

Chapter 8

Value in Shadows: A Critical Contribution to Values Education in Our Times

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Introduction

In one sense, the term values education comes across as a non-sequitur. It is similar to saying Sahara Desert, when “Sahara” (or sahrā) means desert in Arabic. Education is not divested of values. Its conception, discourses, implementation and practices, however broadly or narrowly these are defined, present a number of often interrelated values that are either explicit, as might be recognized in Social Justice Education, or implicit, as in the “hidden curriculum”. The term values education may be seen to operate as having dual signification. It first, in the performance of the term, makes explicit the values-laden nature of pedagogy and practice, and, second, it highlights the need for debate as to what values need to be made explicit. Such a debate requires a more prominent focus in the educational arena to the extent that education for education’s sake is most often the key assumption made within the political policy arena and educational field to a great extent. “More of it” and universally spread is often viewed unquestioningly as a good thing, and how effectively we may “transmit” it through “knowledge transfer” or “knowledge mobilisation” seems to sum up, in the general sphere of things, what is important to consider in this arena and in the social sphere at large. This general conception aligns with an increasingly materialistic trend towards efficiencies, standardized and evidence-based practices in the educational field inherited from corporate philosophies and marketization. In this newly inherited vein with a strong internationalizing and (trans)national thrust, the commodification of educational programmes whose purposes are underwritten by economic forces render insignificant any discussions that have at their centre questions and concerns about education as moral, spiritual, ecological or values-based. It is in the light of the contemporary globalizing context

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of mass education whose rightness and usefulness about “effective” “content” and “delivery” have become increasingly foreclosed and underscored by “best practices” that precede philosophical engagement, divest educators of their right to judgement about what might be best for their students, leach intellectualism and spirituality from educational processes, and preclude a plurality of alternatives. The neoliberal agenda for education has been set, and it is an agenda whose thrust rests on progressivist ideals, modernization and economic development at the cost of other vitally important considerations of the human condition, such as ethics, freedom, democracy, egalitarianism, justice, spirituality, ecological knowing and wellbeing.

In attempting to redirect that which he viewed as the problematic social effects of the current economic development agenda, Amartya Sen (1999), winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics, wrote in *Development as Freedom* that “focusing on human freedoms contrasts with narrower views of development, such as identifying development with the growth of gross national product, or with the rise of personal incomes, or with industrialization, or with technological advance, or with social modernization” (p. 3). Education internationally has suffered under this same economic and ideological agenda, and it too requires redirection and the opening up of the public sphere to create places for contemplation, debate, intersubjective feeling and resistance. In this sense, values education, for me at least, is not merely another packaged panacea for societal and educational ills. This would summon up unattended-to shadows and discursive ghosts in the Derridean (1994) sense, in the same way that the new commodified educational programmes have done within the onslaught of a global neoliberal agenda as a new form of sophisticated economic colonization, foreclosing on alternatives and muting diverse voices. Instead, values education serves as a discussion place: a means of placing back on the agenda questions that foster contemplation and put forward, as worthy, a plurality of ideals about what may be important for educational practice, for those being educated, for those teaching those that affect the world, for those that will affect the world in the future, for society on both a global and local level, and for a vision of a sustainable justice-oriented set of possible approaches to the Earth and those – all of those – that inhabit it. It is not a set of advocated values in itself more than a place to grapple critically with crucial ideas about motives, purpose, ideas and what may be of worth to/in educational practice “glocally”, and why. Such questions are imperative in a world increasingly suffering under rampant poverty, global violence, widening inequity, increasing politico-religious polarization, entrenched injustices, diminishing resources, spreading global capitalism and the devastation of indigenous people and the environment on a massive scale.

With these questions in mind, I now go back a few paces and enter into a discussion through a narrative rendering about issues of interdiscursive agency and its investment in values as aligned with prevailing power relations in various educational discourses. Which discourses, which curriculum subjects, and their social status and agency within the social domain have strong reciprocity with the nature and effect of the values produced in programmes and courses in the educational sphere, and in the philosophies of practice and pedagogy deployed.

