

Aligning Stakeholder Participation in Effective Implementation of Values Education Curriculum in Schools of Vietnam

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ABSTRACT Recent research has demonstrated that values education is not a single subject of the school curriculum. Rather it is considered as an effective pedagogy to foster the quality of teaching and learning, to promote social interactions and enhance students' wellbeing in a comprehensive curriculum. This study focuses on values education implementation at different levels of the curriculum including planning, enacting and experiencing. Data was collected from a qualitative research study in an upper secondary school in Vietnam through semi-structured interviews for the principal and teachers, focus group interviews for students, and document analysis. The findings reveal significant differences between the planned values, the enacted values and the experienced values of the curriculum. It is suggested that the school should identify a shared values set to promote across the whole school community. Further, aligning all levels of values education and training teachers in the school values education plan is necessary.

INTRODUCTION

The new values education pedagogy from the curriculum approach does not perceive values education as a separate subject such as Moral Education or Citizenship Education. Alternatively, values education is a pedagogy grounded in efficient teaching and learning with positive relationships and an explicit and implicit quality values education curriculum (Lovat and Clement 2008; Lovat et al. 2011; Lovat 2017). Values education "is the attempt, within schools, to craft pedagogies and supportive structures to foster the development of positive, ethical, pro-social inclinations and competences in youth, including around strengthening their academic focus and achievement" (Berkowitz 2011: 153).

According to Marsh and Willis (2007), the curriculum is categorised into three different levels, that is, the planned curriculum, the enacted curriculum and the experienced curriculum designed for the implementation of curriculum as a whole at the school level, the classroom level and the community level (DeNobile and Hogan

2014). At the school level, values education is expressed explicitly via the planned programs of study and syllabuses, the school regulations and discipline, and implicitly through the principal's vision and management, the school culture and the staff communication.

At classroom level, the planned curriculum is enacted and interpreted from the general curriculum to detailed values lessons and activities for each specific class community. In addition, values education is presented but invisible through values-filled class ambience, classroom management, teacher and peer modelling and teacher-student relationships. Briefly, this level reveals how teachers and students experience values education. Finally, values education is the connection between the school and parents and the way parents are involved in values education through and with their children at the community level.

It is noted that the alignment of all levels of curriculum in school is the foundation for teaching and learning (Glatthorn et al. 2017). This synchronisation is important to avoid miscommunication for both teachers and students, and to prevent a crisis in assessment of the curriculum effectiveness. The curriculum in the school plan and the curriculum teachers enact may perhaps be different from the curriculum students

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and parents perceive and experience. That means there are gaps between what is planned to teach, what is taught and what is learned (Marsh and Willis 2007; Marsh 2009; Gilbert 2012; Glatthorn et al. 2017).

Objectives

This study explores the implementation of values education at three levels of curriculum, that is, planning, enacting and experiencing in an upper secondary school in Vietnam.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Site

A qualitative research design was employed in this study in line with a constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm in that “individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (Creswell 2009: 8). Of equal importance is that knowledge about values and the implementation of values education are daily shaped through the teaching and learning activities of students and teachers in schools.

The research site is a government school educating students from grade ten to grade twelve following the national education curriculum of the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) of the Vietnamese government. At the time of data collection, the school had 2,256 students in 47 classrooms with approximately 48 to 50 students in each class. A Head Teacher is responsible for ensuring the implementation of school discipline in the classroom and moral education for all students in their class.

The school is organised with twelve professional groups in accordance with eleven subjects namely, Maths, Physics, Chemistry, Foreign Language, Literature, History, Geography, Biology, Computer Science, Citizenship Education, Physical and National-Defence Education and a Superintendent Group. Additionally, the school has the support of the Youth Assistant and the Youth Union under instruction from the Vietnamese Communist Party to organise extra-curricular activities and encourage patriotism among students. The School Parent Association also takes part in moral education for students and has a member on the School Disciplinary Committee.

Participants

The participants in this study are the principal, eight teachers and twelve students in an upper secondary school in Vietnam. First, the principal responded to the research recruitment email and permitted the research to be carried out at the school. Then a research recruitment letter was posted on the school’s notice board to recruit teacher and student participants. The teacher participants have all been teaching for at least three years full time in the school, and are varied in their subject and knowledge background and age. Before being interviewed individually for one and a half hours, the principal and teacher participants were sent the research explanatory statements and the research consent forms to ensure that they understood the research and were participating voluntarily.

The student participants are students of grade twelve at the school, aged from seventeen to eighteen years of age. At the highest level of general education, they had experienced eleven years of the Vietnamese educational system, and thus they had experienced how values education was implemented through all class levels. They were considered mature enough to think about values education as an abstract area and to express their opinions about values education-related questions. Two groups of six students volunteered for focus group interviews, which lasted from one and half hours to two hours.

Data Collection Tools and Analysis

Together with semi-structured interviews for the principal and teacher participants, and focus group interviews for student participants, this study utilised document analysis as another main research method. Official school documents were supplied by the principal, such as the school rules and the school year plan.

