

Why should there be indignation when one person offers a definition or claims that his or her definition is better than existing definitions? Surely all definitions begin by an individual or a small group of researchers doing the best they can to concisely state what they have found? Gradually, with debate, that definition is made more

⁴ See Robb (1997:1-6).

accurate and becomes accepted by most people in a field of study.

During debate, understanding is increased when people arrive at different definitions for the same thing. The resultant resolution of difference provides a better definition. A definition is only right for the time being. If colleagues claim that my definition of values education is inadequate, it would be my duty to evaluate their findings. If I could not explain away their findings, I would be obliged to update my definition. My definition would then become our definition. However, this debate cannot take place if people are not prepared to define - to state their results clearly.

After considerable debate among individuals and then associations, major schools of thought could agree to use certain words in specific ways. A further step would be for learned bodies to hold a major debate between the major schools of thought and find agreement on what certain words name (identify/mean). This standardisation of terminology would be reviewed from time-to-time as new evidence made it necessary. This suggestion may seem strange and even objectionable to some readers, but imagine the lack of progress if individual chemists used any name they wanted for different elements and compounds. Material things and human phenomena cannot be compared, but the disciplined use of terminology is required in both the physical and "human" sciences.

Some colleagues reject detailed defining of values education with the claim that it is merely playing with words - mere semantics. This is very worrying for three main reasons. Firstly, such a view indicates that those who hold it are unwilling or are unable to penetrate to first principles - to the roots of the matter: almost like a doctor alleviating symptoms but not taking the time to find the disease. Secondly, as already explained, if we do not take care to get to the essentials and explain what thing "values education" identifies, understanding will progress only very slowly, if at all. It cannot be denied that agreeing definitions is difficult, but that is not a reason for avoiding it.

Thirdly, claiming that taking time to define values education hinders practical action, ignores the interrelatedness of theory and practice. Human action does not await theory, and theory arises from examination of practice. By examining in detail what values educators say they want to do, it is possible to summarise goals and then offer suggestions for even better practice. Perhaps the reader has noticed the many fads that spring up in education and in industry. They sound like good ideas but lack of careful planning (clarifying what the goal is and what has to be done to achieve it) results in many good ideas fading away. Definition (the beginning of planning) would help avoid this waste of time, energy and opportunity.

In summary, unless we take the time to find out what values education is, it is not possible to effectively promote, study, and practice it. Merely using the word "values education" implies a definition albeit a "hidden" one. Defining values education requires writing down one's existing implicit definition for testing by oneself and others. With this extensive background I hope the reader will enter into dialogue on what I have found values education to be.

What is values education?

Over the years, further research has enabled improvements to the definition of values education I arrived at in 1994. I find values education to be:

an activity which can take place in any organisation during which people are assisted by others, who may be older, in authority or more experienced, to make explicit those values underlying their own behaviour, to assess the effectiveness of these values and associated behaviour for their own and others' long term well-being and to reflect on and acquire other values and behaviour which they themselves realise are more effective for long term well-being of self and others.

Since this definition is a summary, it is possible to give a fuller description by explaining keywords, and by explaining how the activity can be, and is, carried out.

The activity of values education

Values education is **an activity**: it is not some abstract process or a subject of study. All people can be involved in values education - not only young people, and it is not restricted to formal educational establishments: it can take place in any organisation or institution. The activity is facilitated by someone who is skilled at assisting others in making values explicit and assessing values for long term well-being of self and others. The facilitator may be a school teacher, a manager, a probation officer, a youth leader, or a senior school pupil.

However, to be a successful facilitator the following criteria (at least) would have to be met.

- Although facilitators may offer guidance on topics for discussion, they must be willing to examine other options chosen by the group. Participants could reflect on and discuss in detail, particular values such as respect, honesty, and caring, or issues such as teenage pregnancy, abortion, drug abuse, euthanasia and vandalism.
- Facilitators must encourage discussion which shows mutual respect where pre-agreed rules do not permit mocking, insulting and shouting, and where listening and giving reasons for one's views are required.
- Facilitators' views carry no more authority than the participants'. Any member of the group is entitled to state why he or she would not respond in such-and-such a way, and other members of the group are entitled to respectfully test the reasoning of fellow-participants.
- A consensus may emerge, but facilitators should ensure that this is not forced. In addition, the consensus view should not be forced, explicitly or implicitly, on any person who does not agree.
- Facilitators do not tell participants what is right or wrong in relation to any values issue. Sometimes, telling people how to behave and enforcing good behaviour, are necessary and desirable - but not in a values education group (except for ensuring respectful discussion). During values education groups, telling is ineffective because the benefit comes from uncovering for

oneself what is required to become more responsible. Consequently, a code of values is not given, and no attempt is made to inculcate or internalise any values, or to indoctrinate.

