Learning to care: a focus for values in health and environmental education

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Abstract

Health and environmental education seek to address the living conditions and lifestyle choices that lead to health and environmental problems by motivating and teaching students how to participate in the reconstruction of themselves and society in accordance with ecological values and the democratic values of social and economic justice. While an ethic of care unites health and environmental education in this endeavour, liberal and conservative educational practices in the area of values education are dominated by discourses of values relativity and neutrality. This paper seeks to provide a case for teachers adopting a committed stance in teaching young people an ethic of care so that they may participate in the personal and social changes needed to advance the transition towards a healthy and sustainable world. In particular, it draws upon insights from the literature of environmental values education, which is characterized by intense debates between those of liberal and committed persuasions, to explore the ethical and pedagogical issues involved in teaching for an ethic of care in both health and environmental education.

Education, indoctrination and values

Teaching as indoctrination—or indoctrination through our teaching—is a concern for teachers and parents. Teachers-in-training are generally taught how wrong it is and are shown various ways of ensuring they adopt a balanced approach in their work. In place of indoctrination, balanced perspectives and neutrality are claimed as virtues. However, claims to balance and neutrality often deny the reality of much educational decision making by curriculum planners and teachers.

Education, like all social institutions and processes, is a human creation; its nature and purpose determined by human values, history and changing patterns of power relationships. Another reason why education cannot be neutral is that there is insufficient time to teach everything that is possible to be taught. Thus, all educational objectives, emphases in curriculum content and classroom processes must necessarily be a selection of the culture from which curriculum planners and teachers make their selections of objectives, content, resources and teaching methods—and there is no rational way of making such selections without holding certain values to establish priorities. In this way, the processes of education continually expose students to filtered experiences. This inherent values bias in education means that it has the potential to serve the needs and interests of certain groups and not others and, given the unequal power relations in most societies, educational systems and classrooms tend to reflect and transmit the values of the more powerful political, economic and educational decision makers in a society, thus perpetuating their dominant cultural beliefs.

However, the pervasive liberal ideology of balance and values relativity in traditional educational discourses often masks this reality and makes educational processes appear fairer than they actually are. In this way, many traditional and progressive approaches to education can—albeit unintentionally—serve the hegemonic purposes of
dominant cultural groups by blinding students, as young people and later as adults, to dominant ideologies. This view of the relationship between education and society provides the starting point for the arguments advanced in this paper. Thus, the paper is based upon the assumption that, whatever ideology of education one follows, education is 'not a random or neutral process but purposeful and value oriented' (Stanley, 1985). As Grant and Zeichner (1984, p. 15) explain:

There is no such thing as a neutral educational activity. Any action that one takes in the classroom is necessarily linked to the external economic, political and social order in either a primarily integrative or a creative fashion. Either a teaching activity serves to integrate children into the current social order or it provides children with the knowledge, attitudes and skills to deal critically and creatively with that reality in order to improve it. In any case, all teaching is embedded in an ideological background, and one cannot fully understand the significance or consequences of an activity unless one also considers that activity in light of the more general issues of social continuity and change.

This assumption means that the key issue for educators concerned with questions of values and ethics in education should not be to check whether a particular approach to teaching is indoctrination but to ask questions related to the ways, and in accordance with what values and ends, should schools and teachers 'indoctrinate'.

The values foundations of health and environmental education demand that teachers should play a role to help address the living conditions and lifestyle choices that lead to health and environmental problems. In a socially critical approach to both health and environmental education, this is done by motivating and teaching students how to participate in the reconstruction of themselves and their society in accordance with ecological values and the democratic values of social and economic justice (Colquhoun and Robottom, 1990). Critical health and environmental educators need make no apologies for this committed values stance, and can point to the inconsistencies in any educational approach that might claim neutrality. As Huckle (1983) has argued, committed teachers will always meet opposition from those who claim to be neutral but whose status and identity are actually derived from their support of the status quo. Indeed, he also argues that (Huckle, 1983, p. 152):

A more just and caring society can only be achieved by methods which reflect justice and tolerance and foster personal autonomy. Committed and responsible...teachers are preferable to those who claim neutrality for a curriculum which uncritically supports the existing social order.

Thus, it is possible, with Nel Noddings (1984, p. 135), to point to the dilemma of educational approaches that fail to consciously and deliberately teach young people to care for each other, other creatures and for the natural world:

Schools give some attention to environmental problems, but they are not giving enough to the development of caring human beings.... Students in today's schools do learn about ecosystems and food chains, and about extinction and habitat preservation. But the problems they tackle are often focused on faraway places.... [T]hey do not learn to work through sophisticated political processes to make the measurable improvements—sometimes small ones. If they knew how to do this, they might be able to plan for a continuous series of small changes that would make a significant difference.