Thematic analysis was used to approach the research data. First, themes emerged after study of transcripts and documents and were then coded with the support of *Nvivo* software. The selected quotes were used in the findings and the content of themes was written inductively and descriptively.

RESULTS

The Promoted Values

a. The Planned Values

The values planned at the school level were expressed explicitly in the school year plan, the school rules and the principal's initiatives. The school year plan mainly emphasises on developing creativity and activeness for students.

The school facilitates and guides teachers to change their teaching methods to promote self-study abilities, activeness and creativity of students... (The 2016-2017 school year plan)

Other values identified in the school year plan are "*honesty, responsibility, cooperation, respect*" (The 2016-2017 school year plan). Additionally, the principal has also initiated some special tutoring schemes to help students in difficult circumstances and through these programs 'care' was promoted.

We help lower academic performance students through tutoring. Each teacher is responsible for helping one to two students who have difficulty in financial support and lack family love and concern. (The principal)

Some values are also included in the school rules including "*courteousness, respect for teacher and elderly, friendliness, politeness, cooperation, supportiveness and punctuality*" (the school rules).

b. The Enacted and Experienced Values

When asked what values are taught in the classroom, several teacher participants said that values such as "*cooperation, courteousness, friendliness, supportiveness sympathy and caring*" (Teacher 1), "*honesty, respect for teacher and elderly, friendliness and discipline*" (Teacher 2), "*patriotism and environment protection*" (Teacher 3), "*good lifestyle and honesty*" (Teacher 4), "*diligence and studious spirit*" (Teacher 5), "*humanity*" (Teacher 7), and "*politeness and confidence*" (Teacher 8) were integrated into their subjects. They said that they taught these values without any explicit purpose or preparation in advance, and they just felt these values were characteristics that a good student needed.

Student participants also proposed some values that they thought they experienced at school such as *courteousness, respect for teacher and elderly, responsibility, supportiveness good communication and sanitariness* (students of Group 1), and *courteousness, respect for teacher and elderly, diligence, persistence, cooperation, supportiveness and honesty* (students of Group 2).

c. Similarities and Differences

The similarities and differences between the values planned by the principal, enacted by teachers and experienced by students are presented in Figure 1.

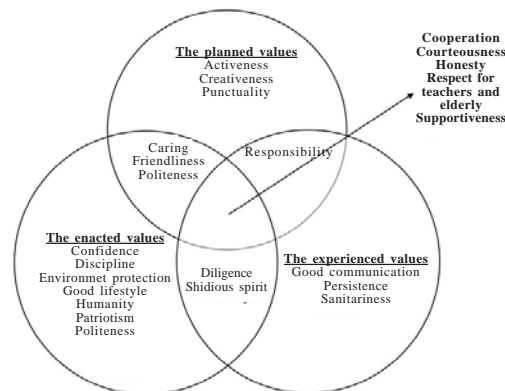


Fig. 1. The similarities and differences between values selection

Source: Author

What stands out in the chart is that five values, namely *cooperation, courteousness, honesty, respect for teacher and elderly, and supportiveness* were planned by the school and also used by teachers to impart to students. In parallel, students also thought that they experienced these values at school. The unified message from the principal to classrooms mostly focused on the values in which relationships of stakeholders were regulated. For example, with teachers and elderly, students needed to be respectful and courteous. With schoolmates, students should be cooperative, supportive and honest. In the classroom, both teachers and students implemented a *diligence* and *studious spirit*. It

seemed these values were necessary to achieve high academic performances of students.

The differences in three levels of curriculum were also recorded through values that were solely planned by the principal and neither enacted by teachers nor experienced by students, like *activeness*, *creativity* and *punctuality*. These key values were regulated explicitly and primarily in the school year plan but they were not transferred to teachers and students. Teachers instead focused on their own values without being directed from the school leader including *confidence*, *discipline*, *environment protection*, *good lifestyle*, *humanity*, *patriotism* and *politeness*. These values were not perceived by students. Finally, some values were not planned and transferred explicitly yet students still put them into practice including *good communication*, *persistence* and *sanitariness*.

The Results of Values Education Implementation: The Insiders' Views

a. The Principal and Teachers' Opinions

In general, the principal acknowledged that in comparison with the goal of the school set for values education activities each year, only seventy percent was achieved. He explained that the thirty percent of unsuccessful values education activities resulted from lack of time and facilities.

I think the school attained seventy percent of yearly values education goals... The rest, thirty percent were not successful since we did not have enough time to do and the school facilities were quite poor. (The principal)

The views of some teachers were quite different. Teacher 1 indicated that the success rate was much lower than that indicated by the principal (30%). The reported causes of seventy percent of ineffective values education schedule depended on the teachers' abilities and devotion.

I think we just achieved thirty percent. The remaining portions were not efficient because it depended on each teacher's capacities and commitment. For example, in my head class, my students really hate a female teacher who always shouts and rebukes students without any reasons whenever she enters the classroom. I cannot understand why she has such behav-

our and how teachers like her can teach values (Teacher 1).

