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ISSUES ON CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT FOR MORAL EDUCATION

Fainos Mangena (University of Zimbabwe)

Abstract

Curriculum design and implementation has been a preserve of educational policy makers and curriculum designers from time immemorial. More often, emphasis has been on *drawing up a curriculum that prepares children for the world of work. This has been the situation in independent Zimbabwe. Very little attention has been given to traditional moral values when setting up curriculum objectives, yet there has been moral decadence in contemporary society due to the failure by social institutions such as schools and universities to teach moral values. Curriculum designers have not put much weight on the need to introduce the moral dimension in the school curriculum. This article makes an attempt to suggest a moral education curriculum that takes these cardinal virtues into consideration.*

Introduction

The teaching of morals in schools today, as was the case in the past, requires a paradigm shift from the traditional subject and teacher-based curriculum to one that encourages the cultivation of a whole person, a virtuous person. Our educational system (the Zimbabwean educational system) will not have an opportunity for true success until moral issues are incorporated into the curriculum. This includes the teaching of ethics as a necessary part of the curriculum from, say, kindergarten through to high school. It is incumbent upon Zimbabwean educators to consider the nature and scope of the curriculum, which is geared towards the teaching of moral values in schools and this is the moral education curriculum. Recognition of the failure by the public school system to properly educate citizens is readily acknowledged by most education leaders, but the remedies leading to effective improvement of the system are woefully lacking. This is the sole reason why the Researcher has decided to consider issues of the development of a moral education curriculum. This paper, therefore, discusses the nature and scope of a moral education curriculum, which may be useful in contemporary African states. The views of R.S. Peters, Terrence McLaughlin, R.F. Dearden and Lawrence Kohlberg shall be very handy in this regard. This discussion shall, however, be preceded by a definition of the concept of "moral education curriculum".

The moral education curriculum: Definition

A general understanding of the term 'curriculum' and its meaning must be captured if one is to successfully define a 'moral education curriculum'. According to B.S.M. Gatawa (1990: 18) there is lack of consensus on the precise meaning of the term 'curriculum' even among people directly involved in education. It is even worse among philosophers of education.

In an attempt to discern the meaning of this concept, the Researcher makes a review of the definitions based on the traditional perspectives and then looks at the same concept, but from a moral education viewpoint. Pai Obanya (1985: 161) defines 'curriculum' in terms of the content (syllabus) of individual subjects or the combination of subjects (or separate disciplines) studied in a school system. Obanya calls this the narrow view of 'curriculum'. The broad view, for Obanya, sees 'curriculum' as including everything that the learner is exposed to under the guidance of a school.

Obanya sees both views of the term 'curriculum' as right, the only difference being that while the 'narrow' definition sees curriculum as a package, the broad definition sees it as a process (Ibid: 161). The argument presented here is that 'curriculum' must go beyond mere content in its quest to generate intellectual knowledge; it must

also include the teaching of moral values and the cultivation of virtue. A 'moral education curriculum' can be considered to be a programme of social values, norms and attitudes taught in life by social institutions such as schools. This definition is not without its own shortcomings, but this is only a working or operational definition, useful for the writing of this paper. So the nature and scope of a moral education curriculum, if this definition is anything to go by, is such that it contains those values and norms required by members of any given society if total human development is to be realized.

The nature and scope of a moral education curriculum

R.S. Peters (1959: 142) postulates that the nature and scope of a moral education curriculum cannot be discussed in isolation, that is, without making reference to the content (subject-matter) and form of moral consciousness. Peters argues that when discussing moral education, it is vital to get clear, first of all, about the structure of what has to be learnt. One should not begin to discuss mathematical education sensibly without some view about the structure of mathematical thought. The same holds for morals. In other words, this paper looks at the structure of what is to be learnt in moral education, that is, the moral education curriculum.

Peters begins by examining the structure of what has to be learnt in moral education before considering how it may be learnt. This work, however, concentrates on the 'what' aspect than the 'how' aspect. Instead of looking at what is valuable in life, Peters confines himself to the sphere of interpersonal rules and practices with which morality is mainly concerned (Ibid: 142).

Peters acknowledges, though, that morality conjures up with a fixed code forbidding sex, stealing, and selfishness. The very word 'code' for Peters suggests a content of rules in a traditional form. But he is very much against the idea of seeing morals just as an established code. He regards this as an unsatisfactory answer as it is obvious for him that codes change as a result of moral criticism. Peters (1959: 143) makes the following remarks,

When we say, for instance, that gambling is wrong, we are not just expressing a private preference. We are suggesting that there are important considerations which count against gambling which any one could recognize – for instance, that it leads to suffering. And this is not to appeal to an established code.