This paper seeks to provide a case for teachers adopting a committed stance in teaching young people an ethic of care so that they may participate in the personal and social changes needed to advance the transition towards a healthy and sustainable world. In particular, it draws upon insights from the literature of environmental values education, which is characterized by intense debates between those of liberal and committed persuasions, to explore the ethical issues involved in teaching for an ethic of care in both health and environmental education.
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An ethic of care

The importance of caring as an educational objective and suggestions for developing the curriculum around 'centres of care' are outlined in two books by Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (1984) and *The Challenge to Care in Schools* (1992). In them she identifies the paradox that sees us living in a world in which to care and be cared for are the ultimate human experience—but many people, such as patients in the medical system, clients in the welfare system, adolescents in schools, and the young and the elderly in some families, feel un-cared for. Noddings acknowledges the debates that distinguish between caring as a personal attribute (a virtue) and caring as a lived process of empathy and active solidarity. In seeking a reconciliation of these perspectives, she outlines the nature of the caring process to involve: (1) conceptual and emotive understanding, (2) positive regard and respect for the feeling and intrinsic value of other persons, animals, plants and non-living things, recognition of her/his/its/rights, and (3) the motivation, willingness and skills to act to protect and enhance these feelings, values and rights.

To help young people develop and practice an ethic of care, Noddings argues for a curriculum organized around 'centres of care' in which attention is given to learning how to care for ourselves, for intimate others, for associates and acquaintances, for distant others, for non-human animals, plants and the geophysical world, for the human-made world of objects and artefacts, and for ideas. She laments that too much contemporary education values caring for ideas above all the other 'centres of care', and argues that educational goals and processes have become distorted as a result. Indeed, she sees contemporary curriculum models and classroom practices that reify knowledge acquisition, cognitive performance and measurable outcomes at the expense of caring for ourselves, others, and the rest of living and non-living nature among the many reasons which contribute to the paradox of un-caring in the modern world. Health and environmental educators who acknowledge the three-fold goal of environmental health education outlined by Spork (1993)—healthy people living in healthy communities in a healthy environment—are well-paced to reorient the curriculum around Noddings' 'centres of care' to help redress this problem.

The global imperatives underlying an ethic of care were identified 20 years ago in the preamble to one of the seminal documents of contemporary environmental education. The 1975 Belgrade Charter advocated that education be directed at solving the social and environmental problems that flow from poverty, hunger and exploitation (UNESCO-UNEP, 1976, pp. 1–2):

Inequality between the poor and the rich among nations and within nations is growing and there is evidence of increasing deterioration of the physical environment in some forms on a worldwide scale...

What is being called for is the eradication of the basic causes of poverty, hunger, illiteracy, pollution, exploitation and domination. The previous pattern of dealing with these crucial problems on a fragmentary basis is no longer workable...

It is absolutely vital that the world's citizens insist upon measures that will support the kind of economic growth which will not have harmful repercussions on people; that will not in any way diminish the environment and their living conditions...

We need nothing more than a new global ethic—an ethic which espouses attitudes and behaviour for individuals and societies which are consonant with humanity's within the biosphere.

Dr Brundtland, the Chairperson of the World Commission on Environment and Development, outlined the nature of the transition required to create such an ecologically sustainable and socially just society, and the role envisaged for education, when she wrote (Brundtland, 1991, pp. 4–5):
The transition to sustainable development touches on core issues of our societies. It concerns basic values and moral codes for human behaviour, attitudes and consideration for fellow human beings and for nature itself. In order to reverse the present negative trends, there is an urgent need for commitment and action at all levels of society. Today, there is an increased awareness that solidarity and responsibility must be extended to encompass the interests of future generations...

Teachers play a very important role in the transition between generations, in the knowledge from one generation to the next. Consciousness-raising is vital for change. Teachers can convey to children a sense of respect and responsibility for nature and for the global environment...

But respect for the environment alone will not be enough to save our common future. A sense of solidarity with the world’s underprivileged will be equally important. There is no way we can win the battle to save the global environment unless we deal squarely with the issue of world poverty. We must teach the next generation that necessity of caring for the poor and the dispossessed.

In defence of commitment

These exhortations from international institutions and leaders aside, at least five clear reasons for taking a committed approach to teaching young people to care about the natural and human environment, for all living and non-living things, can be outlined. These reasons are based upon the ideas proposed in Stanley’s 1985 paper ‘Social reconstructionism for today’s social education’ which related to the role of teachers in working with young people to explore controversial social issues.