Setting a Context for Values of Power

At a special debate held at a prominent Western Canadian university in 2008, an internationally renowned scientist who won a prestigious international prize for Science spoke to a crowd of academics in their Faculty of Education. The award-winning scientist had been hired at great cost by the university administration to “improve the teaching and learning of science” at the university. He spoke to the crowd on his vision of a successful science pedagogy and a set of practices for the university to boost achievement in science courses at that institution. The crowd of academics, a substantial number of whom are considered world-class leaders in specific areas of pedagogy, curriculum studies, including science education, and educational studies more broadly, sat politely listening to his presentation. I was fortunate to attend this event. I say “fortunate”, not necessarily for the insights that the world-renowned scientist offered, but to witness the dynamics and discursive interactions at play, which provided powerful insights into the nature of power, discourse, context and ideology. There were a number of highly regarded internationally recognized science educationalists present. Almost all of these had never been deferred to by the university administration or the incumbent world-renowned scientist for advice on ideas for improving science education at the post-secondary level at this institution despite their expertise in this area and knowledge of local conditions. These were science educationalists who were actively involved in science education research locally and internationally. They sat respectfully listening to the scientist expounding on the programmes and practices that had so far been implemented at the university under his auspices. Needless to say, there was an enormous elephant in the room. At the Q & A period with the audience, everyone seemed too embarrassed to address it, including myself, so blatant was the disjunction between this scientific expert’s narrow knowledge of educational theory and practice evidenced in the language of ideas he used, and the vast array of robust debates in the educational field in which this faculty engaged on a daily basis. The gap was significant. One lone voice spoke up. As a science educator of some standing it was more than fitting for her to speak out. She posed her comment as a question, asking politely of the esteemed scientist whether his pedagogic vision of apprenticing science students at this university from “novices” to scientific “experts” was in fact a conception of educational practice that might be somewhat outmoded or limited. His retort came across as petulant. Rather than listening with openness and humility to ideas from experts in scientific pedagogy for which he was the lesser learned authority, he responded by saying that he was “personally insulted” by her comment. With such a slap-in-the-face response to her legitimate question, what further was there to say? The ironies, contradictions and reversals, double entendres and paradoxes were multiple, and it does not take much to note that the entire premise on which the “scientific expert” had been hired and on which he had made his presentation was “out of joint”. In fact, the real “insult” was the disregard for the intellectual efforts and contributions of the science educationalists in the Faculty of Education at that institution and elsewhere, and the dismissal of their pedagogic knowledge, authority and achievements in their field in favour of the voice of “pure” Science.

One of the most poorly attended to issues in educational discourse and practice, most especially within the sweep of the New Knowledge Economy, is the effect of power on the discursive field, the verticalization of discourses in the social domain and the (ill)legitimizing effects of agency on what can be said, what can be made possible, in what context, by what means and authority, and by whom, where and when. These effects are often collapsed or ignored in the sweep of naturalizing and neutralizing discourses of efficiencies-based neoliberal discourses that enclose an intellectual and cultural commons (Bowers, 2006). Insufficient engagement with the structural and ideological assumptions that underlie many of the “progressivist” advocacies that advance and maintain a neoliberal status quo impoverishes educational debates. As such, normative issues surrounding an ethics of care, democracy, freedom, egalitarianism, as well as visions and values of more holistic ways of being in the world and coming to know, are ignored, dispensed with or at very best assumed present, without acknowledging complexity, contradiction and conflict and demanding proper critical interrogation. In effect, recognition of the values-laden nature of educational praxis, most especially where objectivity is assumed within scientific or scientistic discourses, is mostly rendered absent. This denial of subjectivity serves as a means of maintaining scientific authority and is a mechanism of its “boundary work”, demarcating scientific from non-scientific discourses (Gieryn, 1983). Here, objectivity becomes synonymous with “Truth”. More importantly, as a consequence, spaces for resistance to hidden and embedded ideological norms, which often have dangerous but unseen implications for the future of all the Earth and its citizens, are annulled.