What can be hurriedly discerned from the above quote is that the nature and scope of a moral education curriculum must be motivated by other important considerations than established codes or the need for abiding by certain rules and regulations. Above all Peters argues that morals are discovered by reason.

When looking at curriculum development for moral education, Terrence McLaughlin (1999:121) looks at moral dilemmas in society as determining what has to be learnt in schools. By Moral dilemmas, he refers to contemporary moral problems such as abortion, euthanasia, suicide and the death penalty controversy. For McLaughlin (1999), any moral education which does not address these pertinent issues will be incomplete, and so, a moral education curriculum is supposed to capture these dilemmas (bid.).

McLaughlin (1999) also talks about the need to incorporate African value systems to the moral education curriculum. Values based on *ubuntu* or *unhu*, as in the case of Zimbabwe, are very important in the teaching of moral education and the cultivation of cardinal virtues such as tolerance, endurance, forgiveness, honesty, integrity and empathy. Such is the major pre-occupation of moral education (Ibid.).

McLaughlin (1999) remarked that certain Euro-centric values such as autonomy, freedom and individuality were to be replaced by Afro-centric values of togetherness, communalism and collectiveness. The nature and scope of a moral education curriculum in the African context is supposed to uphold the above values so as to restore African identity (Ibid.). In his bid to determine the nature and scope of a moral education curriculum, Lawrence Kohlberg makes a catalogue of six procedures, which, for him, are very crucial. These are as follows:

Identifying moral issues in the curriculum

Richard, H. Hersh (1979) quotes Kohlberg (1981:97) as saying that moral issues can be found by examining curriculum materials (for example, in literature, history and art) for relationships among persons, or between persons and institutions. These issues may center on events in the home, classroom, school or society. One must assess the issues in relation to the level of reasoning and social role-taking perspective required for students.

Relating the moral issues to students' lives

Students should be able to respond to such questions as: Have any of you faced this type of conflict? What would (could, did, should) you do? What other examples of this conflict can you tell us from

your own experience? Have you encountered a similar dilemma in other areas – movies, other classes, and your own life? (Ibid.).

Exposing students to more adequate moral reasoning structures

The structures of reasoning provided in the curriculum should be blended with moral reasoning structures; this will lead to the development of a new reasoning structure. Whether this culture is created through debating, role-plays, drama or filmmaking, it should stretch the mind (Ibid.).

Using material that promotes role-taking

Role taking means taking one's perspective. Perspective taking helps to clarify conflicting issues and makes moral questions more real. Moral development requires that a person realizes that people are different with respect to attitudes, thoughts, abilities, feelings and viewpoints. By role taking, the students can move from an egocentric view of the world to the point where they see themselves from an external perspective. Role taking is critical to moral development because it enables individuals to experience moral viewpoints that conflict with their own. Cognitive conflict promotes the development of moral reasoning (Ibid: 207).

Encouraging students to be curriculum developers

Opportunities for students to fetch out any moral issues they find in content are essential. Once students become aware of moral issues, they will be quick to point them out. Also students are perspective evaluators of what works and what fails, and will be willing to share their perceptions with the teacher in initiating curriculum change (Ibid.).

Developing experience in which students can act on their reasoning

The opportunity to act provides a test of reasoning. Other activities in school life – clubs, athletics, and student government provide opportunities to transfer moral reasoning to moral action. It is crucial to encourage this behaviour and provide time to discuss such events. Having students act on their reasoning is an important ingredient in helping them move from moral reasoning to moral behaviour (Ibid.).

The above six procedures put by Kohlberg (1981) are very important in determining the nature and scope of a moral education curriculum suitable for contemporary Africa. It should be noted that when children grow up, they are not an Island unto themselves; the environment in which they live influences them. Kohlberg

might have studied society and found out that it had a strong bearing on the moral conduct of the child. This is most probably why in his first procedure towards establishing a moral education curriculum, he talks about moral issues as centred on events in the home, classroom, school or the wider society. This is also the thesis advanced in this work, that through experience and through the guidance of the family and the school, children learn and assimilate moral rules and also learn to reason morally.

In the second procedure, Kohlberg (1981) talks of relating moral issues to students' lives. Here, he looks at the role of experience in determining human behaviour. Unfortunately, he does not tell us why it is fundamental to relate moral issues to student's lives. It is, therefore, the contention of this thesis to argue that children should transform moral reasoning into moral action mediated by experience. In pursuing this project, Kohlberg postulates that one should use material that promotes role-taking, that material which helps clarify conflicting issues and makes moral questions more realistic. This is the way to go, if a moral education curriculum is to be developed.