The first argument holds that the values inherent in an ethic of care are essential for living in a democratic society. These include: a positive self-image; acceptance of, and respect for, others; compassion and kindness; open-mindedness; respect for human rights; concern for justice; commitment to sustainable development, and a willingness to be involved. These core democratic values serve the interests of all, not just the privileged, and are the sorts of values into which Stanley argues young citizens should be socialized. He notes that ‘one would not expect the schools to stand in direct opposition to our main social values and institutions. Furthermore, in a society in which the culture and values (are)...progressive and democratic, cultural reproduction would be a healthy emphasis’. Stanley concludes that, it is not possible ‘to maintain any society without a certain amount of cultural transmission and reproduction’. However, we need to be mindful that the sorts of democratic values that Stanley advocates are not of equal worth in the eyes of all people or equally applicable in all contexts. Bak (1996) argues that this does not mean that the only conclusion is to see knowledge as relative and adopt a relativist position on values. Referring to values as ‘moral goods’, she argues that the need to educate for democratic change requires an approach to education that develops both cognitive processes and moral principles by which young people can learn how to make judgements between competing moral goods and to judge the value of democratically taken decisions.

This relates to Stanley’s next argument that no meaningful learning is purely cognitive because all knowledge has its moral dimensions. Students need to learn to care about certain values and issues and to empathize with others if they are to develop an interest in inquiring into their own health and environmental concerns, and those of others. Thus, Bak (1996) advances a case for a ‘normative epistemology’ to underlie environmental education. For Bak, normative epistemology can transcend the theoretical cul-de-sac created by viewing knowledge as either a totalizing discourse with the potential to be oppressive or as socially constructed and therefore relative. She explains that normative epistemology judges the worth of propositions on two grounds—its justification within the rules that govern reasoned debate (such as consistency, coherence, use of...
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supporting evidence and logical deduction, etc.) and its accord with a defensible set of moral principles. She argues that normative epistemology thus "links rationality to our moral commitments...and our notion of human flourishing...to our cognitive ideals" (1996, p. 4). Using normative epistemology as a basis for teaching involves exposing students to particular content and learning experiences which are designed to have an affective impact, and then consciously using both cognitive argument as well as selected values and principles (such as respect for others, tolerance, and a commitment to sustainable development, justice, human rights, peace and democracy) as criteria for ethical decision making.

Stanley’s third argument relates to the nature of the background knowledge and cognitive skills of primary and early secondary school students. Sometimes these may not be sufficiently developed for young people to be able to apply all the complex thinking and problem-solving strategies necessary to analyse many controversial health and environmental issues. Some commentators, such as Warnock (1996), believe that decisions about many environmental issues, such as rainforest conservation and ozone depletion, require such a deep understanding of complex scientific concepts and their legal, economic and political contexts that ‘it is impossible for very young children genuinely to reach an informed view on them’ (p. 50). However, others argue that such issues cannot be ignored because the media, family and other social influences have already made them a part of young people’s lives, and that that much effective work can be done in teaching controversial issues with younger students by responding to the cognitive and emotional starting points of young people—just as in the teaching of all topics (see, e.g. Murdoch, 1992, 1994). Whatever view one takes, Stanley’s argument leads us to question whether it is possible to wait until children are considered old enough to be able to reason abstractly before beginning to teach them why they should care for each other and the earth, and ways of living that are important manifestations of this.

Fourth, Stanley argues that the affective dimensions and impacts of the learning programmes are opened to public examination when the teacher publicly states a preferred values position. A host of pedagogical guidance is available on ways of doing this without jeopardizing the power of students to value otherwise (Stradling et al., 1984; Fien, 1988; Pennock and Bardwell, 1994; Gilbert and Hoepper, 1996). Conversely, attempts at values neutrality and balance in teaching values-laden issues can convey a hidden message which teaches students that it is preferable not to state publicly that one cares deeply about particular issues or that one’s beliefs should be kept private (after all, this is what their teachers do!). Within discourses of neutrality, students also learn through the resultant values relativity that all values are of equal worth: and if all values are of equal worth, it is possible that all may be considered equally worthless.

