

## Values education: A new development in teacher education

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*The paper focuses on values education. With the current pace of change affecting all facets of our life, we need to see that we do not blindly absorb these changes. Instead we should only absorb those that are worthwhile not only to us but also to others such as those in our families, communities and societies. In this regard values education is a move in the right direction. Schools can play a leading role through the process of teaching and learning of values. For the benefit of our children, it is essential that teachers are well prepared in the area of values education to ensure that they are able to carry out the teaching of values education to our children effectively. To this end, a course on values education has been incorporated into the pre-service and in-service teacher education programs at the University of the South Pacific. This paper highlights this new development.*

### **Influences**

When children go to school, they take with them values that may or may not be appropriate to those espoused by the school, the local community, or society at large. Generally speaking, schools are seen as providing worthwhile learning, that is, learning which contributes positively to the lives of the people. Outside the school environment, there are numerous agencies, such as religious organisations and the mass media, that have a strong influence on children's value formation. Negative influences from some of these outside sources could lead to children adopting values that may be inappropriate and in contradiction with the values emphasised at school and in the community.

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To assume that children will acquire desired values as they grow up, or that parents should be responsible for the teaching of values to their children does not guarantee that the job would be well done. In this regard teachers can play a key role in trying to teach children appropriate values despite the task being a challenging and demanding one.

Here in Fiji, the recent increase in drugs and substance abuse among school children is of major concern to all key stakeholders in education and in particular, teachers. To curb the growing problem of drugs and substance abuse, the Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education (PRIDE) Project at The University of the South Pacific provided funding of FJD\$40,000 to run a series of workshops. These workshops are aimed at raising awareness on the dangers and risks associated with drugs. The National Substance Abuse Advisory Council (NSAAC) of the Ministry of Education was fortunate to receive funding assistance for a worthy course. Here, teachers can play a pivotal role through values education to promote drug free schools and communities and in turn a healthy living for all. This calls for the teaching of values education to the teachers before they can effectively carry out the teaching of values to children. Upholding desired values at all times will certainly help people lead better lives.

### **The Course: Values in Education**

Teachers at all levels and in particular those destined to serve at the primary school level need to be better prepared to meet the demands of work expected of them. Teachers' work is becoming

more demanding and challenging. They are now expected to carry out a wide range of duties and responsibilities with a lot of pressure from different stakeholders as well as with limited resources. To this end, in 1999 an in-service Bachelor of Education (Primary) degree programme was introduced. It provided the opportunity, hitherto nor available, for primary teachers in the region to professionally upgrade their qualifications to degree level. The initiative by the University of the South Pacific (USP) to offer the degree level studies for the primary teachers is, therefore, a move in the right direction. At the same time it was considered important to further strengthen the secondary teacher education programme. Consequently, a four-year teacher education programme was re-introduced in 2003. Values in education form part of both the teacher education programmes.

While schools have always had a role in instilling values, the call now is for schools to play a more active role in the teaching of values. Therefore, the Ministry of Education in Fiji has developed a document on *Values Education* for use in both primary and secondary schools. This demonstrates the Ministry of Education's commitment to teaching values in schools and clearly indicates that teachers have an explicit responsibility to teach values. Even though other important social institutions such as families and religious groups contribute towards values education, the Ministry of Education realises that schools could do a better job in dealing with values education.

For their part, the University of the South Pacific has introduced a course *Values in Education* which is expected to provide teachers with knowledge and skills to carry out effective teaching and learning of values. This *Values in Education* course was taught for the first time in 2000 as part of the In-service BEd (Primary) degree programme. The course is now available in print mode and it also forms part of the four-year secondary teacher education programme. The course consists of seven units and these are now described.

#### *What are values*

This unit introduces the key concept of values and also attempts to clarify what values are. The unit helps one to learn and know that values are different from knowledge, beliefs, skills and attitudes. Also, at the outset, the unit attempts to spell out that schooling and knowledge are not value-free. The unit also attempts to show the need to arrive at a set of core values for the good of all people.

#### *Values at school*

This unit focuses on values in the school community. The need for schools to nurture values that enhance teachers' work and children's schoolwork is explained. In addition, the values children bring to school from their homes, church etc are described.

#### *School ethos*

In this unit the emphasis is on creating a pleasant atmosphere in the school in order to enhance not only the teaching/learning of values but also the teaching/learning of different subjects in the school curriculum. At the school level all participants—classroom teachers, school administrators and children—contribute to the development of the school ethos. In general, it is believed that educational leaders play a significant part in terms of influencing and contributing to the development of a school ethos. Thus, the school ethos can positively or negatively influence the teaching and learning of values.