- Facilitators must be able to help participants go beyond making their values explicit. Values education involves evaluating values for one's own long term well-being and the well-being of others. This means that facilitators must be skilled in Socratic questioning, and in helping others to see for themselves the implications of their behaviour. The phrase "long term" is important for the following reason. If I steal £10, it may increase my short term well-being. However, in the long-term I might experience remorse or punishment (if caught). Even if I experienced neither of these, I would know that I was a thief and experience loss of dignity. Values education makes apparent that what might appear to be to my benefit in the short term, is not in the long term.

Reflecting on the role of the values education facilitator makes it possible to describe what values education is, in more detail.

Values education a straightforward and radical way to increase responsible behaviour without indoctrination

Values education is ultimately about changing behaviour for the better. For me, it is surprising how many educationists and educators refuse to accept this. It is surprising because almost every text on the philosophy of education I have read, stresses that education itself is about enhancement, ennobling, and worthwhileness. Indeed, many educationists find education to be principally an ethical enterprise. Perhaps some educators are afraid to be thought of as indoctrinating. However, the description already given should have explained that values education is a way of changing behaviour, not by telling, manipulating or indoctrinating, but by revealing through rational discussion, what is right action.

The fact that values education is about improving behaviour is shown by examining reasons given for doing values education. For example, Farmer (1987:69) found the purpose of values education to be to enhance people's abilities to reflect intelligently on and understand the role of values in human life: to become more consciously aware of their values, attitudes and feelings. For Silver (1976:7) values education is supposed to help people gain sensitivity to values and moral issues, and to provide opportunities for choosing between competing values and for exercising their capacity for moral judgement. For Nazareth and Waples (1980:35) values education is for enabling young people to study the contribution of the positive aspect of a value to the enrichment of their character and the negative drawback of a disvalue which impoverishes and denigrates the character.

However, asking "why?" to all these purposes or reasons illustrates that there is a more fundamental purpose. By undertaking values work with our students (of whatever age) are we only hoping to get them to become more reflective, understanding, aware, sensitive, and studious? I have found that although they might initially deny it, many educators become interested in teaching values directly in order to influence their students' values and ultimately, behaviour. Furthermore, some values educators wish to influence behaviour because they wish to enhance the well-being of all.

Formal testing of these anecdotal findings could make a major contribution to knowledge about values education. Although it is difficult to find documentary evidence of this fundamental purpose in values education, some educationists have made this explicit. Silver (1975:146) found that a valuing process can improve the quality of human life, and Allen (1975:23) anticipated that values education can contribute to solving environmental problems. Lickona (1991:13-20) briefly described ten social problems arising from youth misbehaviour in the United States of America (USA), implying that values education can alleviate them. More directly, Lickona (1991:22) found that values education in schools in the USA is "... making a positive difference in the moral attitudes and behavior of students ...". Saterlie (1988:1) reported that: "During the last decade, mounting concern over juvenile delinquency, the changing family structure, increased instances of governmental impropriety, and crime, have all contributed to the widespread conviction that public schools have a responsibility of emphasising values education." McGuire and Priestley (1985:40) proposed a values education approach to dealing with offenders which should change values sufficiently to reduce re-offending. O'Reilly (1991:1A) reported how many educators consider that values education can alleviate rudeness, irresponsibility, promiscuity, dishonesty, materialism and violence. Nazareth and Waples (1980:7-10) found similarly. Silver (1976:10) implied the same when he stated that social and personal problems are rooted in value confusion.

The fact that its ultimate purpose is to change behaviour for the enhanced well-being of all, means that values education is more than just considering values in education. It implies that if the values in education are unacceptable, attempts are made to change them. Research about values in education or in the workplace will take us only so far. Remember, also, that values education can take place in many sectors, not only in the education sector. Values education is concerned with what we do about those values.

The reader will have noticed that a values education group involves the participants in doing philosophy. The philosophy is not that usually encountered in a philosophy course offered at university, during which students study the findings of famous philosophers. Rather, it involves people undertaking their own personal search - their own philosophical investigations, individually through personal reflection, and as a collaborative effort in discussion with others.