Stanley’s fifth argument in favour of an openly committed approach to values in teaching is that the interests of the most influential groups in society, and the structures that sustain them and perpetuate unhealthy and environmentally damaging living conditions, can remain hidden without the conscientization that health and environmental education can provide. Education for conscientization and empowerment requires a recognition of the distribution of power in society and the power–knowledge nexus embedded in different discourses and the values that they advance. Committed educators doubt that one can be neutral in any conflict of opinion, values or decision-making between the powerful and the powerless. As Freire (1972) wrote: ‘Washing one’s hand of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not be neutral’. Thus, attempts at values neutrality when teaching about controversial health and environmental issues may end up, albeit perhaps unwittingly, as exercises in deception, and thereby serve to reinforce dominant social values. Such approaches do not give students the option of examining, and then accepting or rejecting, the values stance being proposed. Instead, they inculcate a relativistic notion of values that may prevent students from caring for and particip-
ating in decisions about their future well-being and that of their communities.

Thus, a committed approach to values in education would develop the capacities of students to clarify their views on health and environmental issues by developing an ethic of care. This involves the affective objectives that are associated with the personal development aspects of liberal approaches to education—such as the development of self-esteem, the clarification of personal attitudes and values, and the development of cognitive skills of values analysis. The latter include: the skills of analysing alternative viewpoints on issues, recognizing the values that underlie them and evaluating the consequences of alternative solutions to problems. These objectives of a liberal approach are also an essential part of a committed approach. However, a committed approach has the additional affective objective of consciously seeking to help students to develop a strong and enduring ethic of care.

One way of identifying an appropriate values base for an ethic of care is to turn to the literature on environmental philosophy. This literature reveals a difference between two broad schools of thought—the ecocentrism of deep ecology and the human welfare orientation of social ecology (Eckersley, 1990). Ecocentric environmentalists base their prescriptions for an environmental ethic upon an examination of the human responsibilities to care for plants, animals, and the other living and non-living things in nature. I accept the wisdom of this position and the strong case made for ‘biophilia’ being an essential dimension of our humanity. However, I also see biophilia as an insufficient values base for a committed ethic of care. I believe that a comprehensive ethic of care for health and environmental education needs to be more inclusive than this and also incorporate values related to the human responsibility to care for each other as well as nature. These include the values of justice and equity which have long been neglected in environmental education. According to Atchia (1990), such a comprehensive ethic is to be found in the World Ethic of Sustainability upon which the second World Conservation Strategy (IUCN, WWF and UNEP, 1990) was developed. In summary form, these include two sets of values—those related to our responsibility to care for nature (or ecological sustainability) and those related to our responsibility to care for each other (social justice). Four values may be identified in each set.

**People and nature: ecological sustainability**

- **Interdependence.** People are a part of nature and depend utterly on her. They should respect nature at all times, for nature is life. To respect nature means to approach nature with humility, care and compassion; to be frugal and efficient in resource use; to be guided by the best available knowledge, both traditional and scientific; and to help shape and support public policies that promote sustainability.

- **Biodiversity.** Every life form warrants respect and preservation independently of its worth to people. People should preserve the complexity of ecosystems to ensure the survival of all species, and the safeguarding of their habitats.

- **Living lightly on the earth.** All persons should take responsibility for their impact on nature. They should maintain ecological processes, the variety of life, renewable resources and the ecosystems that support them. They should use natural resources and the environment carefully and sustainably, and restore degraded ecosystems.

- **Interspecies equity.** People should treat all creatures decently, and protect them from cruelty and avoidable suffering.

**People and people: social justice**

- **Basic human needs.** The needs of all individuals and societies should be met, within the constraints imposed by the biosphere; and all should have equal opportunity for improving their lot.

- **Inter-generational equity.** Each generation should leave to the future a world that is at least as diverse and productive as the one it inherited. To this end, non-renewable resources should be used sparingly, renewable resources should be used sustainably and waste should be minimized. The benefits of development should not be
consumed now while leaving the costs to the future.

- **Human rights.** All persons should have the fundamental freedoms of conscience and religion, expression, peaceful assembly, and association.

- **Participation.** All persons and communities should be empowered to exercise responsibility for their own lives and for life on earth. Thus they must have full access to education, political enfranchisement and sustaining livelihoods; and they should be able to participate effectively in the decisions that most affect them.

(Adapted from IUCN, WWFN and UNEP, 1990, p. 22; Fien, 1993, p. 64.)

These eight values might be seen as a starting point, at least in environmental education, for the clarification of an ethic of care. No doubt, committed health educators could revise this list to provide for a more comprehensive ethic of care in health education. However, given Spork’s (1993) three-fold goal of health education—healthy people living in healthy communities in a healthy environment—the people–nature and people–people values outlined above could be a valuable starting point for committed health educators also.

