

Chapter #2

VALUES EDUCATION AT CLASSROOM LEVEL IN VIETNAM: THE INSIDER VIEW

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how values education is implemented explicitly and implicitly at the classroom level in two upper secondary schools in Vietnam. Following a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews of sixteen teachers and observation of their teaching, and focus group interviews of twelve students, the study findings focus on the most important values that should be taught, teaching methods and evaluation of values education at the classroom level. It reveals tensions in teaching values and initiatives which teachers use to promote values. The study concludes that it is necessary to select the value *honesty* as the key value to be taught in upper secondary schools in Vietnam due to cheating in examinations. Values education should be planned and prepared with the consensus of all stakeholders in a school community. Teacher modelling seemed to be a preferred way to teach values and the relationships between teachers and students should be friendlier. Furthermore, new educational strategies should be developed to help teachers regarding values education pedagogy and evaluation.

Keywords: values education, teacher-student relationships, teacher modelling, curriculum, upper secondary school.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent times, values education has been an inextricable part of the school curriculum, considered as a pedagogy to increase quality teaching, students' wellbeing and social cohesion (Lovat, 2017; Lovat & Clement, 2008; Lovat, Dally, Clement, & Toomey, 2011; Lovat & Toomey, 2007; Lovat, Toomey, Clement, Crotty, & Nielsen, 2009). In many parts of the world, values education is an umbrella term including moral education, character education, ethics education, civics and citizenship education (Berkowitz, 2011; Lovat, 2011, 2017; Thornberg & Oguz, 2016). All types of school regardless of private or government sectors cannot exclude values education inasmuch the purpose of schooling itself is values laden. Indeed, values education refers to "any explicit and/or implicit school-based activity which promotes student understanding and knowledge of values, and which develops the skills and dispositions of students so they can enact particular values as individuals and as members of the wider community" (DEST, 2005, p. 8).

Whereas implicit values education is in line with hidden curriculum, mainly to build a positive and values-filled learning environment, explicit values education is embedded in the official curriculum content wherein values are taught directly and apparently (Halstead, 1996; Hawkes, 2010; Lovat, 2017; Thornberg, 2016; Thornberg & Oguz, 2013). Whether teachers are conscious of non-academic problems in the classroom or not, they might have to solve a range of dilemmas such as bullying, conflict and anti-social behaviour. Thus, values education is an imperative for maximising not only students' academic competences, social interaction and learning but also the quality of teaching and classroom management.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Hawkes (2010) proposes that in the school context, *respect* and *honesty* are primary values that should be stressed because they are fundamental tenets that guide behaviour. A comparative research study to examine Swedish and Turkish teachers' views on values education (Thornberg & Oguz, 2013) reveals that teacher participants in both countries identify similar sets of important values namely *relational values*, *self-responsibility values*, *self-enhancing values* and *democratic-participation values*. Significantly, "showing other people respect was the value most often referred to by both Swedish and Turkish teachers (Thornberg & Oguz, 2013, p. 52). An action research study in an Icelandic school (Sigurdardottir & Einarsdottir, 2016) finds that preschool teachers decide to emphasize three core values including *care*, *respect* and *discipline* because they believe that these are most effective in terms of children's social interaction.

Regarding values education methods, Halstead and Taylor (2000) suggest some common methods are direct instruction, the use of stories, discussion, just communities, circle time, extra-curricular activities, personal narratives, peer mediation and so forth. The cross-cultural research of Ghost and Tarrow (2003) identifies different methods which teachers use to teach values in Mexico, Canada and America. In Canada, methods such as role play, examples, case studies, critical thinking, autobiographies and visual media are used. Mexican teachers employ critical analysis, teacher modelling, values-focused teaching and teaching values through tacit curriculum. Discussion, cooperative learning, guest invitation and the use of visual media are frequent methods used in America.

Evidence from the recent values education research in Australia encourages teachers to use different approaches and methods in their classroom (Lovat, 2011, 2017; Lovat & Clement, 2008). Following that, the most effective values education methods are "values-explicit, student-centred and open-ended" (Australian Government, 2011, p. 6). Some of these methods are illustrated by good practices of different schools in Australia such as philosophy in the classroom, Socratic circles, student action teams and values action teams, students mentoring students, service learning, and information and communication technologies in values education (Australian Government, 2011).

