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Making quality teachers: The role of an explicit values-based pedagogy

Elizabeth Curtis

Abstract

There is little conjecture that quality teaching is essential to student achievement and well-being. Whilst much has been written about the importance of quality teaching, including the link to pre-service teacher education, to date there has been little investigation into specific pedagogical practices that can enhance quality teaching dimensions within a pre-service teacher education programme. This paper reports on a small-scale qualitative research study, undertaken in an Australian university, which linked the fields of quality teaching, pre-service teacher education and values education. The study followed the journey of five pre-service teacher education students as they undertook their second field experience unit where the focus was centred on the values-based pedagogy of Philosophy in the Classroom. The research findings, collected via interviews, demonstrated that an explicit values-based pedagogy can have a positive impact on the development of quality teaching dimensions. This new knowledge has potential for further research into examining the ways quality teaching dimensions are gained and practised by pre-service teacher education students and these findings and recommendations are discussed in this paper.

Introduction

The future of society “depends now, as never before, on our ability to teach” (Darling-Hammond, 2005, p.2), and this means closely examining teacher education and advancing it to prepare better quality teachers who are ready to meet the enormous demands of teaching in the 21st century. After all, “the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers” (McKinsey and Company, 2007, p.16). If we want society’s youth to receive a quality and holistic education there needs to be a reinvigorated focus on quality teaching and this needs to begin in pre-service teacher education. One way that this can occur is through an examination and acknowledgement of the role of values both in education generally and specifically within pre-service teacher education and this is best achieved through the explicit teaching of a values-based pedagogy within pre-service teacher education programmes. This paper provides a brief overview of the literature regarding values education, quality teaching and pre-service teacher education. It then provides an overview of a research project which investigated the role a values pedagogy may play within pre-service teacher education in enhancing quality teaching dimensions.

Values education, quality teaching and pre-service teacher education

Recent research findings from fields such as educational philosophy and psychology and the neurobiological sciences seem to be pointing to the benefits of an holistic viewpoint and the need for a pedagogy that engages with the whole person (Lovat, Dally, Clement & Toomey, 2011). This seems to be more important given the strong focus on standardised testing of student achievement that emerged largely as a result of the 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in the US. Given such a focus on high-stakes testing and accountability policies in education, it seems more important than ever that we start to see an increase in a devotion to creating more caring schools as a “complement to the prevailing focus on academic achievement” (Schaps, 2003, p.33). This is perhaps especially so, given that this focus on mastery instruction and testing appears to be incongruent with the Australian Government’s educational objectives as outlined in the Adelaide Declaration of 1999 and the Melbourne Declaration of 2008. Both of these documents encourage and support the notion of an education system that facilitates and nurtures the holistic development of children and young adults, with such statements as: “Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians” (MCEETYA, 2008, p.4).

The fulfilling of these aims and objectives can be served very well through values education as demonstrated by Australian (see for example Bereznicki, Brown, Toomey & Weston, 2008; Zbar & Toomey, 2006) and international (see for example Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn & Smith, 2006; Lovat, Toomey & Clement, 2010) research. This research has spoken of the benefits of a values-based holistic pedagogical approach to education in regard to school students arguing that it “has the potential to enable students to be more self-knowing, self-managing and reflective people, not only capable of dealing with such issues but also with greater capacity in academic diligence, perseverance and attainment” (Toomey, Lovat, Clement & Dally, 2010, p.vii). Despite this research though, little attention to the role of teacher education in promoting and preparing teachers for values education has been noted. We know that pre-service teacher education is a crucial link in preparing quality teachers (see for example: Darling-Hammond & Bransford 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2010) yet there has been little evidence demonstrated of how values pedagogies are being utilised in teacher education to ensure graduates are ready to engage in such pedagogies in their future classrooms (Lovat et al, 2011).

This research programme defined a values explicit pedagogy as one that “incorporates the moral, social, emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual aspects of human development” (Lovat, Toomey, Dally & Clement, 2009, p.17). The word *pedagogy* refers to the science of teaching and is derived from the Greek word *paidagogia*, which means ‘to lead the child’. Pedagogy is more than just methodology or curriculum, rather it is an underpinning philosophy of teaching and learning (Davey Chesters, 2012). The specific values pedagogy that was utilised in this study was Philosophy in the Classroom.