Bernstein (2000) provides a useful sociological framework for describing the effects of power on the interactions and discursive context described in my opening narrative. The “strong voice” of Science as a “vertical discourse” with its strong “insulations” as a bulwark against subjective contamination of other non-scientific or scientistic discourses produces “silences”, in Bernsteinian terms. The strong voice of Science as a prominent verticalized discourse speaks over the “weak voice” of the more “horizontal discourses” of education that are an integrated bricolage of a number of disciplines and fields. This produces the effect such that the “renowned scientist”, embodying the authority of Science, does not see any problem with speaking for, on behalf of and down to science educators on issues of science education. Such assumptions about his own expertise, rights and authority as a scientist are rendered as “plain to see” (McLaren, Leonardo & Allen, 2000, p. 113) in his eyes and are without question. The privileged position and “recontextualizing gaze” (Bernstein, 2000; Dowling, 1998) of Science affords it the authority to speak on behalf of other discourses and recontextualize these practices in its own terms (Dowling, 1998), most often narrowing, reducing and simplifying such discourses to ensure “a fit” with the language of science. I have discussed this in the following texts: Swanson (1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005a, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c, 2006d, 2007a, 2008) in other contexts. The dramatic irony is not lost, however, in the scientist’s response that he was “personally insulted”. His individualized identity as a scientist and its authority are constituted as one and the same. The embodiment of conflicting discourses of power is evident, with emotional effect. The political here is personal.

The fact that this scientific expert's presentation to educationalists on aspects of pedagogy for which he was certainly the lesser expert can easily be taken as an insult to those who do possess the expertise, dispensing with their knowledge in favour of the authorial voice produced by the phallus of Science. Science permits no retaliation in its assault on the educational field, as its right to do so. This legitimacy is ordained. Science can speak for Others but cannot be reproached, maintaining the Hegelian master–slave relationship (Hegel, 1956) between the discursive fields. Scientific discourses are pre-eminent in the existing hierarchy of the “social division of labour of discourses” (Bernstein, 2000) in the social domain. Consequently, the possibility of a reversed event, where a Science educator speaks non-deferentially on the subject of Science to scientific experts, is highly unlikely. Our “renowned scientist” embodies scientific legitimacy over other discourses beyond his specialization and knowledge as “rightful” and as a “natural” condition of the existing order of things, not recognizing that such authority is a product of the socially-constructed hierarchy of discourses in the social domain and therefore arbitrary. His apparent lack of recognition of the power dynamics at play, investments of power that have afforded him such a position of relational authority and that spill over into other domains beyond his expertise, acts as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) against the discursive possibilities generated through the intellectual activities within the field of educational discourses. It rebuffs the alternative pedagogic possibilities that may have been possible with greater institutional credence. The discursive play within the existing power relations also points to the production of mythologizing practices (Barthes, 1972). Here, Science can speak for discourses beyond itself (Dowling, 1998). The weaker voice of Education is delimited in this context and becomes subsumed within the “silences” produced by the strong voice of Science and the insulations it produces. Furthermore, by espousing a philosophy of educational practice that refers to an apprenticeship model from “novice” to “expert” as *the* aspiration for “improved science education”, the scientist locates a narrowly functionalist mode of pedagogy and (perhaps unwittingly or intentionally) deploys a neoliberal ideology invested in rhetoric of “best practices”, “standardization”, “outcomes-based” and “evidence-based” approaches to educational practice within a techno-centered Knowledge Economy. Rather than advancing the assumed “legitimacy” of scientific objectivity as uncontestable, these narrated interactions I have described here point instead to the paradigmatic and values-laden nature of educational and scientific discourses and the hegemonies that underlie them. The denial of such embeddedness of values in scientific discourses is in itself a problematic ideological position that repulses contestation and other (re)imaginings of pedagogic alternatives and cripples their potential for embrace.

