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Abstract

Schools have long been seen as institutions for preparing children for life, both academically and as moral agents in society. In order to become capable, moral citizens, children need to be provided with opportunities to learn moral values. However, little is known about how teachers enact social and moral values programs in the classroom. The aim of this article is to investigate the practices that Australian early years teachers describe as important for teaching moral values. To investigate early years teachers' understandings of moral pedagogy, 379 Australian teachers with experience teaching children in the early years were invited to participate in an online survey. This article focuses on responses provided to an open-ended question relating to teaching practices for moral values. The responses were analysed using an interpretive methodology. The results indicate that the most prominent approaches to teaching moral values described by this group of Australian early years teachers were engaging children in moral activities. This was closely followed by teaching practices for transmitting moral values. Engaging children in building meaning and participatory learning for moral values were least often described.

Keywords

citizenship, early education, moral values, rights-based curriculum, teaching

Introduction

Schools have long been seen as institutions for preparing children for life, both academically and as moral agents in society. In order to become capable, moral citizens, children need to be provided with opportunities to learn moral values (Halstead and Pike, 2006). This recognition has resulted in

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values education becoming a part of the curriculum in many schools at both the international and national level. Values education provides a way of thinking about morality that involves the question 'what kind of person shall I be?' (Halstead and Pike, 2006: 15). Moral values are both positive and negative qualities socially constructed that we express and experience in our own and others' behaviour, acts and attitudes. Morality concerns the life we live and norms for how to treat others. The aim of this article is to investigate the practices that Australian early years teachers describe as important for teaching moral values. The focus is on how teachers describe their teaching practices for children's moral learning and how they conceptualize children's moral learning.

Internationally, interest is evidenced in a growing focus on policy and research in values education in the UK (Halstead and Pike, 2006; Hawkes, 2008); USA (Cooley, 2008; Leonard, 2007); and Canada (Darling, 2002) because 'the public and its representatives continue to be concerned about how young citizens act in society and what they learn in school about morality' (Cooley, 2008: 189). The Convention on the Rights of the Child is an important document that advocates for the child's right to be heard and be involved in issues of their concern. It reflects international consensus about children's human rights (Freeman, 1995; Smith, 2007), which demands the inclusion of children's voices in teaching practices, including the teaching of values (Berthelsen et al., 2009; Dalhberg and Moss 2005; Smith et al., 2000). In the Nordic countries there is a increasing interest in research on moral issues, democracy and children's influence and participation (Emilson and Johansson, 2009; Johansson, 1999, 2007) although there is a lack of knowledge about how and in what way schools and preschools are arenas for children's moral development (Colnerud and Thornberg, 2003; Johansson, 2006; Ohnstad, 2008; Thornberg, 2009).

Moral values education is also a national priority in Australia. Values education became a policy priority in mid-2002, as part of a federally funded Quality Teaching Program initiative. Explicit values education is seen as important in helping students to reach their full learning potential and become responsible and contributing members of society (Lovat and Toomey, 2007). In 2005, the development of the *Australian National Framework for Values Education in Australian Education* (DEST, 2005) provided a further focus on values education. This framework is a reflection of values identified as underpinning our democratic way of life where, in the pursuit of multicultural and environmentally sustainable society, justice is deemed the entitlement of all. It comprises nine values: care and compassion, doing one's best, 'fair go', freedom, honesty and trustworthiness, integrity, respect, responsibility and understanding, tolerance and inclusion. In order to promote such values, the goals of teaching are to help students understand and apply these values and to provide a safe and secure learning environment to explore values within a whole school approach (DEST, 2005). Specifically, a range of teaching strategies are advocated in this framework which include implicit and explicit teaching, opportunities to practice values, explicit planning, implementation and monitoring and learning through all facets of school life, discussion and reflection.

More recently, the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) was released as a key guiding document in the development of education policy and curricula at various levels of Australian government. The *Melbourne Declaration* is premised on the idea that 'Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral, spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians' (MCEETYA, 2008: 4). While the importance of moral and values-based education is implicit throughout the document, there is also an explicit reference to the goal of young Australians becoming active and informed citizens who 'act with moral and ethical integrity' (MCEETYA, 2008: 9).