In terms of values education assessment, Lovell (2006) introduces a social competencies test namely Monitoring Standards in Education (MSE) assessment in Western Australia including teacher observation, self-reporting and student response to particular scenarios. "Developmental scales identify where a student sits on a continuum ranging from seeing no problem in the scenario to showing compassion and valuing others" (Lovell, 2006, p. 2). Brady (2011) proposes some synthesis assessment tools depending on four common approaches to values education in Australia for teachers. Recent research of Notman (2012) in New Zealand found that the most preferred assessment methods of values education are observing student behaviours and student self-assessment.

3. BACKGROUND

The core values for Vietnamese citizens are identified transparently in the National Goal of Education: "To train Vietnamese in morality, health, knowledge, aesthetics and career; loyalty with the ideals of national independence and socialism; to form and nurture personality characters, abilities and qualities of citizens that can satisfy the mission of country's construction and protection" (SRV, 2005, p. 1). This is extended in Resolution No.29-NQ/TW of the National Plenum which identifies the need to enhance creative ability and potentiality of each individual to love family, people and country as well as to live well

and work efficiently (Ministry of Education and Training, 2014). Whereas these official government documents outline the goals of a comprehensive person fulfilled with both physical and mental wellbeing, they fail to address which specific values a Vietnamese citizen should attain and how to do that.

In Vietnamese general education, the subjects Moral Education and Citizenship Education are two main channels to transfer values explicitly in the compulsory curriculum. Nevertheless, these subjects' curriculum, textbooks, pedagogic methods, evaluation and results are criticized by the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (Ministry of Education and Training, 2013). Although according to Nguyen, Nguyen, and Mac (1995) the Vietnamese educational aims, missions and demands performed in every activity of school are considered as a formal syllabus of personality and character education, a straightforward focus on values education studies to investigate the current values education perceptions and implementation seems to be absent. Moreover, in some places, values education is confused with the teaching of skills such as survival skills and self-protection skills in which the nature of educational purposes is very different.

In brief, values education cannot stand only on paper in the current context of Vietnamese schools. It needs adequate understanding, recognition of its important role, a suitable curriculum, efficient pedagogies and clear evaluation to enhance quality teaching and effective schooling. First and foremost, there is a need to investigate contemporary values education experiences at the classroom level where students and teachers work together and influence each other daily and directly. Then from these initial results other educational strategies will be identified to promote values in Vietnamese schools synchronically and effectively.

4. OBJECTIVES

The study explores the views of teachers and students in two upper secondary schools in Vietnam in terms of the most important values that should be taught at school, implicit and explicit pedagogies, values education evaluation and difficulties in teaching values. Following that, four research questions are posed as follows:

- At school, what values are the most important to be taught and why?
- How are pedagogies employed to teach values implicitly and explicitly?
- How are the results of the values education process?
- What difficulties do teachers face in values education?

5. DESIGN AND METHODS

The study employed a qualitative case study research design to collect data in two upper secondary schools in Vietnam (school A and school B). While semi-structured interviews and observations were primary instruments used for teacher participants, focus group interviews were employed for student participants. A total of sixteen teachers were involved and their information is as follows:

Table 1.
Teacher participants.

School A			School B		
Teacher	Sex	Years of Experience	Teacher	Sex	Years of Experience
1	Female	10	9	Male	5
2	Female	5	10	Female	4
3	Female	5	11	Female	3
4	Female	21	12	Male	6
5	Male	12	13	Male	5
6	Male	5	14	Male	6
7	Male	5	15	Female	10
8	Female	5	16	Female	9

The four groups of students (six students in each group) in grade twelve who participated in the focus group discussion are referred to as AG1, AG2, BG1 and BG2. Each focus group interview lasted around two hours. Regarding data collection from teachers, after observation of their classroom teaching, they were interviewed for approximately one and half hours. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and sent back to participants for accuracy checking before being translated into English.