One may think that doing philosophy is appropriate for university students and adults but not for children. However, to some extent, school pupils are already being asked to think philosophically. More significantly, there is considerable evidence that children as young as six can take part in extended complex discussion and enjoy it. This was illustrated in a BBC 2 television programme in 1991 called "Socrates for six-year-olds"⁵, and is documented by Minnis (1991:1). In addition, fellow-researchers have documented the philosophical investigation approach for encouraging ethical behaviour, and there are several well-established organisations which research and promote philosophy for children, or philosophy in schools⁶.

⁵ The title of this programme was misleading: the children were not studying the findings of Socrates but were involved in philosophical investigation using the Socratic method.

⁶ See for example, Costello (1996:5-10), Fisher (1994:10-13), Lipman (1978:139-147), Sharp (1984:3-8) and Williams (1994:5-6). Relevant organisations include: The Society for the Advancement of Philosophical Enquiry and Reflection in Education (SAPERRE), Maine B, Christ's Hospital, Horsham, West Sussex, RH13 7NF; The Centre for Philosophy with Children, Old Acres, Charvil, Berks, RG10 9QL; Centre for Thinking Skills, Brunel University, 300 St Margaret's Road, Twickenham, TW1 1PT; and the European Philosophical Inquiry Centre, West

Values education does not involve moralistic telling or socialising: it attempts to get people, in a community of inquiry, to realise for themselves what behaviour is undesirable and what behaviour is desirable. Consequently, it does not merely involve moralistic telling or internalising or inculcating any external moral, political, social or religious code of conduct. However, values education involves participants in examining the values in these codes and their affect on well-being. In some rare instances, being involved in values education may result in some people feeling obliged to act against certain social and religious norms, and even laws⁷.

Values education transcends cultural and religious (for example) differences: it involves raising awareness of fundamental values common to all cultures and religions. Values education enables people to make up their own minds and enables extensive respectful discussion. Values education means neither agreeing on every point nor suppressing one's own view. It does entail disagreeing in a way that treats others with respect. Values education re-orientates one's attention to valuing people.

It is self-evident that if the activity of values education is to take place effectively, it requires a time slot dedicated to it. In schools, this means a specific "subject/theme"⁸ in the curriculum. In universities and colleges it could mean a number of tutorials, just as communication skills tutorials are offered as "extras". In the industrial and commercial sectors specialised in-house workshops and training courses in ethics could be offered, and to some extent are.

Although values education can take place in any organisation, I would like to explain away two major objections to values education as a subject/theme in the school curriculum.

Firstly, many educators claim that they are already doing values education through subjects/themes such as moral education, religious education, personal and social education, citizenship education, sex education, environmental education and drugs education. This could be true, but one would have to examine classes in these many "educations" to see the extent of values education.

In another study (Robb 1996) I found that much of the content in these "educations" involved the transmission of factual information. The scope for Socratic discussion of values issues was limited. In addition, I found that the "educations" just listed, and many others, have as their goal, behaviour change for the enhancement of well-being of self and others. Consequently, although they are not the same as values education, values education is the essential part in each of these "educations".

It would seem sensible to concentrate all the values education elements of the many "educations" in one subject/theme and export the considerable factual information

Quadrangle, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, G12 8QQ. I have also heard of the European Foundation for the Advancement of Philosophy with Children, and the International Council for Philosophical Inquiry with Children.

⁷ This is not an invitation to break laws one dislikes and disagrees with. The criteria that would justify breaking a law are very strict indeed and space does not permit discussion of them here. However, for example, I would disobey (and I would encourage others to disobey) a law which required citizens to report the whereabouts of Jewish people so that they could be captured and gassed.

⁸ The difference between a subject and a theme is not at all clear in the literature. Consequently, the phrase "subject/theme" is used in this paper.

back to the relevant curriculum subjects. This suggestion would remove about six "educations" from the curriculum but still achieve their main goal! This would overcome the objection that values education would add yet another load to the already overloaded curriculum.

Secondly, it is frequently claimed that there is no need for a separate subject/theme of values education because values should be, and are, taught in every subject in the curriculum. In addition, it is claimed, the whole school ethos is planned so as to instil appropriate values and that educators already take care to ensure that the hidden curriculum teaches appropriate values. For me these claims are not justified.

