Revisiting the Concept of Values Taught in Education

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value   core value   peripheral value

1. Introduction

Schools and universities are not only places to learn subject knowledge, but also places to help students develop their values. This learning experience extends from the moral values developed in schools [1] to the career-oriented values acquired in higher education, such as those essential to good medical practices [2]. Despite this explicit need for cultivating students' values, what values should be taught is always a common question among educators. Value is broadly defined as "the importance or worth of something for someone" [3]. Rokeach [4] (p. 6) further refers to it as "an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence." Therefore, values are relatively stable and play a crucial role in driving preferences, attitudes, and behaviors [5]. They are "the states of the human spirit" [6] (p. 145). According to Ziliotti [7] (p. 409), values can be intrinsic or extrinsic, where intrinsic values are "valuable for (their) own sake", such as friendship, and extrinsic values exist "for the sake of something else", such as a fence that protects a family's safety.

Among other values, core values are the most important values or those that are at the heart of a value system, as noted by Harrison and McKinnon [8] when describing cultural values. A commonly used definition was developed by Smolicz [9] (p. 75), who suggested that core values form "one of the most fundamental components of a group's culture." Numerous studies have found that values are quite stable over time [10]. Sharabi and Haarpaz [11], when grouping values into core and peripheral, found that core values were more stable than peripheral values. This can be explained by the concept of value hierarchies where one's core values entail shaping the very core of one's identity [5]. Such an enduring identity extends to its continuity and stability [12]. Moreover, when core values are characterized in Smolicz's definition as the norm of a culture, such values may not necessarily be positive in the eyes of the world. In terms of morality, ideal core values must be positive and ethical. For example, social morality is defined as "the whole set of moral values and principles for guiding actions impinging on the welfare and interests of others that is accepted as authoritative by a particular community" [13] (p. 226), while political morality

refers to "the moral convictions and commitments that govern decisions about what laws to enact, what policies to pursue …" [14] (p. 1).

2. Values Education

A teacher's professionalism includes not only skills for didactic methods and the subject area being taught, but also being a values educator for helping students develop their whole personality [15]. This aligns with the United Nation's sustainable development goals, which call for greater efforts to engage students in creating a better world [16]. Sutrop [15] cited British philosopher Harry Brighouse's four perspectives on the goal of education. These perspectives stem from four different theories, where the goal of education is articulated to help people (1) focus on their own freedom, choice, and right to self-determination (i.e., the theory of human autonomy), (2) build a more productive workforce that supports economic growth (i.e., the theory of human capital), (3) develop the conditions for "a good life and the development of personality" (i.e., the theory of human development), and (4) prepare for "living together with others in society" (i.e., the theory of civic education) [17] (as cited in [15], pp. 189–190). Since these educational perspectives are imbued with tightly intertwined personal, cultural, and social values, Sutrop [15] concluded that "the nature of education is deeply ethical" (p. 190), while "values permeate every aspect of education" and thus there is no such a thing as a "value-free education" (p. 189).

While education is claimed to be value-laden, we should ask the question: What values have to be taught in education? Sutrop [15] (p. 192) agreed with Russell [18] that "the kind of education we strive to give mirrors our understanding of desirable virtues", which, according to Russell [18], should indicate what type of people we wish to "produce". As Sutrop [15] (p. 192) further mentioned, for raising obedient, loyal, and hardworking people who strictly follow orders and commands, the authoritarian style of teaching with rote methods should be employed; conversely, for establishing a state with "the rule of law, a participatory style of dialogue and interchange, and a rapidly growing, innovative economy," our young people should develop "enterprising, creative, and critical thinking" mindsets. However, this bipolar, mutually exclusive view may not accurately reflect the values our society needs. The reason is twofold. First, people grow up with different personalities. According to the American Psychological Association [19], personality is defined as "the enduring configuration of characteristics and behavior that comprises an individual's unique adjustment to life, including major traits, interests, drives, values, self-concept, abilities, and emotional patterns" and "all (theories of personality) agree that personality helps determine behavior." For example, students differ in their preferred learning styles, which are known to be intricately related to their individual differences [20]. Second, the existing literature has already commented that personality predicts business success (e.g., [21]). Take Myers–Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) as an example. MBTI, which outlines sixteen personality types that influence individuals in making decisions [22], has been widely used to identify the types of personality dominated in different contexts, such as the recruitment of cabin crews [23] and language learning in a cross-cultural environment [24]. Although researchers have criticized the validity of the Jungian-based theory behind MBTI (e.g., [25]), there is no debate about the existence of individual differences arising from various personality types, which match the work values of different kinds of jobs. In fact, values that are required in the workplace are diverse because many of them are job-dependent. For example, creative jobs,

such as sales and marketing, might look for people with innovative ideas and self-directed characters, while jobs involving routine tasks, such as administration or factory assembly lines, might fit those who are obedient and loyal. On the other hand, some values are mandatory in the workplace, such as those of being adaptable, self-motivated, and hardworking.

Behind what is mentioned above lies the sense that there are different concepts in explaining the nature of values. Sutrop [15] mentioned three concepts: absolutism (also known as idealism), relativism, and pluralism. Absolutists believe that values are important in all cases (e.g., teaching justice as an absolute value in moral education), while values are context-oriented in the eyes of relativists and pluralists. Unlike relativism being defined as the belief that values are relative to each particular culture or society [26] (e.g., teaching the Bible in a Catholic school that does not teach other religious values), pluralism refers to the belief that people with different values can live in mutual respect in society [27] (e.g., teaching different traditions in the local community). Rather than arguing over which concept is more applicable than the other in terms of their relevance in society, Forsyth [28] suggested that both idealism and relativism are conceptualized as independent concepts, helping to explain the importance of values that influence the formation of ethical norms and social codes of behavior. In short, "idealism focuses on 'unselfish' concern for others, whereas relativism focuses on the best of alternatives" [26] (p. 84). Although they, including pluralism, are considered non-opposing concepts, there are situations leading to value ambivalence. For example, Park [26] found that highly relativistic individuals were reluctant to comply with idealistic signals of organizational environment (e.g., organizational control systems).

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