Values and citizenship education is also referred to in the *Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) Essential Learnings* Queensland curriculum document, which highlights that, by the end

of year three, children should have experiences identifying and reflecting on values in everyday situations and local contexts (Queensland Studies Authority, 2007). In regards to this, the document particularly highlights values associated with fairness and behaving peacefully. Topics related to the concept of citizenship are also briefly addressed in the *SOSE Essential Learnings* document. It states 'Citizenship involves belonging to groups and communities and valuing different contributions and behaviours such as caring for other members' (Queensland Studies Authority, 2007: 3). The document mentions rights and responsibilities, rules, democratic decision making and voting, and provides some suggestions of what these concepts look like within a school-context, such as classroom responsibilities, student councils and voting for class rules; however, none of these concepts are explored in-depth.

These policy documents provide the backdrop for the teaching and learning of values within Australian schools. However, within these documents, the complexity of the issue of values education is not clearly addressed. For example, values (for example, care and compassion, 'fair go', freedom) are presented in an unproblematic way, and in so doing, they can be taken for granted. Little is said about their complexity, the different ways in which they can be interpreted or that some values can be in conflict with each other. Rather, teachers are left to interpret these values in their own way, which can present a dilemma in teaching for moral values.

The use of relevant policy documents provides a way to consider the macro elements of learning for moral values. An ecological approach is a useful way to conceptualize the relationships between macro and micro influences on children's moral learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This integrative ecological framework was used in our study to enable the various macro and micro elements of policy analysis, teachers' beliefs and child characteristics to be drawn into focus for consideration. This article presents analyses of the micro elements of teacher beliefs about their practice.

Teaching for moral values

Teaching for moral values, or moral pedagogy, refers to teaching practices that aim to develop moral awareness, reasoning, understanding and behaviours in children. In an overview of research within the field, Johansson (2006) found three traditions for moral research and pedagogy: cognitive; emotional; and cultural. These three traditions emphasize different aspects of children's morality and can be further considered in terms of two main paradigms. In the first paradigm, the cognitive and the emotional traditions view inner biological abilities such as cognitive and emotional maturity as essential for moral development thus influencing approaches to teaching. The second paradigm views culture as integral to moral development and thus focuses on the importance of teaching morality from the perspective of the active child and taking context and culture into consideration.

Basourakos (1999) also described moral pedagogies that fall into two dominant paradigms: *conventional moral pedagogy* and *contextual moral pedagogy*. The first, *conventional moral pedagogy*, is where abstract moral reasoning is taught directly to children. The epistemology of this approach reflects moral knowledge as absolute and transferable. Teaching approaches that emerge from this tradition would include strategies like direct instruction in moral values or modelling appropriate values in interactions with children. This paradigm reflects Johansson's (2006) account of cognitive and emotional traditions which focus on developmental notions of morality. From such a perspective, children are regarded as being developmentally ready, or not, to engage in certain moral behaviours and this has implications for what can be 'taught' to them.

Conventional moral pedagogies may be complex, consisting of implicit and explicit strategies. Johansson (2002) found that Swedish teachers wanted to be good role models by

encouraging children's supportiveness in helping children to understand others and to express themselves. In contrast, adults could implicitly condemn, threaten and punish, when they think children are violating important values. In conventional moral pedagogies, moral values which are important to children can be overlooked by teachers. Instead, adults base their teaching on their own opinions of what they think children need to learn about showing consideration for others. The notion that children could develop their own moral values, or that children are important to each other in their learning of morality, was not evidenced by the teachers in Johansson's study. Nordin Hultman (2004) has shown that implicit forms of teaching values may be embedded in the impersonal rules and routines of the preschool and not necessarily through the use of explicit power by an authoritarian adult. Berthelsen (2005) discussed how early childhood teachers emphasized the importance of adherence to rules and routines. The concept of 'benevolent government' developed by Bartholdsson (2007) illustrates how children are governed by teachers encouraging them to follow norms, take personal responsibility, and self-regulate their own behaviour.

A second, alternate pedagogy, according to Basourakos (1999) is *contextual moral pedagogy*, which takes a different epistemological perspective to the conventional pedagogies. From this perspective, moral knowledge is constructed within and related to certain contexts, which reflects Johansson's (2006) cultural perspective of moral pedagogy. Thus, children's moral development is interwoven with the social and cultural context, with their personal history and with interactions with other persons, adults and playmates (Johansson, 2007; see also Dunn, 2006). Very young children appear to be aware of their social knowledge and they use this in their relationships with others (see Johansson, 2006; Killen and Smetana, 2006, for overviews).

