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Teachers' and children's personal epistemologies for moral education: Case studies in early years elementary education.

Abstract

While there is strong interest in teaching values in Australia and internationally there is little focus on young children's moral values learning in the classroom. Research shows that personal epistemology influences teaching and learning in a range of education contexts, including moral education. This study examines relationships between personal epistemologies (children's and teachers'), pedagogies, and school contexts for moral learning in two early years classrooms. Interviews with teachers and children and analysis of school policy revealed clear patterns of personal epistemologies and pedagogies within each school. A whole school approach to understanding personal epistemologies and practice for moral values learning is suggested.

Keywords

Personal epistemology; moral values; young children; moral pedagogy; evaluativistic beliefs; subjectivist beliefs

1. Introduction

International debates about what constitutes quality education abound. While there may be paradigmatic variations in this debate, there are two main principles that can be applied in any determination of quality. The first “identifies learners’ cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all education systems” and the second relates to how an education system is able to promote “values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development” (UNESCO, 2004, p. 17). In this study, we are interested in investigating moral values for social cohesion and active citizenship using personal epistemology as the theoretical framework. Personal epistemology refers to the beliefs individuals hold about the nature of knowledge and knowing (Burr & Hofer, 2002). We know that personal epistemologies mediate approaches to learning and teaching in adults (e.g., Johnston, Woodside-Jiron, & Day, 2001; Kang & Wallace, 2005), so it seems likely that the same relationships might exist for children. It may be important to understand children’s personal epistemologies in order to understand how they learn moral values for social cohesion.

Social cohesion refers to how “members of a society voluntarily ‘play by the rules of the game’ and when tolerance for differences is demonstrated in the day-to-day interactions across social groups within that society” (Heyneman 2003, 2243-2244). Moral values, needed for social cohesion, are the positive and negative characteristics that can be experienced in our behaviours, acts and attitudes. They refer to both our lived experiences and the social norms for how to interact with others (Author et al., 2011a). Social cohesion can be promoted in the early years if we help children to experience and internalize moral values for human rights (MacNaughton & Hughes, 2007), and to develop their own opinions and moral responsibility. It follows that teaching moral values involves pedagogies that support children’s awareness, thinking, understanding, and actions in order to develop their own opinions and responsibilities for moral functioning. Developing children’s opinions and moral responsibility requires that we views children has having agency (Woodhead, 2008). This view is evident in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which “has elaborated a relatively new starting point for early childhood policy and practice that can be applied universally” (Woodhead, 2008, p. 15).

Internationally, there is strong social and political interest in teaching values (UNESCO, 2004) as evidenced by research across a range of countries such as the United Kingdom (Halstead & Pike, 2006; Hawkes, 2008); United States (Cooley, 2008; Leonard, 2007); and Canada (Darling, 2002). This shows world-wide concern about how children learn moral values for effective functioning in society (Cooley, 2008). In Australia, the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (Melbourne Declaration) (MCEECDYA, 2008) advocates for the development and wellbeing of children to promote social cohesion. Even though values education is of significant political interest in Australia, and internationally, there has been limited attention paid to how young children learn moral values in the classroom. Various international and national reports suggest that educational programs should support moral values for active citizenship (DEST, 2003a; DEST 2003b; UNESCO, 2004) but how, and if, those outcomes are to be achieved appears to apply more to primary and secondary schooling, than the early years. The study reported here is significant because it focuses on moral education in early years classrooms. In particular, we draw on personal epistemology (beliefs about knowing and knowledge) as the conceptual framework to examine how teachers' personal epistemologies and pedagogies might be related to children's personal epistemologies for moral learning within the contexts of school policies for moral education.

As part of this situational context, we will examine how early years teachers' beliefs and practices are related to children's moral learning using personal epistemology as the theoretical frame work. Children learn much about moral values through the teaching practices enacted in classrooms (Author, 2011; Thornberg, 2009,). However, Greenberg et al., (2003) noted that we still know very little about how teachers enact moral values programs in the classroom. Teachers' personal epistemologies are important to teachers' pedagogy (Entwistle, Skinner, Entwistle & Orr, 2000; Hofer & Pintrich, 1997) and may offer insights into how teachers promote moral learning in the classroom for active citizenship.

1.1 Teachers' personal epistemologies

Personal epistemology involves an increasing awareness about the nature of knowledge and knowing (Burr & Hofer, 2002). In general, the term *Personal epistemology* is more widely used than *epistemological beliefs* because it reflects the individual, rather than philosophical, nature of these beliefs (Kitchener, 2002; Sandoval, 2005). Hofer and Pintrich (1997) refer to beliefs about the nature of knowledge (truth and certainty of knowledge) and beliefs about the

process of knowing (source or authority of knowledge) in their conceptualisation of personal epistemology.

With respect to *Epistemological development*, research results have indicated that education contexts can have an influence on personal epistemological development (Hofer, 2004). The seminal work of Perry (1970) and King and Kitchener (1994) describe a stage-like view of change in personal epistemologies, demonstrating that individuals may progress from simple, black and white views through to complex evidenced-based ways of knowing. This early work is supported by the considerable body of recent evidence which has described similar developmental trajectories. For example personal epistemology may be described as *absolutist* (facts exist and can be transmitted to others), *multiplist* or *subjectivist* (personal opinions constitute knowledge), or *evaluativist* (a more nuanced perspective that knowledge is changeable and judgments are made based on evaluation of evidence) (Kuhn & Weinstock, 2002). Essentially there is “progression toward an integration of objectivity and subjectivity, a learning to coordinate one’s own subjective perceptions and meaning making with an evaluated stance on the knowledge of authorities and facts about objective reality” (Hofer, 2006, p. 89).

