Chapter 11
Values Education: The Missing Link in Quality Teaching and Effective Learning

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Context of Quality Teaching

Educational research of the 1990s and beyond has challenged earlier conceptions concerned with the capacity of teachers, and formal education generally, to make a difference in the lives of students. Decades of apparently experimental research simply served to confirm time and again the view that the destiny of a student was fairly well fixed by heritage and that what was left of impacting agencies related more to issues like peer pressure, media, and disability than to the agencies of teacher and school. Countless studies were conducted by eminent figures such as the revered Talcott Parsons wherein the extent of research merely reinforced his fundamental belief that families were “factories which produce human personality” (Parsons & Bales 1955, p. 16). Against the potency of the family’s formative power, all else paled to insignificance according to the research findings, leading Christopher Jencks to sum up so aptly that “the character of a school’s output depends largely on a single input, namely the characteristics of the entering children” (1972, p. 256).

This fairly pessimistic view of the capacity of schooling to impact significantly on children’s cognitive development was based heavily on studies around academic achievement but clearly had ramifications for other features of learning as well. Indeed, it could be said that a belief related to the teacher’s alleged incapacity to have impact on matters of academic prowess would render as null the chances of any impact on matters of personal and moral development. Hence, a growing view throughout the 20th century that the role of schooling was limited to enhancing the chances of those who already had plenty while minimizing the damage to those who had few chances was confirmed by research of the most apparently objective kind. Furthermore, an article of faith among the secularized that the only ethical stance for teachers and schools relating to the issue of values was one of values-neutrality was also fortified by research that seemed to indicate that a values-filled orientation would have been doomed anyway. This belief was most apparent in the public regime but of greater significance to many private and even religious schools than was commonly admitted.
It is intriguing to ponder on the question of whether the beliefs or the research that seemed to “prove” them came first. All one can say with some certainty is that they fed into each other and created a nexus of belief and apparent fact that militated against the viability of any attempt on the part of a school to have effective impact on matters of personal and moral development. Worldwide, these beliefs are now being re-evaluated and, coincidentally or not, so are the apparent claims gleaned from earlier research. Internationally, one finds huge efforts devoted to matters of civics, citizenship, and values education as societies struggle to find new ways forward in the face of persistent and debilitating problems of age-old conflicts, racism, AIDS and new terrorisms inspired by the most explicit of values-based beliefs. As an example of this, UNESCO sponsors an international values education programme that functions in 84 countries and has recently endorsed an evaluation of this programme encompassing all five continents (LVE 2005).

On the research front, much of the earlier largely replicable and finally descriptive research has been replaced by bolder forms of research designed to test the boundaries of earlier beliefs. Instead of setting out to “prove” what hardly needed proving, namely that those in good health and with a heritage of achievement were in an advantaged position on entering the school, the new educational research set out to test the boundaries of this truism. Highly interventionist studies (cf. Newmann 1996; Darling-Hammond 1997) were conducted in the USA that tested, against virtually every category of disadvantage, whether a particular approach to teaching and schooling could break through the disadvantage effect. The particular approach to teaching and schooling goes by various names but is most commonly captured in the notion of “Quality Teaching”, a notion that encompasses both the work of individual teachers in classrooms and, ideally, the work of whole-school teaching regimes better known as “effective schooling” or “effective learning”.

The results of these studies have severely called into question, if not shattered earlier conceptions relating to the alleged limitations of teacher and school power to have effective impact on student development. In virtually every instance among a myriad of instances, where the disadvantaged cohorts were facilitated by being offered “Quality Teaching” as defined by the study, and their non-disadvantaged equivalent cohort was being supported by “ineffective teaching”, also as defined, it was the disadvantaged who were shown to achieve at a greater rate. In summary, when faced with all the “proven” barriers to learning, be they barriers based on gender, class, language or even disabilities of sorts, Quality Teaching had at least sufficient power to begin to even up the chances of the disadvantaged and in some instances and over time to change the rules of the advantage/disadvantage divide altogether. While many remain sceptical, as is appropriate in the research setting, the effect is that the earlier thesis about the centrality of heritage to achievement is fairly quickly being replaced as a core belief by a new belief about the centrality of teacher quality (Rowe 2004).

Building on the earlier US studies, each state and territory in Australia, as well as the Commonwealth itself, has conducted studies or implemented policy that has