There is empirical evidence to suggest that awareness of social knowledge is reflected in the evaluation and questioning of the legitimacy of social rules and authority (Johansson, 2009). Coady (2008) believes that children do not just unquestioningly follow adults but actively construct their own moral meaning and perspective. Halstead and Pike (2006) support Coady's view by claiming that the morally educated person is one who not only understands and behaves in accordance with moral principles but has developed this morality through a process of reflection. However, morality is not just about interpreting and reflecting on abstract principals (Frønes, 1995). It is also about discerning the complexity of social situations in which values and norms are negotiated. This requires a capacity to be open to various social perspectives. This communicative competence emerges from the child's experiences of interaction with others, especially with peers (Frønes, 1995). Morality grows out of relationships between subjects rather than being the result of an autonomous subject's logical reasoning (Johansson, 2007), as is the case in conventional pedagogy.

In contextual moral pedagogies, children are encouraged to reflect on multiple 'truths'. This means that there is no one truth in moral values and moral education helps children to reflect with sensitivity on competing perspectives. Johansson (2009) refers to this as moral pluralism in teaching for moral values, which is based on the acceptance of different values and different interpretations of values. The idea is also that value conflicts in everyday interactions have potentials for moral learning. It is important to be able to discern the complexity in social situations and the different values imbedded in those. Teachers who encourage children to reflect critically and empathetically on experiences, with a view to analysing the range of moral perspectives would be drawing on contextual moral pedagogy (also Nucci, 2001). Cooperative group learning strategies and engagement in community service as advocated by Demmon et al. (1996) could also conceivably fall into this tradition if a focus on critical reflection takes place within these contexts. These contextual moral pedagogies focus on acceptance of different values and different

interpretations of values, as well as children's active engagement in critical reflection. Such pedagogy could conceivably be described as a rights-based approach to moral pedagogy because children's voices are foregrounded. Such pedagogy has been suggested by several researchers in recent research, for example by Smith (2007; see also Bae, 2009; Berthelsen et al., 2009; Carr et al., 2004; Clark and Moss, 2001; Farrell, 2005; Pramling Samuelsson and Asplund Carlsson, 2008). According to Smith (2007) participation rights supports a sense of belonging and inclusion, but, more importantly, teaches children how they can bring about change.

There is a current focus in Australian education on moral pedagogy, incorporates values into the curriculum as a means of producing responsible, active members of society; however, there is little emphasis on children's voices in this process. Internationally, there is a well-established literature base around research and advocacy for children's rights to participate in both public and private decision making, especially in matters that directly affect them (OECD, 2006; Woodhead, 2008). Children's rights to participate and hold a point of view are reflected in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, there is limited international and Australian research which investigates the extent to which children's voices are included in teaching moral values. A rights-based approach to teaching views children as competent learners with valued knowledge and understanding of themselves and others, and calls for their participation in the process (MacNaughton et al., 2008). A rights-based pedagogy not only supports the rights of individual children but also helps children to understand the rights of others. Within rights-based approaches, children are provided with opportunities to make choices and decisions, which can help children to recognize the impact of their choices on others (Nyland, 2009). However, rights-based pedagogies are not common in classrooms (Helwig, 2006). In the Australian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) context, it is possible to observe emergent curriculum and child-centred practices but often these approaches remain focused on the teacher's perspectives of what should be learnt.

Children learn a great deal about moral values through the teaching practices enacted in classrooms (Tomanovic, 2003). However, Greenberg et al. (2003) has noted very little is known about how teachers enact social and moral values programs in the classroom and the effects (impact) that different kinds of programs have on children's developing morality (Colnerud and Thornberg, 2003). Using analysis of open-ended written responses, this study investigated what kind of practices Australian early years teachers believe are important for teaching moral values.

Methodology

In order to investigate early years teachers' understandings of moral pedagogy, Australian teachers were invited to participate in an online survey. Respondents with experience teaching children in the 5–8 years age range were contacted through early childhood organizations, via University Alumni networks and through email and newsletters. A link to an electronic online survey was provided and a total of 379 teachers responded. Respondents were located Australia wide. Most teachers (83 per cent) were from Queensland and 41 (11.4 per cent) were from New South Wales. Smaller numbers of respondents resided in the remaining states with seven from Tasmania, five from Victoria, three from the Northern Territory and two from Western Australia, while only one teacher was from South Australia. Most of the respondents were female (93 per cent), with ages ranging from 22 to 76 ($M = 43.5$ years, $SD = 10.7$) and from 1 year to 46 years teaching experience ($M = 17$ years, $SD = 10.7$). There was a wide variation in the level of the qualifications held by respondents. Bachelor Degrees were the most common at 177 (47.3 per cent) however, eight (2.1 per cent) respondents held a doctoral degree, 61 (16.3 per cent) held a masters' degree and 90

(24.1 per cent) held a graduate diploma or certificate. The majority of respondents, a total of 198 (52.9 per cent) had completed their highest level of training in the field of early childhood education. A total of 111 (29.7 per cent) specified primary or secondary education as their field of study while only 14 (3.7 per cent) nominated special education.