Another body of research proposes that personal epistemology is multidimensional and independent as opposed to one-dimensional and stage-like. From this perspective, individuals can hold both naïve (objectivist) and sophisticated (evaluativistic) views about the nature of knowing and knowledge at the same time in one or more dimensions (Schommer, 1994). Schommer proposed the following dimensions of personal epistemology: (a) Omniscient Authority (beliefs in the source of knowledge), (b) Certain Knowledge (beliefs in the certainty of knowledge), (c) Simple Knowledge (beliefs in structure of knowledge), (d) Quick Learning (beliefs in the speed of learning), and (e) Innate Ability (beliefs in the stability of knowledge). These dimensions may have differential influences on individuals’ approaches to learning and may develop independently of each other.

Teachers with *evaluativistic* beliefs are likely to use pedagogies that support the learning moral values based on connections with others and sharing of power with children because they believe there is no ultimate authority on knowledge (Author et al, 2011b). Further, from this perspective, knowledge about moral values is personally constructed through a process of weighing evidence from different points of view including those of children. Such values are necessary in the promotion of active citizenship, as children are encouraged to be involved in decisions and make judgements about issues which affect both themselves and others. At the

other end of the epistemological continuum, teachers with *absolutist* beliefs would be unlikely to share power in learning situations because teaching related to moral values is viewed as transmission of rules and others' perspectives, including those of children, would be less valued (Author et al, under review a). These moral values do not promote active citizenship because children are not encouraged to participate "with others in shaping decisions affecting themselves, groups of which they are members and the wider society" (Moss, 2006, p. 1).

These relationships between personal epistemologies and teaching practice are also evident in the Educational Model for Personal Epistemology (EMPE) (Feucht, 2010; 2011). This model also suggests that teachers' personal epistemologies influence teaching practice, where epistemic instruction refers specifically to teaching practice that is based on teachers' personal epistemology. However, this model goes further to suggest that a classroom epistemic climate is constituted in the relationships between teacher epistemologies, epistemic instruction, knowledge representations (educational resources), and children's personal epistemologies. This model is important because it goes beyond the typical focus in the research on teachers' epistemological beliefs and practice to include the broader classroom resources and children's personal epistemologies. This model also supports the proposed relationship between teachers' personal epistemologies and children's personal epistemologies for moral learning that is presented in this study.

1. 2 Children's personal epistemology for moral learning

In recent years there has been growing interest regarding the development of young children's personal epistemologies (Wildenger, Hofer & Burr, 2010; Burr & Hofer, 2002; Kitchener, 2002). As such, most of the research about children's personal epistemology to date has emerged from a developmental paradigm. Mansfield and Clinchy (1985) appear to be first to have explored children's early epistemological development. Some research suggests that children under the age of four can be described as holding realist epistemologies (pre-dualists) viewing knowledge as a direct representation of an external reality, where justification is not required because there is no false knowledge (Burr & Hofer, 2002; Chandler, Hallett & Sokol, 2002; Kuhn & Weinstock, 2002). Burr and Hofer (2002) described this period of pre-dualism as 'egocentric subjectivity', where children believe that everyone simply possesses the same knowledge as they do.

Kuhn and Weinstock (2002) argued that by age five, most children are on their way to developing a multiplistic or subjectivist personal epistemology, where differing beliefs are accepted as the result of others' different experiences. This early version of subjectivism is judged against a right or wrong (absolutist) view of reality (Hofer, 2005). This means that children at this stage are capable of accepting beliefs different to their own, but their reasoning is often based on the idea that one person must not have been given the correct information (Kuhn & Weinstock, 2002). By the age of seven or eight years, children start to see knowledge as an interpretation of the world, accepting and appreciating that individuals can hold different views about the same thing, however what they do not yet grasp that all knowledge is ambiguous and that diversity of opinion is central to knowing (Chandler, Hallett & Sokol, 2002). By middle to late childhood children begin to develop a constructivist theory of mind, where knowledge is viewed as a personal construction (Cappendale & Chandler, 1996). This development demonstrates an increase in epistemological understanding, as children begin to view knowledge as something that is generated by human minds (Kuhn & Weinstock, 2002).

This developmental description of children's personal epistemology is overly simplistic and is complicated by more recent research related to personal epistemologies in various domains of knowledge (Mason, Boldrin & Zurlo, 2006; Wildenger, Hofer & Burr, 2010; Wainryb, Shaw, Langley, Cottam & Lewis, 2004). In this research, the term *domain* refers to judgements about taste, aesthetics, morals/values and truths (Hofer, 2006), although in some personal epistemology research *domain* refers to epistemic beliefs held within disciplines such as mathematics, science and language (Hofer, 2006).

The research into domains of personal epistemologies shows that children's views may vary across certain domains, and so trajectories vary according to these judgement domains (Kuhn et al., 2000; Mansfield & Clinchy, 2002). For example Kuhn and colleagues (2000), in their study of 10 year olds, found that multiplist personal epistemologies were more prevalent in the domains of personal taste (personal preferences) and aesthetics (personal views about beauty) than in the domains of values (moral values) and truths (ambiguous and physical facts). Similar results were found by Mason et al., (2006). They found that the 5th grade and high school children in their study could be described as holding more absolutist beliefs in the domain of moral values but were able to think in more complex ways (evaluativist) when it came to the domain of aesthetics. Wildenger et al. (2010) also found that the children in their study (ages 3, 4 & 5 years) made the most relative judgements in the ambiguous fact

domain and the least in the morality or fact domains. Tolerant judgements were found to be made significantly less in the morality domain.