Four main themes were developed from the data as follows: the most important values, values education pedagogies, values education evaluation and difficulties in values education. These themes were coded with Nvivo software and quotes were selected to use in the research findings. The data was analyzed and written up descriptively and inductively based on the comparisons between two schools according to themes and between teacher participants and student participants (where this is appropriate).

6. FINDINGS

6.1. The most important values

6.1.1. School A

Five of eight teachers in school A and students in one group stated *honesty* was the most important value to transfer and promote at school because “*honesty* is a core value of a good person” (a student of AG1). Additionally, teachers claimed when students were honest, teachers could help to correct their mistakes.

When my students are honest, I can assess them exactly then I can give them feedback and help them. (Teacher 3)

I always tell my students on the first day of each school year that you can make mistakes as long as you are honest and try to correct them. I am here to help you. (Teacher 6)

Teacher 5 claimed *honesty* was the most significant value taught at school in relevance to issues of exam cheating in Vietnam. As a consequence of high expectations of parents and teachers, students had no choice but to achieve good results. However not all students could attain these good learning levels and felt they had to cheat.

Every day, we have to finish a lot of homework. I think if someone can complete all, they must be a super star. Then some students just wait for copying other students’ homework and these situations become a bad and popular habit in my class (a student of AG2)

Together with *honesty*, teachers and students shared the same ideas about two other values that should be taught at school – *respect* and *diligence*. Other values such as *self-esteem*, *creativity* and *tolerance* were values that teachers appraised. This was different to students' selected values which included *independence*, *responsibility*, *politeness* and *fortitude*.

6.1.2. School B

Similar results were identified in school B. Half of the teachers, when asked about the most important values to teach at school, identified *honesty*.

Honesty is a basic value of an individual. If a person is not honest, other values become virtual. (Teacher 14)

Honesty helps communication at school become easier. (Teacher 9)

Interestingly, the reason for selecting *honesty* was almost identical between two schools in relevance to exam cheating problems. As a teacher's explanation, "If *honesty* was taught, exam cheating would be reduced. When students were honest, they would respect knowledge, science and research thereby improving their attitudes with study and exams" (Teacher 10). Another teacher revealed a sad reality in line with *honesty* and exam cheating.

Sadly, now my students no longer believe in honesty. They think exam cheating does not matter but benefits themselves. So, why not? ... They just need good certificates to gain good jobs. (Teacher 14)

Students of school B also believed *honesty* should be imparted at school so as to "enhance learning attitudes of students because when they do not cheat at examinations, they have to learn hard to gain high academic results" (a student of BG2). Together with *honesty*, other important values mentioned by teachers were *respect*, *creativity*, *politeness*, *confidence* and Vietnamese traditional values including *patriotism*. Student group discussions included values such as *respect*, *independence*, *discipline*, and *responsibility*.

All in all, both teachers and students in school A and B thought that *honesty* is the most important value that should be imparted at school. The reason for this originated directly from exam cheating and indirectly from the heavy current curriculum and high-academic-results expectations of Vietnamese society. Apart from *honesty*, *respect*, *independence* and *creativity* were other important values mentioned.

6.2. Pedagogies

Teaching values is different from teaching knowledge of specific subjects and emphasizes not only developing cognitive levels of students but also behavioural and affective levels. Values can be learnt through direct methods implemented consciously by teachers, and by hidden methods instilling values naturally without any explicit purpose of teachers and students.

6.2.1. The explicit methods

In both schools, teachers used a variety of explicit methods to teach values from traditional ways such as **questioning**, **the use of stories** and **direct discussion** to support use of videos, games and visual objects. However, when teaching values, most teachers combined this into their lessons. Some teachers focused on students' *cooperation*, *tolerance* and *respect* by guiding them on how to work as a team.

I often assign a topic and instruct them to work together. (Teacher 12)

The students have to plan their project and divide detailed tasks to each other. Then they will present it in class and receive comments from their mates and teachers...That's the way they learn to listen to their friends' ideas patiently and the way to cooperate with each other... (Teacher 2)

Teacher 1 said she often used **good examples** to teach her students. Teacher 4 claimed using **good examples** to teach values is effective because the students did not want to be preached at; they wanted to hear others' stories which applied for their situation. Teacher 10 mentioned **reading good books** was an effective way to teach values. In school A, some teachers stated that they often used **rebuke** and **punishment** with their students when talking gently did not bring results.