The online survey consisted of a series of questions relating to teachers' epistemological beliefs and beliefs about children's moral learning. At the end of the survey, two open-ended questions were posed asking teachers to describe how they teach moral values in their classrooms and how they think children learn moral values. The questions were:

Question 1: What are the most important practices you use in your classroom which you believe help children to learn moral values?

Question 2: Give an example of a situation in which you noticed a young child learnt something about moral values.

This article focuses on responses provided to the first question, relating to teaching practices for moral values. It is important to note that the data is not about the actual everyday teaching practice, but is about teachers' *descriptions* of their educational practice. The responses to these questions varied in length and ranged from several lines to half a page of text. This means that some descriptions could be fairly short whereas others are detailed recounts. In the analysis of all responses, the research team ensured that the meaning was evident within the statement itself. If there was not enough evidence to support allocation to a theme the statements was described as not codable. For example, if a response suggested that moral pedagogy involved engaging children in building meaning we did not assign it to the theme of building meaning unless the text clearly described a focus on such things as engaging children in problem solving, processing information for themselves, thinking reflectively or making links to their previous knowledge and experiences. Complexity in the described teaching practices was taken into account but also the values implied and/or explicated in the teachers' descriptions.

Using an interpretive methodology, the responses were analysed using Creswell's (2005) data analysis spiral. The spiral involves three main steps. In the first step, *sensitizing*, three members of the research team familiarized themselves with the data by reading the written responses to develop an understanding of what was important in the data. This enabled the researchers to develop theoretical sensitivity. They made notes and highlighted points of relevance.

In the second step, *categorizing*, the data was analysed. These categories were developed inductively. This enabled the complexity of responses to emerge from the data, rather than being reduced to fit within a theoretical framework. Shank (2006: 147) describes this process as 'making note of the same sort of things you pick up, either implicitly or explicitly, when you pay attention to unfolding events in the world'. In step two, we paid selective attention to the points that we believed related to our focus on moral pedagogy and learning. This process of searching for emergent patterns and coding into themes is referred to as thematic analysis (TA). It involves comparing meaning statements with other meaning statements, meaning statements with emergent themes and finally themes with other themes (Creswell, 2005) until the point at which no new themes emerge (known as saturation). This means that different meanings about how to teach values were of interest in the analyses.

In the third step, *synthesis*, themes were scrutinized to see if any were similar enough to be combined. The trustworthiness of themes that emerged was promoted through a process of peer debriefing. Specifically, a peer debriefing process known as dialogic reliability was used in which three researchers coded 20 per cent of data together to establish the themes through

negotiation (Åkerlind, 2005). The remaining responses were coded by one researcher. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion at this stage. In the next stage of peer debriefing, two additional researchers interrogated the themes and exemplars. These two researchers had extensive research expertise in teaching practice in early childhood and teaching strategies for working with children's morality. Once again, agreement was reached through a process of discussion and negotiation.

Findings

The themes that emerged for the open-ended question are presented in this section.

Teaching practices for moral values

This open-ended question related to the types of teaching practices teachers believed helped children to learn moral values. In analysing teachers' responses, we identified a range of themes as summarized in Table 1. A total of 363 responses were provided to the first open-ended question. Of these, 101 teachers provided accounts where their practice could be described as *transmit moral values*, 181 as *engaging children in moral activities*, 63 *engaging children in building meaning about moral values* and four as *engaging children in participatory learning for moral values*. Fourteen responses were not codable. These not codable responses discussed issues that did not respond to the question, or were not clear. We now turn to each of these themes for detailed discussion.

Transmit moral values

Responses were coded as transmitting moral values when teachers provided accounts of practices such as demonstrating, direct instructions or modelling moral values for children. These practices were the second most frequently described by the respondents, with nearly a third of the group (101 out of 363 respondents) drawing on these teaching practices.