Recent studies have explored the development of children's personal epistemologies across different domains in terms of judgements of relativism and tolerance (Wildenger et al., 2010; Wainryb et al., 2004). Wainryb et al., (2004) used vignettes which involved a disagreeing character with children aged 5, 7 and 9 years. The disagreeing character was created by assessing the participant's own beliefs and then ensuring that one of the characters in each disagreement endorsed the participant's own belief, and the other character held divergent beliefs. Participants' tolerance was assessed by asking, 'If they thought it was okay for the character (with divergent beliefs) to think that way?' The study revealed that an increase in age had a positive relationship to the frequency of relative and tolerant judgments. Tolerance of moral diversity was found to be significantly less than tolerance of diversity in other domains; these findings align well with previously mentioned work (Kuhn et al., 2000; Mason et al., 2006) which found that children were more likely to give absolutist responses (only one right answer) in the domain of value judgments. These might be considered to reflect beliefs about knowledge, in particular the certainty of knowledge about moral values.

The relationship between children and authorities should be viewed as multifaceted and reciprocal (Laupa & Turiel, 1986). Very little research has examined the nature of children's beliefs about authorities which can be seen to form the basis of epistemological beliefs known as "omniscient authority" (Schommer, 1994). In seminal research, Laupa and Turiel, (1986) examined the beliefs held by 84 children in Grades 1, 3, and 5 about source of knowledge and views of authority. In the school, certain children in Grades 4 and 5 were given a measure of authority and trained to intervene in non violent conflict situations between younger children. Interviews, focusing on two events (turn taking on a slide and fighting in the playground), assessed children's evaluations of the events and their response to commands from different sources of authority (e.g., a peer and an adult in authority, and a peer and an adult not in a position of authority). Most children viewed the transgressions in the events negatively, basing justifications primarily on welfare and fairness. Across all age ranges, children accepted the authority commands in some events and rejected them in others. For example, children accepted the authority command to stop fighting, however rejected the authority command to continue fighting. The authors argue "children do not take a unitary orientation toward authority" (Laupa & Turiel, 1986, p. 411).

To date, very little research has investigated children's personal epistemologies, and of that research, most of the studies have used a developmental paradigm. There has been no research to date which has investigated children's personal epistemologies in the context of learning moral values. Recently, Hofer (2010) argued that the field of personal epistemology needs to move beyond a developmental, psychological framework to consider broader contexts and how such contexts impact on personal epistemology. This is also true for the limited research related to children's epistemology. There is also a growing understanding that contexts plays an important role in the study of personal epistemologies (Strømsø & Bråten, 2011) and so it is important to investigate personal epistemologies in terms of broader school contexts.

2. The Study

The study addressed the following research question:

“What is the relationship between children's personal epistemologies, teachers' personal epistemologies and pedagogies, and school contexts for moral learning?”

Using multiple data sources is an approach typically used in case study design (Yin, 2003). In this study, these sources included an examination of school contexts and policies for moral learning; stimulated recall interviews with two teachers based on video observations of classroom practice; and scenario-based interviews with children in each of the classrooms of the two teachers who participated in the case studies. Principals, teachers, parents, guardians and children agreed to participate in this study prior to data collection. While consent was obtained by the parents (or guardians) and teachers, the children expressed their willingness to participate by drawing a smiley face to indicate they agreed to participate or frowning face to mean they did not want to participate. Thirty-five children agreed to participate in present study. Each of the sources of data are now described in more detail.

2.1 The school contexts and policies

In 2009, as part of an Australian Research Council Discovery grant, eleven teachers and their classes were involved in the study of how teachers' personal epistemologies were related to moral pedagogy and children's learning of moral values. During this initial analysis of teacher interviews, the personal epistemologies of the teachers were analysed. The two teachers, from two separate schools, were selected from this original group of teachers because they represented divergent personal epistemologies and pedagogies. Hence the

teachers, rather than schools, were the basis for selection and we were aiming for variation rather than similarity of beliefs. However, we were also interested in the school contexts as influences on teachers' and children's personal epistemologies and moral learning and so we examined school policies, school mission statements and handbooks for evidence of views about knowing and learning. For School 1, we used the school's handbook while for School 2 we used the school mission statement available to parents on the school's website.

2.2 Teachers' stimulated recall interviews

The interviews focused on two teachers' understandings of moral pedagogies and personal epistemology. The stimulated recall interviews involved presenting events and posing open-ended questions about these in order to elicit teachers' thoughts about their practical knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning (Dunkin et al., 1998). It is important to acknowledge that this is an indirect method of obtaining evidence of cognitive activity, and therefore this is taken into consideration when evaluating findings.

Photographs taken during a period of observation in the classroom were presented during the stimulated recall interviews to encourage teachers to discuss their actions and interactions. The teachers were asked to describe their moral pedagogy and their role in teaching children moral values. Questions were also posed about the teachers' beliefs about knowing (personal epistemology) and children's learning of moral values. In sum, the stimulated recall interviews provided teachers with the opportunity to talk about their views about pedagogy for moral values and their personal epistemologies.