Philosophical inquiry initiates children into open discussion concerning values and meaning and it encourages them to make moral judgements. By participating in a philosophical community of inquiry a moral culture is created, where thinking and acting together cultivates virtues such as respect for others, sincerity and open-mindedness (Fisher, 2000). The use of Philosophy in the Classroom to enhance children’s thinking skills was revived in the US by Matthew Lipman at the beginning of the 1970s with his Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach. The aim of this programme was to teach children how to think for themselves and make informed choices (Lipman, 2003). Central to Philosophy in the Classroom is the community of inquiry (COI), which is a community where students listen to one another with respect, build on each other’s ideas, challenge each other to supply reasons, assist each other in drawing inferences from what has been said and seek to identify assumptions (Lipman, 2003). It is the two elements, the rational and the moral, which allows for the developing of reasoning abilities and the development of social dispositions that make the community of inquiry so unique and beneficial to the educative experience (Fisher, 2000; Velasco, 2001).

Teacher quality is an elusive concept and various definitions abound. I would argue though that effective teachers are people who are competent across an array of domains including behaviour, cognition, content, character and knowledge of and sensitivity to cultural, social, political contexts and environments. In this study quality teaching is defined as teaching that makes a positive difference in students’ learning and their lives, and this is based not only around factual knowledge but around social and personal knowing as well (Lovat, 2007). In other words it is the balance between knowledge, behaviour and the affective (an holistic education) which are vital to quality teaching,

The model of quality teaching that is used is a combination of the four dimensions of the Productive Pedagogies (The University of Queensland, 2001)) model and a values dimension. The Productive Pedagogies (PP) model uses four dimensions to describe quality

teaching: intellectual quality; connectedness; supportive classroom environment; and recognition of difference and all four dimensions are essential for improved student outcomes. To these four dimensions I have added a fifth: values and beliefs.

Figure 1: Model of quality teaching



Table 1: The dimensions of quality teaching

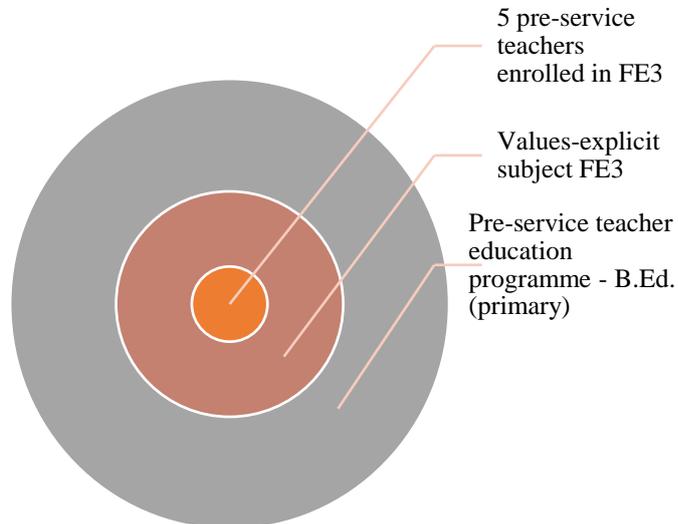
Intellectual quality	Supportive classroom environment	Connectedness	Recognition of difference	Values
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher-order thinking Deep knowledge Substantive conversation Knowledge as problematic metalanguage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> academic engagement student self-regulation student direction of activities social support explicit criteria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> knowledge integration background knowledge connectedness to the world problem-based curriculum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cultural knowledge inclusivity narrative group identities in a learning community active citizenship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> teachers' values, beliefs and attitudes teacher dispositions teacher-student relationships teacher expectations

Research Design

The aim of this research study was to link the fields of values education, quality teaching and pre-service teacher education, which to my knowledge had not been done previously. It then aimed to determine the impact of a values-based pedagogy on the development of quality teaching dimensions within a specific subject within a pre-service teacher education programme. The values pedagogy that was utilised was Philosophy in the Classroom. The

study took the form of a nested case study design (Patton, 2002) and used a qualitative methodology where the main source of data was via semi-structured interviews.