An example of responses that were categorized as transmitting moral values can be seen below:

Through example a teacher should show respect for others ... adults AND children. This can also be explained by verbalizing the way others should be treated. (Response 36)

This teacher highlights the importance of respect as a teaching practice. She emphasizes her role as a model, an implicit teaching practice ('through example') and also comments on the practice of direct or explicit teaching ('verbalizing'). These teaching strategies position the teacher as the 'authority' who demonstrates and explains to children the concept of respect. The implicit assumption is that children are able to learn from the teacher's behaviour and the children are not explicitly discussed as actively participating.

Table 1. Teaching practices for moral values

Transmit moral values	Engage children in moral activities	Engage children in building meaning	Engage children in participatory learning	Not codable	Total responses
101	181	63	4	14	363

Note: The children were of similar age to the children in this study.

The following response also shows a teacher describing the transmission of moral values as a teaching practice: 'By Example! By giving the clear rules of the classroom and keeping the consequences consistent, meaningful and relevant' (Response 88).

This response indicates that teaching practices through which children can be taught moral values include setting a moral example, and being explicit about rules and consequences. These practices are transmissive, the teacher providing moral instruction through modelling and setting rules.

From the first example we learn that respect is an important value and from the second example, rules are important in the teacher's description of practice. In the following response, responsibilities seem to be more of a priority than rights for this teacher. The respondent highlights the teacher's role as a model, and also as an explicit teacher in teaching children moral values:

Children learn what they live. This is not an original thought, but children learn more from what you do than what you say they should do. By example, at every 'moment of truth' children are assessing how authentic teachers are in their respective positions on moral issues and the responsibilities and rights of any citizen. I tell them that responsibilities come before rights, just as 're' comes before 'ri' in the alphabet and this is a simple way to make a profound point. (Response 65)

This teacher also alludes to the children's own role in this process, that they 'learn what they live' and also that they are involved in 'assessing how authentic teachers are'. Children are positioned as observers and evaluators of the authenticity of moral instruction. While transmissive teaching strategies are described, the teacher also acknowledges children's active role of evaluation. The teacher talks about 'moments of truth' in children's lives, acknowledging that children's own life experiences influence the learning of moral values. However, in this response, the teacher focuses on her role as an 'authority'.

Engage children in moral activities

The second theme related to *engaging children in moral activities*. This was the most common strategy described by teachers with approximately half the group (181 out of 363 teachers) discussing such approaches to teaching moral values. These approaches were based on getting children engaged using a range of activities. However, while children were active in this process there was, however, little emphasis on reflection. It often represented a hands-on way to transmit moral values, for example 'role playing situations they have or may encounter' (Response 19).

Role play involves the children's active participation in the learning process. The teacher also talks about role playing situations that children 'have or may encounter'. Thus, the children's input of their own experiences is a key part of this teaching strategy. Engaging children in moral activities often meant that the teacher tried to help children to tap into their own experiences of moral issues.

The use of discussion was another teaching strategy that was considered to be reflective of engaging children in moral activities:

Class discussion about events that take place in class and how they could be dealt with if they reoccur – modelling language for apology – scaffolding children to discuss with each other what has happened when they feel someone has 'wronged' them. (Response 118)

The teacher highlights practices, such as discussion, that actively involve children in the learning process, with the teacher scaffolding the learning. The response implies concepts of collective learning, where the group of children, as a class, are used as a resource for the discussion. Concern for, and understanding of others is implicitly valued by this teacher as part of moral values teaching

and learning. The teacher refers to ‘events that take place in class’. Thus, children’s everyday school experiences are drawn upon in the teaching of moral values. The respondent highlights teaching the children through the practice of encouraging them to tap into their emotions (for example, ‘when they feel someone has “wronged” them’). It seems that emotions can be drawn upon as a resource when teaching about social and moral values. The teacher describes the transmissive practice of ‘modelling’; however, this is used in conjunction with active teaching practices. Respondents often described active teaching practices in conjunction with transmissive practices for teaching moral values. While some of the strategies described in this theme seem to promote active learning, this learning was about a pre-determined set of values for moral learning. In the next theme, *engaging children in building meaning*, the approaches to teaching morals were not only focused on active learning, but it was clear that children were actively constructing their *own* understanding of moral values.

Engage children in building meaning about moral values

In this theme, approaches to teaching moral values involve children actively engaging in building their own meaning about moral values through problem solving, negotiation and reflection. Around one-sixth of the respondents described this approach to teaching moral values (63 out of 363 respondents). The following response exemplifies these practices.