While the interviews were semi-structured and involved a series of set questions, the interviewer at times would use prompts to clarify points or encourage the interviewee to expand upon an area of interest. Interviews took place as soon as possible after the period of observation of their teaching practice, so that the session was still fresh in both the teacher and interviewer's mind. This was in an attempt to elicit as clear an understanding as possible of the observed practice from the perspective of the teacher. The interviewer, a member of the research team, was usually the one who had observed the teacher's practice. The interviews, which lasted approximately one hour, were audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

2.2.1 Analysis of teacher interviews

The aim of the data analysis was to highlight personal epistemologies and pedagogies for moral learning. Creswell's data analysis spiral (2005) was implemented to analyse these school policy documents. This approach involved three main steps. First, through multiple

readings of the documents, the researchers sensitised themselves to the intricacies of the data. Second, thematic analysis was used to search for patterns and themes related to teaching and learning of morals in the school. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis “is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). Analysis involved the comparison of meaning statements with other meaning statements, and then with emergent themes and finally comparing the themes with other themes (Step 3 in data analysis spiral) until a point of saturation was reached (where no new themes emerged). This approach enabled themes to become evident in the data first. This was followed by a comparison of these themes with the existing research related to personal epistemology. This reflects what Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 84) described as a “theoretical thematic analysis” in which the researcher’s conceptual understanding influences the nature of the analysis and “is thus more explicitly analyst driven”. This approach enabled themes to become evident in the data first, followed by a comparison with the existing research related to teachers’ personal epistemologies and pedagogy.

2.3 Child Interviews

Interviews with 20 children in Teacher 1’s class and 14 children in Teacher 2’s class were used to investigate their personal epistemologies for moral values. One child, who was 10 years of age, was excluded from the analysis (teacher 2’s class) to ensure that the age range corresponded with those typically associated with the early years of elementary school (ages 5-8). See Table 1 for details of participants’ ages and gender.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The interviews consisted of a set of scenarios and open-ended questions. The scenario interview protocol was adapted from Killen et al., (2002) and has been designed to suit the age range of the children in this study. At the beginning of the interview, children were provided with two scenarios relating to issues of inclusion around gender and culture. As the scenarios were read, the children were presented with picture cards to represent the characters. A series of set questions were then posed to probe into issues of inclusion around different genders or cultures. These questions asked children to comment on the influence that peers or teachers may exert on their decisions in regards to inclusion of different genders or cultures.

The questions from Killen et al., (2002) were used for both gender and culture as shown in the example below. The example is based on gender and a similar scenario was used related to culture.

Jessica is in Grade 1. Luke is a new boy in her class. Luke wants to make new friends so at lunch time he asks Jessica if she wants to play. Jessica doesn't want to play with Luke because he is a boy.

Q1. Evaluation: Do you think it is okay for Jessica not to play with Luke because he is a boy?

Q2. Justification: *Why do you think it is okay/ not okay?*

For a Judgement of Not Okay

Q3N. Social Influence: *What if Jessica's friends say they don't think she should play with Luke because he is a boy. Do you think it is okay then? Why?*

Q4N. Authority: *What if Jessica's teacher says it is okay for Jessica not to play with Luke because he's a boy. Do you think it is okay then? Why?*

For a Judgement of Okay

Q3O. Social Influence: *What if Jessica's friends say they think she should play with Luke even though he is a boy. Do you think it is okay then? Why?*

Q4O. Authority: *What if Jessica's teacher says she should play with Luke even though he's a boy. Do you think it is okay then? Why?*

Finally, a series of open-ended questions were posed to investigate children's perspectives on their participation, moral issues and teaching in their classroom. Their responses to these questions were used to understand their enacted personal epistemologies. Kuhn and Weinstock (2002) described this as "theory in action" (p.134). They advocated for such approaches to investigating personal epistemology because they measure beliefs in action in the classroom. The open-ended questions used in this study related to everyday school life, including their understandings of their choices and decisions in the classroom and playground and who makes the rules in school.

The child interviews were conducted by three researchers from the research team. Each of these researchers had been trained in the conduct of these interviews. The quality of the interviews was increased by establishing trust. The interviewers spent some time observing the classroom activities and becoming familiar with the children and the context prior to the interview process. It was important to ensure that children felt comfortable so the interviews took place outside the classroom within view of the teacher in most cases. They took

approximately twenty minutes to complete and were audio-taped for later verbatim transcription.

2.3.1 Analysis of children's interviews

We used children's responses to the interview questions as indicators of their personal epistemologies by measuring their tolerance judgments for inclusion. If children indicated that there was a right answer, namely that children must be included/excluded, they were described as absolutist in their personal epistemology. If children indicated that inclusion was important, but only in certain contexts and under certain conditions, they were described as having subjectivist personal epistemologies.

Next, children's responses were scored as absolutist if they changed their response based on either the social or authority influence, and were coded as subjectivist if they maintained their beliefs regardless of perceived external pressures to change their views (suggesting that they were constructing their own personal knowledge rather than relying on external authorities).

The responses to the open ended questions related to making choices and rules revealed children's personal epistemology. That is, did they see themselves as constructors of knowledge about the rules and decision making (subjectivist beliefs) or were the teachers the ultimate sources of this knowledge (absolutist beliefs)?

2.4 Integrated analysis of school policies, stimulated recall interviews and child interviews

The overall goals of the analyses were to explore the relationships between teachers' personal epistemologies, teaching practices, children's personal epistemologies for moral learning and school policies. These relationships represented patterns in the data. For example, did teachers with evaluativist personal epistemologies use pedagogies that supported the learning of moral values based on connections with others and sharing of power with children, and did the children in their class evidence more sophisticated personal epistemologies? Further, were these personal epistemologies and pedagogies reflected in the school policies?

3. Case study findings

We first examined the various sources of data for each school to investigate the relationships at a school level. Next, these relationships were explored across the case studies to compare the findings for the two schools. Table 2 is a summary of the teacher data including school context information, teacher demographics, moral pedagogies and personal epistemologies.