In some cases, I had to request my students to stand up and asked them about their wrong behaviours and attitudes ... (Teacher 5)

I invited noisy students to stand up at the end of the classroom to avoid minding other students. (Teacher 3)

With some cases, I had to use strong methods like scolding and discipline. (Teacher 2)

Although in school B teachers answered that they did not use **rebuke** or **punishment** in their classrooms, observations in some classrooms showed differently. Some teachers often rebuked their students during their teaching sessions.

6.2.2. The implicit methods

a. Good relationships between students and teachers. Values are reflected in the relationships between teachers and students in school (Halstead, 1996) whether those involved perceive this or not. In both schools, all teachers and students agreed that the relationship between teachers and students could influence their teaching and learning in both negative and positive ways.

If students like you, they also enjoy learning your subject and willing to cooperate with you. Otherwise when you ask them, they do not answer or even offend you ... (Teacher 3)

We should have good relationships with most of students in a class. If not, we fail to teach them. (Teacher 14)

I will learn more effective if I love my teachers and vice versa. (a student of AG1)

Understanding that the relationships between teachers and students impacted on the efficiency of teaching and learning, both teacher and student participants proposed that they should have active ways to make good relationships with each other. The consensus seemed to be that they both tried to impress the other by carrying out their roles as best as possible.

I try to concentrate seriously on their lessons and ask smart questions... I attempt to score higher marks. (a student of AG1)

In each teaching period of any teacher, I always focus on what they teach and ask them some problems I do not know ... Although some subjects are quite boring, but I still listen to them to show my respect. (a student of BG2)

I always burn myself with the love of teaching ... I do not forget to encourage by rewarding small gifts suchlike happy stickers and books. (Teacher 1)

When students understand that their teachers are doing with great efforts to bring the good things, students will love them. (Teacher 7)

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Some teachers tried to be good friends with their students and spent time with them at break and after school time as they said, “I often play some games with my students at school playground” (Teacher 11) and “I am playing in a football team with my students” (Teacher 12). In the classroom, some teachers made a conscious effort at creating a friendly and relaxed ambience during their teaching periods to improve learning quality.

Honestly, I am bad at singing, but when I find my students stressful, I try to sing and dance. (Teacher 6)

When I find that my students are tired of learning, I often tell jokes to make them laugh. (Teacher 10)

Especially, teachers and students in school B emphasized ‘care’ as being the crucial element to improve teacher-student relationships. ‘Care’ meant that “teachers should ask students about their matters and show them that we are willing to help” (Teacher 11). Other teachers showed their care to students via praise and sympathy.

In spite of sitting at the teacher’s table and talking, I often walk around the classroom and see my students’ work. When I see something they make interesting, I often praise them. Or even if their work is not quite good as a whole, I cheer them up by giving positive comments on their effort and the details of their work. (Teacher 13)

I think we should sympathize with our students and discard their mistakes if we can. For instance, sometimes our students forget to do homework, I understand that they have to learn many subjects in a day long and they have so many things to pay attention to. Such understanding prevents me from rebuking or punishing them. (Teacher 14)

Similarly, students in school B said that they expressed their care to their teachers by “preparing some water bottles for our teachers When our teachers have new clothes, shoes or hair styles, we often complement. These tiny things make them happy and friendlier” (a student of BG2). Some teachers in both schools thought that they “should remind students about their positions. Teachers are not students’ peers or mates” (Teacher 16) and “teachers should keep a certain distance with students” (Teacher 10) because “when the gap between teachers and students disappears, students will not respect and listen to teachers” (Teacher 7). In contrast, students expected that their teachers would be “their friends, sisters or brothers who they were able to trust and share problems with” (a student of AG1). Students also believed that, when teachers kept a distance from students, they felt afraid of asking questions or expressing their opinions. Students also thought that friendship between teachers and students could enhance the quality of learning.