Mostly – showing respect for children and demonstrating this through our interactions. Plan do reflect cycle of teaching with children – shows respect for children – values their interests and input into the program. Seeing social issues in the classroom as ‘teachable moments’ and reflecting with the children on feelings and appropriate strategies. Challenging stereotypes and unjust practices in stories and life e.g., ‘Could a woman be a fireman?’ ‘Why; why not?’ ‘How do you think John feels when you tell him he is smelly?’ – asking what the children think/brainstorm what would be an appropriate way to behave in this situation. (Response 98)

In this response, the teacher describes teaching practices that encourage children to reflect upon situations requiring moral values, including others’ feelings and how their own behaviour might affect others’ feelings, and ways of dealing with issues. The teacher also talks about the importance of showing ‘respect’. Respect can be understood not only as a value in itself, but also as a teaching practice. The idea of ‘challenging stereotypes’ implies a focus on the ability to critically analyse. Thus, the teacher engages children in higher order thinking about moral values. She also uses social issues as a base for learning about moral values, again making a link to real life learning. Another teaching practice that the teacher articulates is encouraging children to put themselves in another’s situation. The teacher discusses the importance of thinking about and articulating feelings as a way of developing children’s understanding about moral values. Here the child is positioned as an active member of the community, able to reflect and draw conclusions about moral issues.

The next example provides evidence of teaching practices for *engaging children in moral activities*, which were evident in the previous theme (discussion and collective learning). Practices aimed at engaging children in ‘thinking’ to build understandings of moral values are also seen:

We discuss issues and collaboratively talk about positive actions that could be used. We always think (and usually verbalise) how our actions (positive and negative) affect other people. We explore how to be a good friend and look at strategies that help us work together as a caring classroom. (Response 101)

Here, children are encouraged to ‘explore’ and ‘look at strategies that help us work together’, practices that engage children in thinking and building meaning about moral issues. The teacher

also describes the need for children to think about and understand the relationship between their own actions and the impact on others. Throughout this response, the teacher uses the term, 'we' – the teacher is not positioned as an 'expert', but rather as a fellow learner. In this theme, the respondents are concerned about making children reflect and understand values and moral behaviour. In the next theme the teacher extends the practice encouraging children to stretch their understanding through and for action.

Engage children in participatory learning for moral values

Responses coded as *engage children in participatory learning for moral values* were those in which teachers described the child and teacher as not only building meaning but also putting this new moral understanding into action. These could be described as activist approaches to teaching moral values. Only four respondents out of 363 described practices for teaching moral values that were categorized as engaging children in participatory learning, for example:

I work in a democratic school which empowers children to participate in many issues within the school community, and this in turn leads to learning about moral values through actively discussing and reflecting on conflict situations. I also think modelling of moral values and ethics by respected peers and adults including the teacher is vital for healthy moral development. The children I teach spend a lot of time in conversations about conflicts and issues, including social justice issues beyond the immediate classroom, and through conversation and debate, moral values are both stimulated and challenged. Ultimately, the important practices I use would be conversations, relationships, modelling and participatory democracy. (Response 45)

This teacher employs various practices, including conversation, debate and drawing on everyday conflicts as a base for moral learning. The teacher also indicates that children are encouraged to engage with broader social issues, 'beyond the classroom'. This example includes elements of transmitting moral values (for example, modelling); engaging children in moral activities (for example, discussion); and also engaging children in building meaning (for example, reflecting). However, it goes beyond that, in that here, we see the teacher describing practices that are used to encourage children to build and demonstrate their understanding about moral values through and for action. Thus, children are not only involved in thinking about moral issues, but also in using their understandings to do something about moral issues. The respondent talks about children's participation and empowerment as a way of learning about moral values and highlights values which they consider important, such as respect, democracy and social justice. This is an example of transformative teaching practices, where children are encouraged not only to build understandings of moral values, but to do something with these understandings. This response differs from the previous theme which focused on building meaning. In this example, the teacher explicitly discusses children's participation in a way that goes beyond talking or thinking about it, to doing something with the understandings they have about moral values.

In the next response, the respondent also describes practices that can empower children:

When working with children aged 5–6 years I build a relationship as a teacher with each child. This relationship is based on mutual respect. I consult the children about issues which affect the entire group. We brainstorm solutions and cooperatively plan strategies. When a solution does not work we re-visit our position and decide on another tactic. This empowers the children to take responsibility for their actions and decisions and to learn to work cooperatively to reach a solution. I also consult the children as a group if one child within the group is struggling with making 'good choices' with their behaviour or daily routine.