Figure 2: The study's nested case study design



In total 43 pre-service teachers participated in three studies in order to determine if their involvement in a subject where they were introduced to an explicit values pedagogy impacted on their knowledge, skills and confidence in terms of quality teaching dimensions. This paper is discussing findings from the inner nest which was a case study involving five female pre-service teachers in the third year of their four year Bachelor of Education degree within a Faculty of Education in a large Australian university. The five participants (pseudonyms were Aurora, Betty, Clara, Dot and Eliza) were interviewed at three separate times – prior to the values specific subject (FE3) starting (Week 1 of the semester); at the completion of the lecture component of the subject (Week 11); and after their four week field experience in a primary school (Weeks 16-17). The purpose in this particular inner nest was to track the changes of individual pre-service teachers throughout the course of the subject FE3 and to focus on how the participants changed in terms of their beliefs surrounding quality teaching as a result of their experience in the values-based pedagogy of Philosophy in the Classroom. The interviews were transcribed and analysed by the researcher following Marshall and Rossman's (2006) seven step approach of organising the data.

Indications of the effective use of a values-based pedagogy in pre-service teacher education

Within the confines of this paper, I have selected a few key findings and extracts only from the data that illustrate how a values pedagogy may be useful in improving quality teaching dimensions within a pre-service teacher education programme. These extracts and findings are not considered as reflecting all of the quality teaching dimensions as noted in Table 1 and diagram 1 as these will be explored in future writing, but they do begin to illustrate the connection of an engagement in values pedagogy with an enhancement of quality teaching dimensions.

Over the sixteen week exposure to the values pedagogy it could be noted that the participants' confidence in their ability to effectively develop their students' intellectual quality grew quite substantially. Their understanding of intellectual quality moved beyond general teaching strategies and questioning to the realisation that teacher talk should be reduced; that knowledge is problematic and; that Philosophy in the Classroom can facilitate increased metalanguage and higher-order thinking. This understanding was cemented even further as a result of their employment of the new pedagogy whilst on field placement with participants now adding substantive conversation, increasing challenges to and improvement in students' intellectual quality in their discussion surrounding the quality teaching dimension of intellectual quality. The importance of the field experience in strengthening the participants' quality teaching skills and dispositions was indeed evident, and aligns with research which suggests that field experience is crucial in terms of allowing pre-service teachers the opportunity to test ideas and theories raised in university coursework (see for example Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

The idea of creating an environment where students felt safe, supported, respected and valued seemed to be paramount to the participants when discussing the dimension of a supportive classroom environment. Following their introduction to Philosophy in the Classroom in the lectures and upon seeing it themselves on field experience they realised that this pedagogical tool provided them as teachers with an ideal tool for creating such an environment. They especially noted that the procedural elements involved in conducting a COI greatly assisted students in better listening to and respecting each other which they then saw as assisting with behaviour management in the classroom, and this extended beyond the confines of a philosophical COI:

They were getting really good at doing the whole I love what you had to say, or I like the idea. They learnt very quickly that you don't disagree with the person you disagree with the idea and they were telling their friends about that at lunch and that's

not how we talk. So I can see how that would filter out into the playground and stuff like that (Clara).

With regard to the connectedness dimension, following exposure to the values-based pedagogy, participants noted that the Philosophy in the Classroom pedagogy provided them with a structured way of assisting students to make connections which the participants linked to life-long learning. The participants equated it with the benefits of social discourse and the importance of this in the development of an individual's learning. The pre-service teachers, as a result of their introduction to the values explicit pedagogy, now understood the importance of peer dialogical exchange that occurs within a community of inquiry through the process of collaborations, reasoning and justification, in terms of developing life-long learners. They noted that Philosophy in the Classroom gave them a concrete tool for bringing big issues and questions into the classroom and connecting these to the students' lives and life-long learning skills. This was directly related to the ability of a values-based pedagogy to transcend specific curriculum content and to engage with and connect to all elements of a school's curriculum.