If a teacher is friendly and easy, I feel free to ask them everything that I do not understand. When they are happy to answer my questions, I have a high motives to learn more. In the opposite case, even though I have a question, I do not dare to ask. (a student of BG1)

I really want my teachers to be our friends. Between us does not have any barrier thereby improving our learning quality. Teachers are our friends does not mean that their positions are reduced. We still respect them ... (a student of BG2)

b. Modelling by teachers. Values education can be achieved through modelling by teachers who have direct influence on their students. From the views of teacher participants, students followed the teachers who they admired, especially their head teachers. Being a teacher meant that they had a responsibility to be a good person, both at school and in society.

When we observe the styles of head teachers, we will see the students of their head classes copy these styles...For instance, a class has an active head teacher, that class will take part in many activities and vice versa. (Teacher 3)

I think, every teacher should be good at morality and behaviour. If we just do one mistake, reputation of educational sector can be impacted. (Teacher 8)

Several teachers believed that teacher modelling was the best pedagogic method and they often used themselves as examples for student behaviour:

I want my students to be punctual, so I have never entered their classroom late. I teach my students about honesty, so I always do as I talk. I mean I have never told lie... (Teacher 14)

If a teacher behaves properly and take care of students, their students will tell well about them with their parents. Then parents will take teachers as examples for their children to follow. I think the best pedagogy is using my behaviours and manners as examples to teach my students. (Teacher 10)

The positive character of teachers might impact students directly however, when teachers behaved badly, students were affected indirectly and they did not respect their teachers. Teachers should unite in what they said and what they did. If not, they could make students confused or even offended.

Some teachers did not keep their word. What they said and what they did differently. As a result, their student did not cooperate with them. (Teacher 11)

If a teacher does something wrong, their students can do the same things. (Teacher 9)

In the case of students, they felt that they respected and followed teachers who were always gentle, intelligent and sensitive as good models. Students said they loved teachers who could control their tempers and be calm in any circumstances.

I wish that I will have good characters like my teacher. She is smart, well-behaved and delicate... I am impacted by my teacher who never lose her control and always be well-organized. These good values are useful for my work in the future. (a student of BG1)

Students also discussed that they were impressed by teachers who were different and 'strange' with special teaching methods. They took their Physics teacher as an instance, "when he taught us about a pendulum, he illustrated by a hanged person. It is so easy to remember his lessons" (a student of BG2).

6.3. Evaluation

In the Vietnamese educational system secondary schools assess knowledge and skills of students through their learning capacity based on a marking system from 0 to 10, equivalent to lowest to highest levels. The learning of students is assessed on the outcome of many tests performed weekly and monthly. Each school year has two terms and at the end of each term student results are released. Together with learning assessment, a school also issues records of conduct ranking with four levels namely Good Conduct level, Fairly Good Conduct level, Medium Conduct level and Bad Conduct level. According to teachers of school A, values education assessment was conduct ranking based on the times and frequencies of breaking the school rules, and progress of students in terms of improving bad behaviour throughout the whole school year.

I connect closely with the Supervisory Group to record my student's mistakes then I assess conduct level of each student at the end of each term. (Teacher 1)

The criteria to assess conduct level lies on how the students obey of the school rules and their progress by reducing mistakes. (Teacher 2)

In school B, teachers stated that they did not have any specific method of assessment regarding values education for their students accept based on their own observations.

The assessment of values education is quite subjectively so it is not exact. I just feel its results through students' cooperation and their communicative improvements. (Teacher 12)

It is so hard to know the results of values education. We just observe through our students' behaviours and attitudes. (Teacher 13)

6.4. Difficulties in values education

First of all, lack of time was a serious obstacle that the teachers of both schools had to deal with. While time shortage in school A was related to the number of students in a classroom (around 48-50 students/classroom), in school B, time used for subject content and exercises.

Some lessons contain lengthy unrealistic knowledge and we have to teach all of them. Certainly, my students get bored and they do not cooperate thereby the lessons seem to be longer. (Teacher 11)

We just focus on teaching maths, we do not have time for values education. (Teacher 13)

This difficulty resulted from the expectations of the Vietnamese society and family where "the society and parents always require high academic results so we have to prioritize knowledge teaching and exercises" (Teacher 12).

Secondly, the lack of facilities for values education was another issue. As an example teacher 3 wanted to use a short video to integrate environmental protection awareness into her geography session but it was impossible.