We talk about how we can help that person to cooperate. We talk about how we feel when we are all working together and how we feel when someone does not cooperate. I truly believe that your own standards make you what you are and determine how you react to situations. (Response 120)

Problem solving and the use of strategies are discussed in this quote. The respondent is describing practices in which children are encouraged to build moral understandings and then draw upon these understandings in their activities. The teacher describes a collective learning environment, in which values such as mutual respect, community cooperation, empowerment, helping others and taking responsibility are encouraged. These values can also be seen to inform teaching practices. In general, the respondents in this theme are concerned about children's participation and empowerment as a way of learning about moral values, thus demonstrating a rights-based approach to moral learning.

Summary

The most prominent approaches to teaching moral values described by this group of Australian early years teachers were engaging children in moral activities. This was closely followed by teaching practices for transmitting moral values. Engaging children in building meaning and participatory learning for moral values were least often described.

Discussion

Based on the responses to the first open-ended question there appears to be a strong focus on conventional pedagogies. Again we would like to stress that this study does not inform us about teachers' practices per se. Rather, it reveals how teachers describe and evaluate practices for moral education. Conventional moral pedagogy involves an epistemology which reflects moral knowledge as absolute and transferable, with role modelling a common teaching strategy. The teachers in our study overwhelmingly reported transmissive (*transmit moral values*) and active (*engage children in moral activities*) teaching practices.

Our findings regarding transmissive teaching practices are reflected in Johansson's (2002) study where she also found that teachers employed modelling as an important practice for children's learning of moral values. These teachers in this study also seemed to hold moral values as absolute, and in some examples the teachers seemed to view children as lacking ability to understand and relate to values. It is important to note that the children in Johansson's study were younger than the children in this study. In other research with elementary school children, Johansson and Johansson (2003) studied moral interaction between teachers and children¹ in five schools in Sweden. Three different positions upon which the teachers seemed to build their pedagogical practice were found in the study. The two most common positions revealed that the teachers regarded inner abilities such as emotion and cognition as the pillars upon which moral development and learning should be built. The third and least common position was connected with intersubjectivity and a contextual approach to moral learning. Our study also found that the contextual approach to moral learning, or the pedagogy of participation, was the least often described moral pedagogy.

In addition to transmissive teaching practices for moral values, the teachers in our study reported active views of teaching and learning for moral values. The teaching practice described most frequently by the teachers was *engaging children in moral activities*. Thus, children's active involvement in moral issues is a central theme in the teaching practices, described here as a *pedagogy of enactment*. This pedagogy of enactment actively engages children in some way in the

process of learning moral values; for example, seeking their involvement in the learning process through practices such as discussion or role play. These types of responses, both in terms of teaching and in terms of children's learning, explicitly discussed engaging the children in their learning about moral values through activities. The descriptions also indicated that teachers want children to reflect on and understand others' feelings or understand a moral situation where someone is in a position of need. Enabling children to experience and understand others' feelings seems to be an important practice for the teachers in helping children learn values. Johansson (2002) also noted similar findings where teachers made an effort to help children experience concern for others' feelings and situations. Here, the value of concern is not explicit, rather understanding others seems to be taken for granted as a result of moral learning.

The teachers in our study were not asked to reflect upon their moral values, yet they often described such values as a practice for learning. Respect for instance, is a value frequently expressed by the teachers and implies that the roles of both teachers and children include being respectful of each other. One teacher reported that she shows children respect with the intention that children should then experience and model this kind of value. Sharing, as a value, can be communicated by teachers through actually sharing with children in order to make them aware of this value. The value of responsibility is also found in the teachers' descriptions. On the one hand responsibility can be seen as a value imposed on children, while on the other hand it is described as an essential component of children's involvement as active participants in the community. Values related to children's rights were seldom expressed in the study, but could be found among the teachers who described participatory practice. In those few cases we found values for community, mutual respect, understanding and concern for others.

While the responses focused on a pedagogy of enactment indicate a preference for teaching and learning that moves beyond modelling and observing, there is no clear indication in these responses that children are able to make choices or set the directions of their moral learning. The teacher's agenda is at the forefront of such moral learning (McGrath et al., 2008). What is not clear in these responses is the extent to which children are constructed as competent, agentic learners with valued knowledge and understanding of themselves and others (MacNaughton et al., 2008). On the contrary, for some teachers, rules seemed important in the children's moral learning. Rules ought to be explicit and understandable and the consequences should be clear to the children. Here we can find connections with the disciplinary values found in Emilson and Johansson's (2009) study on teachers' communication of values. Disciplinary values refer to rules upholding the order in preschool Emilson and Johansson noted that children's voices are often not heard because of teachers' attitudes, rules and use of power. For example, Emilson and Johansson describe how the value of caring in early years classrooms seems to be foregrounded, while there is less focus on values of democracy and rights. Also Thornberg (2009) found that teachers and children in school persistently communicated rules for behaviour.