Another four teachers felt that the implementation of values education at their school was not thorough or efficient. The reasons given for this situation were the focus on knowledge of the curriculum, the lack of time and teacher abilities.

I guess our students were not really into in values education activities... The enactment of values education in each classroom depended on each teacher and time allocation. (Teacher 7)

Teaching values education in my school did not have impact on our students as we expected (Teacher 8).

The curriculum released by the Ministry of Education and Training stresses on subject knowledge so the time for values education is scaled down (Teacher 2).

Another explanation for ineffective values education was lack of understanding of values education. *"Values education has not received adequate attention from all teachers, especially science teachers who just focus on the knowledge part of subject"* (Teacher 3). Nevertheless, Teacher 5 held a different view, *"We do not only focus on the knowledge like before"*. Two teachers had optimistic views about the leaders, teaching staff and values education promotions in recent times. They believed in a future where values education would be implemented very well, when they said, *"I like the working environment here. Every teacher is young and enthusiastic... I respect and esteem management staff that consider the school as their second houses"* (Teacher 6) and *"We can do well if we have enough time"* (Teacher 4).

b. Students' Opinions

Student participants said that values-education-related activities at their school were both entertaining and unfocused. Students could not understand the purpose of these activities and they doubted the educational results while there were so many competitions within them.

"We cannot breathe with continuous activities and events of the school. Some values education activities were so entertaining and competitive" (a student of Group 2).

"We do not know what lessons we learn from these types of activities. I agree that we need

relaxing but valuable lessons should be added" (a student of Group 1).

Student participants also indicated the significant differences between what was taught at school and in society. The students mentioned the school taught theoretically and ideally while the reality of society was very different. Even within the school, values education was not efficient in some cases.

"I was taught that I should be honest at school. But I met some people who behaved badly. For example, they made dirty things to make me quit my casual job. People often were corrupted at work places..." (a student of Group 1).

"My teacher said that everyone was equal but my classmates often took my weakness for fun. My teacher scolded and punished them, but it seemed inefficient..." (a student of Group 1).

Thus, they wished the school not only taught the good things but also showed them how to *"cope with bad people and protect ourselves from bad things"* (a student of Group 1).

DISCUSSION

Recent empirical research has shown that values education programs were successful in school due to a whole school approach (DeNobile and Hogan 2014) in which schools articulate and practice values education at different levels of curriculum with "the consensus of the various stakeholders, including school staff, students, parents and the wider community" (Lovat and Clement 2008: 280). The alignment of all levels of curriculum in a school is a crucial factor for quality teaching and learning (Glatthorn et al. 2017). This contradicts the findings of this study wherein the values that the school planned to promote were different to the values the teachers taught and the values the student received.

Even in the classroom, the differences still existed. Regarding reflection on general implementation of values education in the school, the principal, teachers and students failed to reach complete agreement. The principal assessed the efficiencies of values education activities higher than the teachers did. Meanwhile, the students thought values education at their schools was unfocused and ineffective. Having said that though, there are potential gaps between what is planned to teach, what is taught and what is

learned (Marsh and Willis 2007; Marsh 2009; Gilbert 2012; Glatthorn et al. 2017). There need to be mutual agreements of all stakeholders in a school community about common values and values education strategies.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, it seems that there are apparent differences between the three levels of values education curriculum. One of the most important findings is that there is an absence of common core values that guide and monitor values education implementation in the school. Some values such as *activeness, creativeness* and *punctuality* were planned by the school leader in the school year plan and the school rules but teachers and students did not implement them. Without being led by the principal, however, teachers homed in on their own values to teach students *confidence, discipline, environment protection, good lifestyle, humanity, patriotism* and *politeness* but these values were not perceived by their students. Some values like *good communication, persistence* and *sanitariness* were not planned and transferred explicitly, and yet students practise them.

The school stakeholders, that is, the principal, teachers and students, did not come to a shared understanding about values education implementation results at their school. The stakeholders assessed the effectiveness of values education differently. The students appraised values education results at their schools lower than the principal and teachers did. Schools with good implementation of values education show their consideration in all aspects of curriculum including planning, enacting and experiencing. It is not to mention that they are good at modelling, communicating, cooperating and considering all vulnerable and alternative approaches. Thus, it is necessary to align stakeholder participation in effective implementation of values education curriculum in schools in Vietnam.

RECOMMENDATIONS

First, the school should identify common values, which are crucial for implementing values education to ensure that all stakeholders focus on shared goals thereby avoiding curric-

ulum gaps. Then, to reduce the gaps between curricula, curricular alignment needs to be processed wherein teachers and students are key elements to perceive and respond to the curriculum plan. Following that, all teachers should be trained before each new school year about the values that the school plans to promote and its common pedagogic strategies. Finally, to prevent misunderstanding of values education messages from the principal to teachers and students, values education should be announced and promoted explicitly throughout the school community in as much as teaching as is possible effectively, so values education is not be left to chance. This synchronisation is important to avoid miscommunication for both teachers and students, and to prevent a crisis in the values education assessment.

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