Our classrooms were not equipped with computers and projectors. If I want to use these tools, my students must move to a special room with projectors. When the students move out and in it takes round 10 minutes. (Teacher 3)

Thirdly, problems in values education included the ‘special’ students who challenged teachers’ efforts and patience. Some teachers appeared to struggle in finding appropriate methods to response to these students.

Each year I meet at least one student who makes me lose my patience! I do not know how to cope with them even I try my best. (Teacher 1)

I am afraid of some students who keep talking and talking in my teaching sessions even I give warning to them many times. They bother their classmates and make me lose my teaching inspiration. (Teacher 3)

Fourthly, the complication of present society where young people face many pressures and pitfalls could be a barrier in teaching values as teacher 4 said: “not only teachers face difficulties in educating values but also our students. The conflicts of values taught at school and values received from society might upset our students”. Finally, another difficulty in teaching values came from the lack of cooperation of students’ family and the parenting methods of students’ parents.

Some students behaved badly. I invited their parents to school and they did not believe in what I said... They thought I made up the stories because their children were nice and obedient at home. (Teacher 5)

Some parents always rebuke their children without listening. The children become stubborn gradually. (Teacher 2)

7. DISCUSSION

The findings show that in both schools the majority of participants firstly identified *honesty* as the most important value that should be taught and then *respect*, *independence* and *creativity*. These results further support recent research conducted by Hawkes (2010), Thornberg and Oguz (2013), and Sigurdardottir and Einarsdottir (2016) in which *respect* and *honesty* are fundamental values of schooling. The reason for choosing *honesty* was similar in both schools in relevance to exam cheating issues in Vietnam and the true quality of students’ abilities in assessment. This suggests that any educational strategies to promote values education in school cannot exclude *honesty* in the curriculum and that the exam cheating problems should be the focus of specific study in the future. Additionally, other values related to the Vietnamese school context that should be considered and studied in more detail are *creativity*, *confidence*, *diligence*, *discipline*, *fortitude*, *independence*, *politeness*, *responsibility*, *respect*, *self-esteem* and *tolerance*.

Teacher participants stated many different methods to teach values, however, they felt that they enacted values education without clear purpose and preparation in advance. Apparently, this is at odds with recent research in values education which argues that values education “cannot be left to chance or merely assigned to the hidden curriculum” (Lovat & Clement, 2008, p. 280). Values education needs to be planned and prepared carefully with the agreement of all stakeholders, especially the school leaders. Some teachers claimed they often used rebuke and punishment. This indicates the need to develop values education programs not only for students but also for teachers regarding appropriate pedagogies for values education.

In terms of the relationship between teacher and student, although the majority of teachers were aware of the importance of good relationships with their students and were willing to become their students’ friends, some thought students might not respect them if they were too close. At this point, students’ opinions contrasted with those of their teachers

as they expected that students and teachers should have closer relationships such as friendship, brotherhood or sisterhood. Teacher modelling could influence students in both positive and negative ways and being good mirrors for students was regarded as the best way to teach values. This seems in accord with recent studies indicating that teacher modelling is the most favoured and effective strategy to teach values at school (Arthur, 2011; Lovat & Clement, 2008; Lovat et al., 2011; Lovat & Toomey, 2007; Lovat et al., 2009; Notman, 2012; Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013).

The assessment of values education based on the number of times of school rules were broken seems both inappropriate and unsatisfactory. This contradicts the findings of Brady (2011) and Notman (2012) suggesting specific, suitable and planned assessment tools and methods for values education. The evaluation should be underpinned by a unified curriculum in which the content and pedagogies are well-developed first and followed with values education assessment. The lack of time for values education was cause for major concern as most time was used for transferring knowledge of subjects. This requires changes on a national scale for the curriculum of the Vietnamese educational system. Other obstacles that should be taken into consideration are the dearth of educational facilities, tailored methods for special students, current social problems and parent cooperation.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My great appreciation is sent to Dr Jill Brown, Faculty of Education, Monash University for her inspiration and training, and to Dr Danh Duc Nguyen, School of Educational Studies, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education for his encouragement and valuable support.

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