The cross-curricular (in England and Wales) or permeation (in Scotland) approach requires subject teachers to identify values issues in history, geography or chemistry, for example, and to discuss them briefly when they arise during teaching. It is true that every subject contains values issues. But how much time is the history or chemistry teacher to spend on detailed discussions of these? Is a history lesson to be interrupted every time a values issue becomes apparent? Common sense dictates not because a values issue would be raised every lesson.

For me, the cross-curricular approach is limited to teachers merely drawing attention to values issues in their own subjects, and then liaising with the values education specialist to contribute issues for discussion in the values education class. If subject specialists did any more, the history or chemistry would suffer. In addition, unless history and chemistry teachers were specifically trained to undertake Socratic discussion, their attempts at values education would be ineffective and even counter productive. In my view, it is unreasonable and unnecessary to have history and chemistry teachers, say, take on values education as well as their specialism.

It is true that people "pick-up" values from watching the ways adults and older children behave. It is reasonable to expect that children will "pick-up" responsible behaviour from watching adults behave responsibly. In addition, it is reasonable to expect the chemistry teacher, for example, to show respect for method, honesty in recording data and concern about the social implications of chemical products. It is reasonable to expect educators (professional staff) to respect the human dignity of all others.

Similarly, the whole ethos of a school - its cleanliness, facilities and interpersonal relationships - is often regarded as contributing to children⁹ behaving more responsibly. Consequently, it is frequently claimed that values education can best be done through the hidden curriculum and the whole school ethos.

However, is not use of the hidden curriculum, conditioning? An educator does not educate by "just being there". Surely teaching and learning are intentional activities, and as "act" in "activity" indicates, lasting change will come about only when there is some awareness and choice to behave in a certain way. Similarly, the school ethos approach is a resort to telling - to instilling - to producing an external set of rules: "These are the values we all agree to abide by and we will abide by them or else!". Responsible use of the hidden curriculum and school ethos are not enough on their own: we know that many people do not respond to a good example.

My objections just stated are not about the possible favourable effects of the hidden

⁹ The reader will be aware that this could apply just as well to adults in the workplace.

curriculum and school ethos (conditioning) approaches. There is some very preliminary evidence (Robb 1994) that they do encourage some people to behave more responsibly. My objection is to calling them "values education" and to the claim that they obviate the need for a specific subject/theme. Surely we want to enable people to make rational choices about what behaviour is desirable and what behaviour is not.

For me, without a set time (period or class) to discuss values issues in depth, with a specialist (specifically trained) teacher who knows how to draw out the values implications and how to encourage youngsters to think rationally about complex and sometimes sensitive interpersonal issues, the separate contributions made by cross-curricular mentions, hidden curriculum, and school ethos, would be ineffective. Values education takes place when aspects of the hidden curriculum are made explicit and discussed, and in the consultation and seeking required to draw up the school's ethos statement. In summary, I reserve "values education" for the specific reflection and discussion. Although cross-curricular mentions, making the hidden curriculum explicit, and the school ethos all contribute content for the values education class, and may contribute to people behaving more responsibly, they are not themselves values education¹⁰.

Conclusions

For me, there is enough evidence reported in this and other papers to recommend that religious, moral and personal and social education, for example, should be scrapped and replaced by values education. It is also recommended that values education be given a set time in the curriculum and treated as having as much importance as English and mathematics.

Some readers may be concerned about yet another change in the curriculum and the work this will cause. However, there already are materials and strategies for practising values education in classrooms: Cross (1995), Joyce (1994) and Rowe and Newton (1994), are only three such collections prepared for schools. Aitken *et al* (1993) and the Guide Association (1996) have produced similar collections for the voluntary sector. There are also courses for teachers in Socratic method.

It cannot be denied that being an effective values educator will require training. It seems reasonable to suggest that guidance, pastoral, religious, personal and social education and moral education teachers, would convert quite easily to become values education teachers. Many teachers are still uneasy taking religious education and moral education classes. Values education as I have defined it would replace this unease with enthusiasm. There is now a growing literature on teacher education for values education (Selmes and Robb 1996a, 1996b).

I know that much in this paper may be unsettling to some readers. Perhaps the reader knows of better ways of helping people to behave more responsibly: clearly sex education and drugs education, for example are not working (Robb 1994). It cannot be denied that understanding values education, analysing how it relates to what we already do, undertaking (teaching) it, and having it accepted by education (political) authorities, involves a struggle. However, the struggle is worth it. Is not values education a sound way to enhance the ultimate well-being of the educand - and is not that, the sole purpose of education?

¹⁰ This amends my earlier findings in Robb (1993:29-34).

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