#### *Curriculum and values education*

The unit spells out clearly that values are embedded in the different curriculum areas. Thus curriculum is not values-neutral. The different subject areas emphasise certain values which children might learn and these are briefly discussed.

#### *Teaching and learning values*

The need to use an integrated approach in the teaching and learning of values is considered. Teachers need to integrate values into teaching and learning of different subject areas. For example, teachers should promote the learning of values in

collaborative group work situations. In general, the teacher should act as a role model in the classroom by helping children to clarify values and show their relevance and basis in students' everyday life.

#### *Are we getting it right?*

The need to use suitable approaches to undertake assessment of values teaching and learning are discussed in this unit. Various suitable approaches such as the use of portfolio, reflective journal and profiling in assessing students' learning outcomes in the area of values are explained

#### *Values in life-long education*

This is the last unit and provides useful suggestions on how to apply the principle of 'learning to learn' to the teaching and learning of values. Also, the unit emphasises the need to incorporate the teaching and learning of values in further education and in non-school settings.

Overall, the course is based on the view that, for the betterment of humankind, the need to adopt appropriate values is vital at all times. Specifically, the course aims to develop a critical awareness and recognition of values within the school and curriculum context. In fact, appropriate values are embedded in the school curriculum and these values need to be brought out in the discourses with children in order for them to benefit.

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In any teaching activity the following four aspects warrant equal emphasis: knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. However, due to the pressure of examinations in our education system, teachers tend to emphasise only those parts of the syllabus that will be examined and, consequently, areas such as the teaching and learning of values are marginalised. For example, the national curriculum for Fiji schools is excessively academic in nature (Fiji Islands Education Commission, 2000). As far back as the 1990s, the UNESCO report of 1992 made a similar comment: that in many of our Fiji

schools there is an overemphasis on the teaching and learning of academic subjects at the expense of areas such as moral, social, personal and aesthetic values. Such an academic education "may help us to compete more effectively in the job market, [but] it does not feed the human spirit, it does not make us whole as individuals" (Muralidhar, 1994: 79). Muralidhar (1994: 79) goes on to further state that "access to the wealth of our cultures and the cultivation of the sensibilities, human imagination and judgment are not peripheral educational concerns". Similarly, values education is not a peripheral educational concern but one which deserves much attention. Thus for the good of everyone, values education must be promoted, that is, it should receive equal emphasis in all teaching and learning activities.

The course provides the in-service and pre-service teachers with relevant insights into the need to use a professional approach in the teaching and learning of values. As pointed out by Gilbert and Hoepper (1996), the teaching of values needs to be carried out critically and carefully by teachers. We need to caution that values education cannot be treated like a set of "commandments that will tell us what to do in specific situations in our everyday lives" (Gilbert and Hoepper, 1996). Instead of imposing or inculcating values, teachers should use suitable means to help children realise the need to uphold certain values. In particular, the use of appropriate pedagogical skills such as observation, recognition, discussion, situational analysis and critical thinking are vital for the purpose of effectively teaching and learning values. Also, it is necessary to create a favourable atmosphere in the school and the classroom in order to enhance the teaching and learning of values education. Furthermore, to evaluate the teaching and learning of values, a number of suitable approaches are suggested in the course. The use of these approaches provides a comprehensive picture for the teacher and, in turn, for significant

others such as parents about children's position with regard to values education. The course aims to develop teachers in these areas, and to equip them to take a leading role in the teaching of values to children.

The teaching and learning of values should be a collaborative effort between the school and the community. Teachers need to work closely with the community served by the school. The school and the community can reach a consensus on the core values to be developed in the children. In this regard, Howley and his colleagues (2000) proposed the idea of a *substantive partnership* which is vital to enhance the teaching and learning of values. The collaborative effort can help in the promotion of a community of learners, in which people can learn from one another about the values that are considered important.

## Conclusion

Values education is not a peripheral educational concern. A course in values education for teachers is a move in the right direction. Since teachers play a significant role in shaping and reshaping the lives of the young people under their care it is crucial that they are adequately prepared in all areas of work and responsibility such as in values education. Through values education teachers can make a big impact in the lives of the children. However, teachers alone may not be able to achieve optimum learning outcomes in values education; a joint effort with other agencies in the community is vital. A combined effort from all social institutions and agencies will surely lead to a significant improvement in the holistic development of a person.

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