These positions and perspectives of “objectivity” and “neutrality” are historically inspired and have resonance with attitudes towards scientific authority from ancient and modern history, but seem to reach their zenith with the Enlightenment and beyond. The words of the acclaimed scientist Karl Pearson ring clear in this respect. Pearson, greatly threatened by Science's becoming “tainted” by subjectivity and openness, wrote at the turn of the twentieth century that Science admits the following:

... no interested motive, no working to support a party, an individual, or a theory; such action but leads to the distortion of knowledge, and those who do not seek truth from an unbiased standpoint are, in the theology of free thought, ministers in the devil's synagogue. (Pearson, n.d., as cited in Porter, 1995, p. 75)

For Pearson, and following from the Rationalist and Enlightenment movement, knowledge, and in particular scientific knowledge, is spoken of as separate to bias, possessing a god-like purity and "Truth", as if it were able to stand alone, transcendent in time, uncontaminated by doctrinism, polemicism, partiality and prejudice. Ironically, Pearson's theologizing of science invokes a contradiction. Whilst he represents science as divest of doctrinism and any association of science with subjective sentiments as being flagitious, he paradoxically speaks of it in terms of its Omnipotence in prescribing the moral (and religious) space in which knowledge is founded. The relationship between the mathematical sciences and educational discourses offers the same tensions and paradoxes. It is invested in the denial of the values-laden nature of scientific and educational discourses as contextually elaborated within existing and competing relations of power. In the sense that it compounds the effects on the lives, wellbeing, choices and possibilities for young and adult learners, this denial and the agency that sustains it go further, however, to a question of ethics.

Values in Educational Discourses: Mathematics Education as Exemplar

Notoriously, mathematics education, until more recently and then only in small measure, has been commonly assumed a neutral discourse. This claim follows on from and contributes to the previous discussion, noting the agency between discourses and the dominance of scientific and scientifically invested discourses over others along a hierarchical continuum in the social domain. As before, the production of "objectivity", "neutrality" and "authority" inheres in scientific dominance within the social division of labour of discourses and reproduces it. Unlike other school curriculum subjects such as history, social studies and language studies, mathematics has been viewed as free from bias and inherent values. It is for this reason that I use school mathematics and mathematics education as examples, as they appear to be the least likely to be considered "values-laden". As one "already knows" from prevailing common sense discourses that arise and reproduce themselves in the social domain, one can either "do" mathematics or one "can't". This globally circulated assumption is a reflection of the all-pervasive differential access to the "regulating principles" (Bernstein, 2000) of school mathematics as a "natural" condition. If it is constituted as "the way things are", then there is no purpose in contesting it as undemocratic. It is simply part of the doxic order of things, an unchangeable reality to which one has to resign oneself and accept one's lot as a "can do" or "can't do" subject of mathematical discourses. Mathematics is not viewed as socially and historically constructed. It is merely a/the "Truth". Mathematics is not recognized as elitist, discriminatory and exclusive. Bishop (2000, 2008) draws attention to these

values that are implicit in mathematics teaching and pedagogical practice. It is generally considered a simple fact of life that some can progress in this subject and “succeed” at it as an arbitrary condition of biological make-up at birth and some cannot. The further fact that differential access is tied very strongly to access of opportunity in later life, attributable to the same hierarchy of the social division of labour of discourses that affords mathematics, as the Queen of the Sciences, such pre-eminence, is often not acknowledged as being unjust. Such differential access that aligns with a historically-produced social hierarchy of discourses contributes to the existing unequal social relations as a mechanism for the maintenance of an oppressive status quo. The social inequities and injustices that are maintained and reproduced on a global scale through the practice of school and post-secondary mathematics and its gate-keeping role are seldom contested as undemocratic.