Table 3 is a summary of the children's responses to the interview questions (choices, and who decides the rules) as well as their responses to the scenarios

[Insert Table 2 about here]

[Insert Table 3 about here]

3.1 School 1 context

School 1 is an all-boys independent, Anglican Christian school. While catering for day students, the school also offers boarding arrangements. A holistic approach towards education is endorsed. The school philosophy presented in policy documents and handbooks places emphasis on values related to leadership, responsibility, respect, self-control, and care (for self, others and the environment). Qualities such as confidence, happiness, thinking, creativity, emotional intelligence, participation and service are also highlighted. There is also an understanding that boys think and learn differently to girls: "Renowned for our balanced and holistic approach to boys' education, we recognise that boys think and learn differently from girls." (Source: School 1 website, 2010). The preparatory classroom philosophy expresses similar values, including the importance of children acting responsibly so as to bring credit to the school, their family and themselves. A sense of belonging to a community and the *acquisition* of strong fundamentals are also valued. Students are encouraged to act with the wellbeing of others in mind, acting courteously, with consideration and respect. There is the requirement to respect property and encouragement for children to develop positive self-control. In line with this, consequences for ones' actions are seen as an important part of behaviour management. Students are expected to apply themselves to tasks and have the right to work in a safe, friendly environment.

3.1.1 Teacher 1's pedagogy for moral education

For Teacher 1, there is a clear theme that moral education is about teaching moral values that are "right", with children learning about values by following others' examples. Teaching strategies related to "Following others" centred on the use of modelling along with rules and rewards (see Author et al., under review a). This is could be reflective of school policy, which encourages teachers to act as role models for students. The school policy also highlights the importance of reinforcing appropriate consequences for behaviour, which may be why there is a strong focus on rules and rewards. Commenting on her moral pedagogy, Teacher 1 stated:

If I'm modelling correctly... they're going to be doing the same... Even though they're young, you have to teach them. In the beginning of the year we do a lot of how we greet people... We shake hands, they look at us in the eye... People come in, we welcome them... in show and tell, good morning, we say their name, thank you for listening, thank you for sharing. (Teacher 1, 2009, p.10)

Teacher 1's class consisted of predominantly white-middle class Australians, and here we see Western traditions, such as appropriate greetings highlighted as important social conventions to be explicitly taught and learned. Class rules, such as welcoming visitors to the room and listening are also mentioned by Teacher 1.

When presented with a photograph showing the children participating in group work in her classroom, the teacher talked more about rewards and following what others do. When asked about a photo in which the children in groups were rewarded with gold coins for taking turns effectively, Teacher 1 commented:

We had rewards for groups working together, listening carefully. Because you often find kids, your strong one want to do everything. So this was a way of trying to make everybody have turns, respecting each other, giving each other turns. So we initially had a leader, a captain for each table, and they'd have a day to be a captain. (Teacher 1, 2009, p.7)

This shows that rewards are used as an incentive to promote 'positive' behaviour, such as taking turns and so on, behaviours that can relate to values of respect.

Games and discussions about behaviours were also mentioned by Teacher 1 as strategies for teaching children moral values, thus highlighting that while modelling is important, sometimes it is necessary for children to discuss or participate in activities to learn moral values.

3.1.2 Teacher 1's personal epistemology for moral education

The personal epistemology articulated by Teacher 1 for moral pedagogy was based on her personal beliefs and perspectives, without evaluating competing claims. Teacher 1 noted that:

We're all individuals and we all can teach differently. I can teach morals and values maybe in the way I model or the way I talk to the kids, but somebody else may be really good at storytelling ... I do believe that it should be taught or modelled correctly, but I don't believe there's a right and a wrong way. What I might think may be a different opinion, but we all interpret things differently. (Teacher 1, 2009, p. 22)

Teacher 1 explains that, in her view, there is no absolute way of teaching moral values and that due to individual differences, teachers may teach differently. Thus, while certain moral values could be right or wrong, how they are taught is up to each individual, which reflects a subjectivist personal epistemology. What this approach overlooks however, is the theory and research related to moral pedagogy and children's learning that could be used to inform her teaching rather than viewing it simply as a personal opinion/approach. Teacher 1 also highlights that she believes that through observing her talk and actions, children can learn moral values.

She also talked about the need to 'follow' or observe other teachers' pedagogy as a strategy for building knowledge about the teaching of moral values.

Observing more mature teachers at that stage in my life, ...as in, oh that would be a nice way to speak to the kids or that would be a better way to model... watching my kids' coaches, has changed my perspective on how to teach PE (physical education) ... because again it's a different set of morals and values. (Teacher 1, 2009, p. 24)

She observes and models other teachers' practice, indicating that her way of knowing about moral pedagogy is practical (see Author et al., under review a). She does not discuss the extent to which she evaluates her own or other teachers' perspectives when doing this; however, she does highlight that different contexts may be imbued with different set of moral values (such as when playing sport).

3.1.3 School 1 children's personal epistemology for the learning of moral values

The children in Teacher 1's class were asked in open-ended questions if they had choices in class and in the playground, and who decides the rules. They were also asked to respond to the questions in the scenario about gender and race. In both the responses to open-ended and scenario questions, children's personal epistemology for moral learning was investigated by considering to what extent they viewed themselves as sources of knowledge, rather than passively receiving knowledge from an external authority. Table 3 provides a summary of the categories of responses and the frequency of these responses.