An important ingredient in selecting relevant moral issues is the ability, by teachers, to take the perspective of students. This ability

by the teacher to allow social intercourse in the class has been the major thrust of progressive education pioneered by people like John Dewey. Dewey, in particular, is known for advocating for a child-based curriculum, which also takes into cognissance children's experiences both at home and at school. This study is, however, limited to moral education and not progressive education. But the aspect of moral development also calls for independent thinking on the part of the learner, considering his or her needs, interests and pre-dispositions..

The more teachers can understand the moral viewpoint of their students, argues Kohlberg, the easier the task of curriculum development for moral education. In drawing up a moral education curriculum, teachers have to ask such questions as:

How would my students feel if they were faced with this dilemma?

Are these enough facts to make the issue comprehensible and believable? Is there too much information which will cause confusion? What questions might I ask to help my students see the point of view -? In what ways is this material connected to previous and future subject matter? Can my students relate these events to their own lives? If I were in their shoes, how might I respond? (Ibid: 209).

Over and above this, the teacher must lead by example, he or she must be a paragon of morality, given that being a character trait, moral conduct requires exemplary behaviour from the teacher than mere classroom lessons. The teacher cannot expect the students to develop morally when he or she cannot transform moral reasoning into moral action. Socrates says that good conduct is picked from experience with good people just as Peters (1959) maintains that one thinks critically by keeping a critical company. Peters also postulates that kids take shades of those they admire (Ibid).

The moral education curriculum project and its benefits

Why a moral education curriculum? This is a question which has often been asked within the circles of education and curriculum design. Modern society has become increasingly more lawless, violent, undisciplined and permissive, and the trend is more apparent in the younger generation. There is, therefore, need to revive moral education in schools, and this can only be possible with a relevant curriculum among other things. The traditional curriculum cannot suffice.

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Dewey (1954: 187) makes the point that subject-based curriculum planners can justify their content selection only in terms of its potential for generating knowledge. That is, the 'end-in-view' of curriculum planning and designing is to turn content into meanings or knowledge for learners. Curriculum content only selected from the point of view of its meaning to the adult curriculum planner may be very 'well-learned' by the child, and the learning may be certified as effective on the basis of good examination results. Dewey is probably making the point that such a curriculum cannot provide a perfect platform for "education", given that there is a distinction between being "learned" and being "educated", being "morally learned or trained" and being "morally educated".

Dewey maintains that this content, though it represents knowledge to the traditional curriculum planner, is mere 'information' or other men's knowledge, second knowledge to the learner. The child's learning is verbal, learning for social purposes, for purposes of recitations and promotions (Ibid.).

A moral education curriculum, according to T.W Moore (1982: 91), acknowledges that the immature experiences of the child is remote from the far more comprehensive experience of the adult and, therefore, the need to have content which suits the African child in

this regard. For instance, Kohlberg's account of the levels of moral reasoning shows that at the early stages of moral development, children judge an action to be right or wrong in terms of consequent punishment or reward, while adults judge an action by providing a rationale (Kohlberg, 1981:98). This is why Peters has maintained that moral codes are derived from reasoning.

In stage two, which Kohlberg calls 'Good-boy morality', where rules are seen as part of the order of the world linked by praise and shame, children are still far from being moral. Stage three will see children as autonomous, being able to question the validity of rules and principles. This is the stage of 'moral autonomy'. Moral education allows for these stages to exist, and so a moral education curriculum will cater for all these stages in essence.

The corresponding virtues in the learner in stages one and two, according to R.F. Dearden (1968: 170), are unquestioning obedience, conscientious compliance and difference. To have the same content as stipulated by the traditional curriculum would, therefore, be to miss the point altogether. Kohlberg would suggest that moral issues be identified and assessed in relation to the level of reasoning of the child, which, of course, would be the business of a moral education curriculum. Dearden (1968) shares the same

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view by noting that the teaching of morals requires adequate reasoning structure. But this does not mean that the idea of identifying and assessing moral issues in relation to the level of reasoning of the child cannot be challenged. A question can be raised as to how this can be possible, but Kohlberg and Dearden seem not to provide answers.

A moral education curriculum may be a better option, given that it encourages children to develop their own power of moral reasoning through sharing their perceptions and experiences with the teacher in initiating curriculum change.

Conclusion

The paper starts by giving an appraisal of the two types of curricula as suggested by Pai Obanya (1985: 161). This is done in a bid to come up with a definition of curriculum that captures and incorporates the teaching of morals for the cultivation of a whole person, a person with the physical, rational and the moral components. The moral component will instill in the person the values of honesty, prudence, integrity and trustworthiness *inter alia*. The paper, therefore, looks at the criteria for coming up with such a curriculum and its benefits to contemporary Zimbabwe and Africa, in general.

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