To begin to address the issue of democratization of mathematics education, and this applies to education in general, is to render explicit the ways in which it is value-laden and to ask what goals are being advocated in curricula and practice. The national agenda is very much caught up in the ideological formations that mathematics education takes in different nation states, tied to a global agenda with an expanding neoliberal mandate. As Bishop (2000) notes of the Australian context:

At present, for example, in my country, as in some others, the economic rationalists hold political power and their demands are for the efficient delivery of a narrow range of specified mathematical competencies by limited, and preferably cheap, means. I have no doubt that the goals being reached by this kind of approach in no way address the concerns for democratisation of mathematics education that many of us aspire to. (pp. 1–2)

Skovsmose and Valero (2001) also reference mathematics education’s dissonance with democracy and the need to develop a critical relationship between them. Others also speak to the hegemonies of mathematics education discourse and practice in various contexts (see some examples, Khuzwayo, 1997, 1998; Valero, 1998; Vithal, 1999, 2000; Volmink, 1994), and to the sociology of “failure” and disadvantage that is (re)produced (see some examples, Dowling, 1998; Lerman and Tsatsaroni, 1998, Swanson, 1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2005a, 2006a, 2006b, 2007a; Zevenbergen, 2003). In so doing, many address the problematic of the Eurocentric nature of dominant Western mathematics curricula throughout the world (examples, Atweh, 2007; Atweh & Brady, 2009; Dowling, 1998; D’Ambrosio, 2001b; Powell & Frankenstein, 1997) as a form of Western cultural imperialism (Bishop, 1990). Arguably, this may be the root hegemony, along with mathematics education’s globalized/ing economic utilitarianism, that has produced very divisive practices in mathematics education globally, and concomitantly carries dangerous forms of cultural domination and associated oppressions. The recognition of the problematic nature of many of the values embedded in Western/global mathematics discourse and practice as recontextualized in local contexts throughout the world prompts the need to seek justice-oriented alternatives. These have often been forthcoming in the form of the Ethnomathematics movement (see D’Ambrosio, 1997a, 1997b, 2001a, 2006; Gerdes, 1997), Mathematics for Social Justice movement (see Atweh, 2007, 2009; Ernest, 2007; Gutstein, 2008) and “culturally-responsive” mathematics education (see Barta & Brenner, 2009), amongst others. Endemic on a global

scale, however, is the general and dangerous point of view that mathematics education is value-free and ideologically neutral and has nothing to do with democracy, justice or moral values. Such widespread attitudes, unfortunately, assist in maintaining an oppressive status quo and continue to detrimentally affect the lives of many individuals and groups in local contexts across the globe, delimiting opportunities, enclosing freedoms and negatively impacting their livelihoods and wellbeing.

The often suppressed ideological investments of mathematical discourse and practice in various contexts align strongly with questions of ethical engagement. Why we “do” or “don’t do” mathematics, who has access and what kinds of mathematics are taught or not taught to whom, and why, are caught up in these considerations. Ideological discourses are at play hidden by the representation of the mathematical sciences as objective. The political and economic utilitarianism of mathematics education curricula globally is often framed within a neoliberal and neocolonial economic development model. Such a politically utilitarian pull aligns similarly in terms of investments of power and interest with the way in which mathematics curricula are constituted within citizenship discourses that feed off nationalisms and competitive globalization agendas, thus perpetuating new techno-scientific hegemonies and industrialization that advance neocolonialism. The power that mathematics asserts within the social domain is extensive as it is divisive. It serves to rationalize and normalize cultural, socio-historical and geopolitical differences and inequalities rather than complicate or disrupt them. Becoming critically aware of the operationalization of such networks of influence, their critical interconnections with discourses of power, the deployment of ideologies and the social hegemonies produced on a global structural level are aspects of the political economy of mathematics education that is, for the most part, ignored in academic and other public debates. For those who hold to the defunct position that mathematical sciences are objective and all but political, such broaching of mathematics education’s complicity in contemporary interrelated political agendas of economic development, linear progressivism, unsustainable techno-centered industrial globalization and neocolonialism is often dismissed. It is a position that often elicits threatened reactions from more conservative quarters and free-marketeters. This position is also without recognition that “objectivity” is already a position of ideological bias. Unless there is a fuller appreciation of the complex implicatedness of mathematics education, as dominantly practiced globally, on contemporary societal and environmental ills and injustice, I assert that there is little chance of a deeper understanding of how one might approach a mathematics education as moral and ethical practice. At the core of any mathematics education practice should lie the moral questions of “why” and “for what” and “for whom” and “to whom” and “with whom” are we teaching this and, if so, “why this way”? It should also be asked: with what and whose wisdom? What investments of power and ideology lie hidden in any single judgement to act mathematically and/or pedagogically in a chosen way, and what assumptions about what is good for those engaged in mathematics education precede us without our awareness or critical language of empowerment to question or to chose to act otherwise?