In response to the *open-ended interview questions* about choices and deciding on rules, 13 children (out of 19 responses) in School 1 believed they could make such choices in class, while 14 children (out of 18 responses) believed they could make choices in the playground. When children talked about who decided the rules, there was only one child (out of 18 responses) who believed children decided the rules in Teacher 1's classroom. This showed

that most of the class believed that the rules were developed by the teacher and the school with little child input.

The *scenarios* about inclusion/exclusion explored children's views about whether they thought it was acceptable to play with a new classmate of different gender or race. All children in School 1 expressed the view that children must be included regardless of gender or race. When asked what they would do if an authority figure, in this case a teacher, told them not to play with the child, the majority of children still believed that the child should be included (18/19 responses for the gender scenario and 17/18 responses for the race scenario).

3.2 School 2 context

School 2 is a community-run, independent school in a suburban setting. The school is relatively small and there is a high teacher to student ratio with students organised into three multi-age groups (early years, middle years, and older primary). The school maintains that each child works at their own pace and therefore, children are not exclusively organised by age and may at times move between the groups. Examination of the school's philosophy presented on their web-site highlights teachers as collaborators in children's learning, rather than authority figures. The concept of community is emphasised, with each member of the school viewed as playing an important role. Parents' and guardians' involvement is encouraged and they are welcomed as co-educators in the school.

Described as a democratic school, values such as responsibility, rights and valuing children's voices are emphasised. The philosophy highlights the need to treat children's concerns with seriousness and endorses the empowerment of children to take responsibility for their actions, their learning and their environment. A weekly whole-school meeting, run by the children, provides a forum where children, staff and parents can raise and work through school-related issues. The school website also highlights the school behaviour management plan, which is based on conflict resolution techniques. Drawing upon this strategy, children are encouraged to negotiate and problem-solve, working to manage their own feelings and behaviours. Values including harmony, care, cooperation, non-prejudice, creativity, positive self-image, respect, trust, compassion, kindness, safety, flexibility, sensitivity for the environment and a love of learning are also highlighted in the school's mission statement and aims.

3.2.1 Teacher 2's moral pedagogy

Teacher 2 described knowledge about moral practice and her personal epistemology as informed by both research and practice. Strategies involved promoting active learning,

independence, reflection, empathy, taking ownership, involving families and relationship-based teaching. Central to relationship-based teaching is a sense of respect for both families and children (see Author et al., under review a). This strongly relates to the school's policy, which encourages children to take responsibility for their actions, learning and environment and also places emphasis on the importance of a community environment, where all members play an equal and important role. Teacher 2 described the importance of viewing children as both powerful and competent:

There's a lot of openness about power and who has power and where power is coming from, which I think is important in the moral values situation. The power, in a certain extent, is shared as equally as we can share it. But when there are times that we say well this is unsafe or this is not what we're going to do, we're open about that... because of these reasons. I have a lot of communication with parents. Parent partnerships basically drive everything...when there are issues, we tackle it as a team. We often talk to children as a team. (Teacher 2, 2009, p. 7)

3.2.2 Teacher 2's personal epistemology for moral education

When articulating her beliefs about how she views knowing and knowledge in the field of moral education, Teacher 2 described the importance of taking on board the strategies used by others in their moral pedagogy, *evaluating* these strategies and trying them out. She noted that while some knowledge is changeable, some knowledge is also more absolute in nature. She also expressed the concept that some opinions can be more valid if backed by evidence such as research and training. Such a view reflects an evaluativistic approach where knowledge is based on informed consideration of perspectives (Kuhn & Weinstock, 2002).

There are people's opinions who have more weight... People who have educated themselves in issues; people that have read and researched and thought. People who are trained, such as teachers, who went to college; counsellors and professionals. Then they have a bit more weight because they've actually done some independent and external thinking, research and thought about things rather than just an emotional reaction to one particular case, but larger, broader kind of ideas. (Teacher 2, 2009, p.35)

The teacher also described the significance of moral pedagogy which encouraged problem solving and relationship-based teaching in authentic contexts. She espoused the relationship between moral values and active citizenship and highlighted issues such as standing up for others' rights and sharing power. Research and practice, including parents' views, were

drawn upon in constructing knowledge about moral values and pedagogy, indicating Teacher 2 held complex evaluativistic beliefs. This is in contrast to the beliefs described by Teacher 1, who did not refer to research or parents' views when constructing her understandings of moral pedagogy.

3.2.3 School 2 children's personal epistemologies for the learning of moral values

In response to the open-ended interview questions about choices and deciding on rules, 10 children (out of 12 responses) in School 2 believed they could make choices in class while all children who responded said they could make choices in the playground (12/12 responses). When children talked about who decides the rules, eight children (out of 12 responses) indicated they could decide the rules in class. See Table 3 for a summary of these data.

Like School 1, all children at School 2 believed that children should be included regardless of gender or race. When asked what they would do if a teacher instructed them not to play with the child, many children at School 2 (10/13 responses for the gender scenario and 9/13 responses for the race scenario) still believed that the child should be included in their play.

4. Discussion of the two case studies

We now examine teachers' personal epistemologies and moral pedagogy, children's personal epistemologies for learning moral values, and teachers' and children's personal epistemologies in school contexts across the two case studies to address our research question.

4.1 Relationship between teachers' personal epistemologies and moral pedagogy across cases

Examining the relationship between personal epistemologies and moral pedagogies for the two schools highlights the relationships between teachers' personal epistemologies and how they support children's personal epistemologies for moral learning.