While initially the participants noted recognition of difference in terms of learning styles and needs, after their introduction to the values pedagogy they changed to identifying this dimension in terms of more cultural difference and difference of beliefs and opinions. They identified that the Philosophy in the Classroom pedagogy provided the students with opportunities to be more accepting and inclusive of differences.

It's like the kids are bringing in their own background knowledge and they're opening communications with each other without anybody making a judgement (Aurora).

All participants commented in some way on the benefits in terms of values that occurred in their philosophy lessons and in some cases spilled over to other aspects of the class and even into the playground. Aurora noted that the students were more willing to listen to each other in philosophy than they were in other lessons:

it was the only time they actually stopped and listened to each other instead of talking over the top of each other (Aurora).

The participants observed that with this increased willingness to listen to each other came the notion of respect and respecting other's opinions. Clara's mentor teacher noted to Clara after a philosophy lesson that she was so surprised in hearing "the kids talk in a way I haven't heard them talk".

Informing pre-service teacher education

The findings and discussion of the results from this particular study proved to be useful in that by presenting five individual case studies which looked at individual progression from prior to the commencement of the subject FE3 right through to the completion of the subject including field experience, allowed for a solid examination of the impact of a values explicit subject on the formation of pre-service teachers' knowledge, skills and confidence in quality teaching dimensions. This study demonstrated that the teaching of Philosophy in the Classroom as a values-based pedagogy enhances the participants' understanding of quality teaching. It also demonstrated that pre-service teachers' field experiences continue to build on this new-found knowledge and confidence by allowing them to practise it and to see it in action for themselves, thus further enhancing their quality teaching skills. Research demonstrates that "the learning of student teachers is only meaningful and powerful when it is *embedded in the experience* of learning to teach (Korthagen, Loughran and Russell, 2006, p.1030). From the five case studies examined it appears that the pre-service teachers became more positive towards the pedagogy of Philosophy in the Classroom as a result of their practical field experience even if their mentor teachers were not supportive of the philosophy pedagogy. Thus it appears that for these five pre-service teachers the benefits that they themselves witnessed during the philosophy lessons they taught their students on field experience were of greater pull than any negative concerns raised by their mentor teachers. Overall, the findings have demonstrated that knowledge combined with practical application and practise in a values explicit pedagogy does help with pre-service teachers' knowledge and skill development in quality teaching dimensions as well as increasing their confidence in these.

Recommendations

It is important that pre-service teacher educators give some attention as to how to allow for the inclusion of values-based pedagogical practices for all pre-service teachers. This study, though small-scale, has demonstrated that a values-based pedagogy such as Philosophy in the Classroom can have an impact on quality teaching dimensions, but this is just one possibility and there are many more which could be investigated. Whatever form the values-based pedagogy takes within pre-service teacher education programmes, the pre-service teachers themselves need to engage in the active learning of the pedagogy. For a true understanding of the power of values-based pedagogical practices on the development of quality teaching skills

and dispositions the pre-service teachers need to live the experience and feel themselves challenged in the same way their future students will.

The importance of practical field experience in pre-service teacher education should not be undervalued. It was clear from the five participants in this research programme that the depth of understanding of quality teaching dimensions and the pre-service teachers' developing confidence in these was closely related to the opportunities they experienced on field placement to directly teach and experience the new pedagogy which they had been taught, thus allowing them to determine its true potential for themselves.

Conclusion

By engaging pre-service education teachers in the values-explicit pedagogy of Philosophy in the Classroom allows them the practical experience to implement quality teaching dimensions at the same time as helping them to become "more respectful, tolerant, caring and cooperative people and thus more likely to be quality teachers" (Curtis, 2010, p. 119). It is only by developing quality teachers that the education of our children can be bettered. By providing beginning teachers with an explicit understanding of values and a specific values-based pedagogy we can go some way in providing for better quality teachers. This small-scale research study has demonstrated that values pedagogies can play a role in enhancing quality teaching skills of beginning teachers, and further and larger-scale investigation into this could be useful.

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