‘Good’ Education, and an Ethics of Purpose and Ideal

Gert Biesta (2009), in his inaugural lecture *Good Education: What it is and why we need it*, attempts to get at the core of the purpose of education behind the scenes of a set of common assumptions about educational value premised on economic development agendas and globalizing neoliberalism. The effects of this trend have been the spread of a surveillance and audit culture that has considerably narrowed discussions about and towards evaluation and measurement, about what is good and worthy to be evaluated – if at all, and about who might need to be made “accountable” for what and why. It has increased standardization frameworks underwritten by an “efficiencies” agenda that increasingly sees education as a commodity within the Global Knowledge Economy, one that is framed within the terms of relations of exchange, thereby emphasizing narrowly functionalist, techno-centrally utilitarian and skill-based approaches to teaching and learning as the only valuable forms of educational practice. Furthermore, it eliminates considerations about whether there may or may not be any purpose to education other than to contribute to economic development and growth and the viability of the nation state. Absent, for the most part, are discussions about what the moral implications and responsibilities may be to those being educated or not, whether these are democratic and fair and whether they have anything to do with normative questions of ethics, ecology, care, spirituality, justice and other worthy human values. Biesta (2009) notes:

By using the phrase “good education” and not, for example, effective education, successful education or excellent education – I wish to make it clear from the outset that I am dealing with a normative question. In my view questions about education always raise normative issues and therefore always require value judgements, i.e., judgements about what we consider to be desirable. In plural democracies like ours (speaking within Scotland/the United Kingdom/the European Union) we should not expect that there will only be one answer to the question as to what constitutes good education. It rather is a sign of a healthy democracy that there are ongoing discussions about the purpose and direction of such a crucial common endeavour as education. (p. 1, parentheses inserted)

Biesta (2009) bemoans the rise in competitive league-tables that pit students and schools and nations against each other, especially in mathematics (contributing to my earlier discussion of the divisive values entrenched within dominant mathematics education practices), and the increasing tendency to turn education into an evidence-based profession based on research knowledge about “what works”. As he notes in contradiction to the trend towards evidence-based advocacies in education: “there are probabilistic relationships between actions and consequences and never deterministic relationships between causes and effects” (p. 2). Arguing against the new neoliberalized language of “learning” and “efficiencies”, Biesta points to the disadvantage of standardization “that takes away opportunities for educational professionals to make their own judgements about what is necessary and desirable in the always particular situations they work in” (p. 6), based on low trust by administrators. As Biesta (2009) continues:

A second disadvantage about educational standardization is that it takes away any opportunity for a plurality of opinions about good education. This is often done through the construction of a quasi-consensus around an alleged common sense notion of what good education is. One popular version of such a quasi-consensus is the idea that in order to remain competitive within the global knowledge economy schools need to produce a highly-skilled workforce; hence the most important task for schools is that of raising standards in English, science and mathematics. (p. 6)

Education has been held to ransom by a set of values that dictate the terms of its elaboration and interpretation. They restrict the form of its discourses, debates and practices. These values have become a pre-discourse where the means to debate the terms of implementation or practice are forestalled as they are held to the mandates of economic forces that advance global competition over cooperation. They also promote techno-centric industrialized progress over ecological sustainability and global social justice. In this way, they maintain existing social inequalities and inequities as a “natural” condition of market forces over concerns for democracy and egalitarianism, and underscore an ideological status quo that reproduces capitalist relations of production on an increasingly global scale.