Teacher 2 expressed a more sophisticated personal epistemology which was described as evaluativism. This teacher viewed children as competent and responsible and believed that children need to be given the democratic power to express their ideas and engage in problem solving. Teachers with evaluativistic beliefs are likely to teach in ways that support power sharing and meaningful understanding because from this epistemic stance there is no ultimate authority on knowledge (Author et al., 2011b). This means that knowledge about moral values is personally constructed through a process of weighing evidence from different points

of view including those of children. Such evidenced-based approaches to learning and teaching moral values are necessary in the promotion of active citizenship because they enable children to have a voice and take responsibility.

Teachers with absolutist beliefs are less likely to conceive of moral pedagogy that involves sharing power because knowledge related to moral values is transmitted rather than constructed and children's perspectives are less valued (Author et al., under review a). This approach is also less likely to promote active citizenship in the early years because children are not required to participate in decision making that affects themselves or others (Moss, 2006). Teacher 1 described a subjectivist personal epistemology and a moral pedagogy of transmitting or modelling the 'right' social behaviour and rules to the children. Within a classroom context this approach may not give children many opportunities to make meaningful choices about their actions during the school day.

4.2 Children's personal epistemologies

In response to the *open-ended interview questions about choices*, 10 children (out of 12 responses) in School 2 believed they could make choices in class while a total of 13 children (out of 19 responses) at School 1 believed they had these choices. We have described these as evidence of subjectivist responses because they reflect a view of knowledge as personally constructed rather than an absolutist view that knowledge is transmitted from teacher to child. When the interview data were examined in more detail for the *type of choices* the children believed they had within each of the classrooms, some interesting differences between the schools emerged.

Of the children in School 1 who believed they had a choice in class (13/19 responses), almost half ($n=6$) stated that they could choose to play with Lego construction materials. A further six children in School 1 believed they could choose to draw, play games or participate in reading activities. The remaining child stated that he had choices in class which involved, "Doing works and doing nice manners, and doing what the teacher says to me" (child 5). Nine children in School 1 discussed when they were able to make choices in class, and of these the majority indicated that they were only given choices occasionally, for example, before they went home, at break time or when the teacher said so.

The responses of the children in School 2 provided different examples of the choices they believed they were making in class. Here, 10 children (out of 12 responses) believed that they could make choices in class. An analysis of the interview data showed that these choices were

related to learning and the curriculum, rather than simply engaging in activities as fill-in activities as was evident in School 1. For example, one child in School 2 discussed the democratic notions of class discussions and voting in the classroom in relation to choices:

Like we have our own meeting and sometimes we choose what we are going to do - work on. And we like write it down and we get to pick which one.

Interviewer: So people have different ideas and then you write them down and you have to choose one?

Yeah and they get like votes. (Child 6, 2009, p. 2)

Children in School 2 described how the choices they could make in class were often related to the decisions about the structure of the school day, rather than simply fill-in activities as was evident in School 1.

When children talked about *who decides the rules*, eight children at School 2 expressed that they could decide the rules in class, while in School 1, there was only one child who believed he decided the rules (subjectivism). Taken together these data about children's participation in decisions about rules and the nature of choices described above suggests that the children in School 2 had more opportunities to construct their own moral knowledge, reflecting a subjectivist personal epistemology.

The *scenarios about inclusion/exclusion* explored children's views about whether they thought it was acceptable to play with a new classmate of different gender or race. All children in both schools indicated that children should be included regardless of gender or race. We have labelled these responses as absolutist because children indicated that that there was a right answer, one correct response and not something that might be contested. This supports previous research that shows children are more likely to be absolutist (only one right answer) in the domain of value judgments with children far less tolerant of moral diversity than diversity in other domains (Kuhn et al., 2000; Mason et al., 2006). It is likely that children have learnt that some values are obligatory and absolute (i.e. inclusion regardless of gender and race) but this does not necessarily mean that the children are absolutist in all domains.

When children were asked what they would do if an authority figure, in this case a teacher, told them not to play with the child, the majority of children still believed that the child should be included (School 1, 18/19 for gender and 17/18 for race; School 2, 10/13 for gender and 9/13 for race). These responses are taken to reflect a type of subjectivism because they reflect the view that children are able to construct their own response, and ignore an external

authority. Laupa and Turiel (1986) also examined young children's views about the source of knowledge related to authorities. They interviewed children about what they thought about a conflict in the playground and then they were asked about following the directions of both peers and adults. As was the case in our study, nearly all the children believed that the conflicts were “wrong”. They accepted the directions of the authority to stop fighting, but rejected the directions to continue fighting. Previous research (see e.g., Smetana, 1995) has indicated that children’s moral evaluations do not appear to be influenced by authority figures; that is moral transgressions (as opposed to social-conventional evaluations) are viewed as wrong even when an authority figures (such as a teacher) indicates that it is all right. The children in our study also rejected the teacher’s command to exclude the child, showing that children’s judgments can be complex and context specific and that even young children are able to make their own judgement about right and wrong.

4.3 Teachers’ and children’s personal epistemologies in school contexts

Few studies have investigated the role of contexts in personal epistemology research (Hofer, 2006). This study has helped us to understand how the school philosophy might be related to the personal epistemologies of teachers and children. The two schools varied quite distinctly in the policies articulated. School 1, as an independent Christian school, valued leadership, responsibility, respect, self-control, and care with a view that essentially boys learn differently to girls. There was also a focus on *acquiring* strong fundamental values. This process of acquisition is contrasted by School 2’s focus on teachers as *collaborators* in children’s learning, rather than as authority figures. Here the concept of community is emphasised, with each member of the school viewed as constructing knowledge about moral values. Another key difference between schools relates to valuing children’s voices. This was not mentioned in the policy documents for School 1, while School 2 described the need to respect children and empower them to take responsibility.