There is little evidence in the responses of pedagogy whereby children are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning and demonstrate agency. Only a few teachers reported teaching practices as *engaging children in participatory learning* ($n = 4$). We describe this view of teaching and learning as a *pedagogy of participation* which draws on a rights-based approach to teaching and learning. The notion of rights refers to powers or freedoms to behave in certain ways (Coady, 2008). Therefore, a rights-based approach to teaching views children as competent learners with valued knowledge and understanding of themselves and others (MacNaughton et al., 2008). Such an approach reflects the notion of the 'rich child' who plays a role in 'shaping their own childhoods' (Woodhead, 2008: 21). A pedagogy of participation reflects the notion of contextual moral pedagogies (Basourakos, 1999), in which moral values are constructed and actioned by

children. It appears from our analysis that children's involvement at this participatory level in the teaching and learning of moral values is less common in the responses. These responses provided little evidence of a 'rich child' discourse or a rights-based approach to teaching moral values (Woodhead, 2008). Our data would support Emilson and Johansson's (2009) view that teachers' attitudes, rules and use of power may prevent children from being agentic and powerful in determining their own futures. Like Emilson and Johansson, we noted in the teachers' responses that values of caring in early years classrooms are more significant than values of democracy and rights. On the one hand, the Convention of the Child's right mirrors a world consensus on the status of children as citizens in their own right (Boshier, 2005). On the other hand, the narratives from the teachers in this study indicate that these ideas might not reach out into children's everyday lives in early education and in practices for children's moral learning. It seems that educational practices which involve children's voices in the teaching of moral values are still not common place in early years education (Berthelsen et al., 2009; Dalhberg and Moss 2005; Smith et al., 2000).

The teaching of values is a national priority in Australia in order to promote responsible and contributing members of society (Lovat and Toomey, 2007). In particular, the *Australian National Framework for Values Education in Australian Education* (DEST, 2005), promotes a range of approaches to teaching that are focused on supporting the understanding and application of moral and social values. The document recommends a range of teaching strategies which include implicit and explicit teaching; opportunities to practice values; explicit planning, implementation and monitoring of social and moral learning; and learning through all facets of school life, discussion and reflection. This policy clearly advocates a range of strategies that could be described as active learning for children or a pedagogy of enactment. While the goals of teaching are to help students understand and apply these values and to provide a safe and secure learning environment to explore values within a whole school approach, there is a clear lack of focus on rights-based approaches to moral education in which children are empowered to think and take action for change. This was also reflected in our study.

To promote rights-based approaches in teaching in the early years, everyday teaching practices and teachers' interactions with children need to be examined with an agenda of children's participation. In promoting rights-based approaches, it is important that teachers are mindful of their relationships with children in order to listen to children's voices effectively (Berthelsen et al., 2009; Rhedding-Jones et al., 2008). Deconstruction of practice enables teachers to question their relationships with children, make changes to practice and be more open to multiple perspectives. 'Just repeating the research practices of others and the everyday ways of organizing and interacting in schools and preschools, is not so difficult. However if we wish to act ethically around issues of power and voice, we have to act and speak differently' (Rhedding-Jones et al., 2008: 49). Implementing children's participatory rights in practical situations demands, according to Woodhead (2005), new role expectations for teachers. If children are to be allowed space for participation and expression, we also need to critically look at one-sided understandings of relationships in which views of adults are foregrounded (Bae, 2009). Studies such as this can provide insight into practices for teaching moral values that can advance understanding about ways forward for values pedagogy.

There has been limited research that investigates the extent to which children's voices are heard in the teaching of moral values. Our study suggests that teachers are more focused on a pedagogy of enactment rather than a pedagogy of participation. If pedagogy of participation for social change is to be promoted, then it is critical that an ecological theoretical framework is explored. We need to view pedagogies for participation holistically using both micro and macro dimensions. At the micro level we need to be engaging children in taking responsibility for moral learning and at the macro level, policy documents need to be clearly reflecting a rights-based approach to teaching for moral learning.

Note

1. The children were in the similar age as the children in this study.

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