So what, then, is a way towards redirecting attention to issues of purpose and the place of debate within the educational field? What might be required to stimulate debate around advancing forms of education focused on core human issues of contentment, peace and wellbeing; on the core ideological issues of democracy, freedom and egalitarianism; and on the principles of global justice? In their preface to *Curriculum Wisdom*, Henderson and Kesson (2004) draw on Walker (2003, p. 60) in stating:

Curriculum theories . . . are about ideals, values, and priorities. They employ reason and evidence, but in the service of passion. Curriculum theories can be analytical as well as partisan, but unlike scientific theories, they are not curriculum theories unless they are about ideals. Curriculum theories make ideals explicit, clarify them, work out their consequences for curriculum practice, compare them to other ideals, and justify or criticize them. (p. xiv)

Through the language of “curriculum theories”, Henderson and Kesson evoke questions of “ideals, values, and priorities” and on how these ideals need to be made explicit, to be clarified and their consequences for curriculum practice worked out. These ideals are open to justification or critique. This approach holds at the centre of values education, or so I believe it to be, for without the ideals, the values, the justification and critique, it would become another form of unfettered socialization as has become the historical tenets of education within a globalizing, homogenizing modernism. Even as values education calls forth ideals of a humanistic nature, such humanism requires constant self- and internal reflection in order not to supplant one form of “common good” decided on behalf of others, such as in the economic development model that advertizes wealth for all, with another “common good” that turns out to be not so “good” at all, at least for some (often a vulnerable minority), even if not for others. In bringing the question of “what is good education” back into play and placing it at the door of values education, a critical plurality of opinions is offered, while holding to questions of what is important, worthy, ethical, moral and just. I believe this approach to be crucial to a Values

Education mandate from critical perspectives. To contest the core assumptions that have been subsumed within modernistic educational practices is also the work of a values education if it is to be, almost paradoxically, critically valuable. Biesta (2006) warns us of humanistic ideals adopted in education in ways that deflect the plurality of other options and provide a singularly socializing effect on individuals and groups such that they would lose the critical capacity to critique, question and contest in favour of a given common good into which they are enculturated. An open and critical values education would need to address this even as it advocates for a greater explicit focus on what values we participate in within the educational field.

With this in mind, I enter into a discussion about an African philosophy of humanism as a contribution to values education as an educational ideal. It is an ideal for education that I believe would serve a different purpose to education as currently dominantly practiced and reconstitute its purpose towards human care, collectivism, sisterhood and brotherhood. I draw on this African humanism from my lived experience growing up in South Africa and have witnessed it practiced amongst many indigenous people in lived contexts of its African expression. I assert that this form of indigenous spirituality offers more to an ideal of “good education” within the consideration of worthy human values than many others, or so I believe. It also offers a viable alternative to the standardized, universalized status quo. Biesta (2009) remarks along these lines that the “problem of stories that express a quasi-consensus about good education is also that they suggest that there is no alternative”. He argues that it is however, “not too difficult to see that instead of economic competitiveness, we could also argue that as a society we should give priority to care – care for the elderly, care for the environment – or to democracy and peaceful co-existence”. Insightfully, Biesta notes that “such priorities suggest a complete different set of educational arrangements and articulate radically different views about what good education might look like” (p. 7).

With these thoughts on an alternative for “good education” that places values of care above economic imperatives, I will now describe Ubuntu towards a philosophy of educational practice as a contribution to a values education. I have written and presented on Ubuntu elsewhere in terms of its contribution to education, an ethically-focused research methodology, and hopeful opportunities for living well in the world (Swanson, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b, 2007b, 2009).