This contextual information is important for understanding personal epistemologies for moral pedagogy. It is of interest that the teachers’ personal epistemologies seem to mirror, to a certain extent, the school epistemology. This could be due to teachers being drawn to working in particular school settings, or it could be because they have been enculturated in the local knowledge of the school, as part of the school culture. Teacher 2, who espouses complex evaluativist beliefs, teaches in a school context which advocates a similar epistemology of co-construction. Even though there is a difference in ages for some children between the two schools, we see that many children in her class believed they could decide

the rules in class and had real choices in the curriculum. This indicates that they had more opportunities to construct their own moral knowledge, reflecting a subjectivist personal epistemology.

Teacher 1 who is described as holding less sophisticated beliefs about knowing and knowledge, teaches in a school context which seems to reflect a similar epistemology. That is, children should learn socially acceptable standards, but there is little reference to constructivist ways of knowing in either the policy or the teachers' epistemology. It is not surprising then that only one child believed he decided the rules in class, and while many thought they had choices in class on closer inspection these choices were related to selection of "fill-in" activities rather than participation in constructing the curriculum.

5. Implications

Very little research has focused on the relationships between personal epistemology, teaching, learning and school contexts (Feucht, 2011). Hofer (2010) has also called for research that considers personal epistemologies in broader contexts, rather than simply taking a developmental view. To our knowledge, our study is the first to consider children's personal epistemologies for moral learning in the context of a classroom environment. We noticed in the two case studies that there seemed to be a relationship between teachers' personal epistemologies, children's personal epistemologies for moral learning and their school contexts. That is School 2 children with more sophisticated personal epistemologies regarding the source of moral knowledge had a teacher with evaluativistic beliefs and a school that valued children's democratic participation in school life. In School 1, the children held less sophisticated personal epistemologies, with a teacher who described a subjectivist epistemology and a classroom and school that valued modelling the 'right' social behaviour and rules to the children.

While these findings are illuminating at the local case study level, there are broader, international implications that can be discerned. It is evident that the case study findings showed a relationship between personal epistemologies, teaching and moral learning which is also supported by research in other domains of learning (Johnston et al., 2001; Kang & Wallace, 2005). Both the case studies presented in this paper and the broader research field point to an important consideration in promoting effective moral education for citizenship. The extent to which children are encouraged to have their own opinions and construct their own knowledge about moral values is related to sophisticated personal epistemologies

evident across teachers, children and school contexts. Developing children's opinions and moral responsibility speaks to UNCRC's focus on children as competent and agentic citizens (Woodhead, 2008). While the current study may not be generalisable to other populations due to the small sample size, Yin (2009, p. 15) argues that case studies are "generalisable to theoretical propositions" when the intention of the research is to "expand and generalise theories (analytic generalisation) and not to enumerate frequencies (statistical generalisation)". Thus the findings of this study have important *theoretical* implications for educational practice internationally. Specifically, the clear links evident in our findings between the epistemic climate of the schools, the epistemic beliefs of the teachers and the extent to which children felt empowered to make choices and decisions in schools demonstrate the importance of a focus on personal epistemology for promoting agentic children in learning about morals. It is clear that educational systems that support critical thinking and democratic practice attract teachers who engage in constructivist practices within the classroom and support children's own critical thinking. Conversely, when school policies are silent on issues such as supporting active citizenship, teachers may be less inclined to engage in constructivist pedagogies and less likely to encourage children to have a voice in decision making.

A further limitation of this study may be the varied ages of children in the two classes, with school 2 having a greater number of older children in the class. There can be developmental differences in children's moral *reasoning* between ages 5-6 (school 1) and 8-11 (school 2), however we were not measuring reasoning skills but *beliefs* about knowledge and knowing. Recent literature suggests that children up to age 10 or 11 years are likely to hold absolutist personal epistemologies in the domain of moral values. For example, Mason et al., (2006) found that the 5th grade children described more absolutist beliefs in the domain of moral values but were able to think in more complex ways (evaluativist) when it came to the domain of aesthetics. This suggests that the age variation evident across the two schools in our study is acceptable for examining personal epistemologies for moral learning (Kuhn et al., 2000).

While this study has described case studies from an Australian context, it seems likely that a focus on the epistemologies of teachers, children and the school provide a lens for understanding the epistemic climates (Feucht, 2010) of schools around the world, specifically the epistemic climate for moral education. Feucht developed a model of epistemic climate called the Educational Model for Personal Epistemology (EMPE). The model represents how

the epistemic beliefs of teachers, instruction, and knowledge representations relate in a reciprocal way to children's epistemic beliefs in a domain general way.

Our study has also described the epistemic climates of two schools in a similar way to the EMPE Model; however, we have chosen to focus on moral learning specifically. The epistemic knowledge representations in our study are reflective of the broader school context and policy documents about moral education. Feucht (2011) argues that it is important to help teachers to develop an understanding of how their personal epistemologies and those of the school contexts might have an influence on the epistemic climate in their classroom. We add our support to this contention by arguing that there needs to be a whole of school approach to understanding personal epistemologies and how they are enacted in practice. There also needs to be closer attention paid to the role of families as part of this broader school context. This is an area of research which can provide us with further understanding about how the school as a system of teachers, children, families and other school staff can create epistemic climates which are conducive, or not, to children's learning outcomes.

It is clear that in order to understand teaching and learning for moral values across any context, it is important to both understand the individual factors related to personal epistemologies and the broader school values and epistemologies. This study has contributed to a growing research literature that considers personal epistemology not as a psychological construct but as a complex social phenomenon that needs to be addressed from a number of perspectives – teachers, children and the school.

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