Ubuntu: A Philosophy of Becoming Human

Ubuntu is short for an isiXhosa proverb in Southern Africa. It comes from *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*: a person is a person through their relationship to others. Ubuntu is recognized as the African philosophy of humanism, linking the individual to the collective through “brotherhood” or “sisterhood”. It makes a fundamental contribution to indigenous “ways of knowing and being”. With differing historical emphasis and (re)contextualization over time and place, it is considered a spiritual

way of being in the broader socio-political context of Southern Africa. This approach is not only an expression of a spiritual philosophy in its theological and theoretical sense, but is an expression of daily living. That is, a way of knowing that fosters a journey towards “becoming human” (Vanier, 1998) or “which renders us human” (Tutu, 1999), or, in its collectivist sense, a greater humanity that transcends alterity of any form.

Nobel Prize laureate Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, who, in 1995, became the chairman of post-apartheid South Africa’s *Truth and Reconciliation Commission*, was a strong advocate of the philosophy and spiritual power of Ubuntu in the recovery of “truth” through narratives of atrocities from the apartheid era. He also viewed it as necessary in the more important and subsequent processes of *forgiveness*, reconciliation, transcendence and healing that arise through the cathartic process of truth-telling. In this sense, the extension of notions of “truth” in respect of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s* mandate exceeded a forensic notion of “truth-finding” to include three others of truth-seeking, which encompassed personal or narrative truth, social or dialogic truth, and healing or restorative truth (Marx, 2002, p. 51). A sense of African epistemology resounds through these postulations of “truth” in their formulation and exposition. As a philosophical thread of African epistemology, Ubuntu focuses on human relations, attending to the moral and spiritual consciousnesses of what it means to be human and to be in relationship with an-Other. This is voiced in the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s* (TRC’s) announcement that “It shift the primary focus of crime from the breaking of laws or offences against a faceless state to a perception of crime as violations against human beings, as injury or wrong done to another person” (as cited in Marx, 2002, p. 51). Again, the TRC’s imperative of truth-seeking is underscored by a conception of African epistemology and Ubuntu in its incorporation of personal or narrative truth, social or dialogic truth, and healing or restorative truth.

As I have grown to understand the concept, Ubuntu is borne out of the philosophy that *community strength* comes of *community support*, and that dignity and identity are achieved through mutualism, empathy, generosity and community commitment. The adage that “it takes a village to raise a child” is aligned with the spirit and intent of Ubuntu. Just as apartheid threatened to erode this traditional African way of being – although in some instances it ironically strengthened it through galvanizing collectivist support and creating solidarity amongst the oppressed – so increasing industrialization, urbanization and globalization threatens to do the same.

How might Ubuntu be fostered in educational contexts, not only for Africans, but as a way away from the industrialized and post-industrialized ideologies that render human values as inconsequential against the thrust of economic considerations? Perhaps this may be a focus of a values education debate that places such a philosophy at the forefront of concerns about what might constitute a “good”, valuable and worthy educational practice, or set of practices, for Africans and non-Africans alike, and which counters and contests current implicit assumptions.

Conclusion

Values education, I believe, offers a route into providing and debating educational alternatives. It does so by asking fundamental questions of values, purpose, intent and ideal. It should not foreclose on assumptions about ideology and the core human questions of morality, spirituality, wellbeing and care. I believe that it should maintain these questions at the forefront of any further questions about educational discourse and practice, but it should do so with recognition of multiple alternatives, of a plurality of thoughts and ideas about what is for others' educational good, and even who might ask these questions or why these questions might need to be asked or not. I believe that it should also be self-critical and internally reflective, and recognize the ambiguities, contradictions, paradoxes and multiple perspectives that inhere in any advocacy on behalf of others, society and the environment. It should never waiver from the key thematic principles and worthy human values of freedom, democracy, wellbeing, care and justice, but it should do so with acknowledgement of the complexities that such approaches underscore. For to ignore the complexities, pluralities, ambiguities and contingencies is to suppress the shadows and ghosts that wander mournfully through our discourses and debates. We need, in the Derridean sense, to interlocute deferentially with these ancestral ghosts in asking what is more real, more just, more valuable for the education of our children, youth and adults across the globe. To be of value, values education should not just be another form of advocacy for education in itself as much as offer a place for critical debate as to what values should be both the purpose and engagement with/in education, . . . or not at all.

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