**Contrasting approaches**

There is a difference of opinion among educators over the appropriate stance teachers should take on values such as these. This difference involves a debate over the extent to which teachers should directly teach towards particular values. It also involves debate over the ideological ends served by adopting values pluralism and claims to neutrality of liberal approaches to values education. This debate is active in environmental education at the present time (Jickling and Spork, 1996). It arises from the arguments of some environmental educators over a long period of time that directly teaching for the values of a committed environmental ethic should be an overt purpose of education. As O’Riordan (1987, p. 2) argues:

Radical environmental education has a philosophy, content and methodology that is trying to influence the attitudes and values of society so that care and justice are integral elements of human behaviour out of which will inevitably come a careful treatment of the world’s resources.

This contrasts with the view of those who argue that a values neutral approach is more appropriate. The richness of this debate indicates that there is a substantial body of literature on values in environmental education which health educators might consult. This work has provided a range of frameworks and strategies for dealing with values-laden issues in teaching (e.g. Caduto, 1983a,b; Knapp, 1983) and has reviewed research findings on the effects of environmental values education (Iozzi, 1989a,b). However, with the exception of the critiques of values education made by Huckle (1980, 1983b) and Fien (1993), and the arguments for commitment advanced by Bak (1996), almost all of this literature has been written from a liberal orientation to values education. This orientation does not appreciate the first points made at the start of this paper, i.e. that school curricula and practices reflect dominant patterns of power and control in society, and that the ideological function of the curriculum (both hidden and overt) means that schools and teachers cannot avoid inculcating particular values. Thus, this literature does not question the explicit values that underlie the case for neutrality in values education or the values inculcated through pluralist values education strategies such as values clarification and values analysis (Stradling *et al*., 1984; Simpson, 1986).

As a result, health educators should be aware that the literature on values in environmental education has tended to ignore research on the nature of moral thinking (Hare, 1981), an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982; Nodding, 1984, 1992), social justice (e.g. Rawls, 1971) and collective social responsibility (e.g. MacIntyre, 1981), and their place in democratic societies (Timmerman, 1986). Trapped within its own liberal ideology, this literature has not sought to reconcile the case for directly
teaching the values that underlie learning why and how to care with the case for teaching students how to reflect on the dilemmas posed by the conflicting values and how to clarify their own attitudes to particular environmental issues (Benniga, 1988, p. 417).

Thus, Huckle (1980, 1983b) has argued that the liberal position on values education—that students should be taught about the range of values in any situation and how to clarify their own position in relation to them—must be extended to include the direct teaching of particular values within an atmosphere of free and critical discussion. As Giroux (1981) also argues, 'students must learn not only how to clarify values, they must also learn why certain values are indispensable to the reproduction of human life' (p. 359).

The values to be promoted in this manner include the substantive or terminal values related to environmental ethics, social equity and democratic procedures outlined in the previous section as well as cultural universals such as truth and honesty. Pepper (1987) insists that pedagogically this need not lead to indoctrination but to a drawing out of students' values in free and open discussion, ideology critique, and the analysis of social interests through critical praxis. Pepper argues that education is not a matter of teaching 'correct' values but one of drawing out what students already know and believe to be ethical. He argues that (Pepper, 1987, pp. 12-13, emphasis in original):

If pupils are enabled to analyse the values behind their present socially-learned behaviour patterns they will conclude for themselves that different behaviours require different values—and these will probably be values that they believe in at heart, because at heart most kids are decent and nice. What students need above all is to know how behaviour patterns can change, and such knowledge cannot be complete without some understandings of the relations of production that stem from our economies—relationships which substantially contribute to our behaviour patterns in the first place.

This approach to values education has been labelled 'committed impartiality' by Kelly (1986). According to Kelly (1986, p. 130), committed impartiality entails two beliefs:

First, teachers should state rather than conceal their own views on controversial issues. Second, they should foster the pursuit of truth by ensuring that competing perspectives receive a fair hearing through critical discourse.

A similar case for teacher commitment in values education has been made with regard to religious education by Hill (1982) and multicultural education by Singh (1989). Teaching through committed impartiality involves a number of ethical responsibilities which have pedagogical implications. Kelly (1986, p. 130) has outlined five conditions for 'teacher disclosure' which safeguard students from unethical teaching practices:

1. Teachers’ views should be consciously included rather than avoided in the discussion of controversial issues.
2. Teacher disclosure of personal views should represent a positive ideal of, and model for, committed and responsible citizenship.
3. Teachers should disclose their views openly and unashamedly, and not consistently disguise or diminish them through devil's advocacy or repeated qualification.
4. The timing, mode and tone of disclosure involve professional decisions that can only be made by individual teachers with regard to individual classes and students.
5. The disclosure of teachers’ views should be done judiciously and with due regard to the imperatives of impartiality and critical discourse.

Kelly (1986, pp. 130-131) summarizes the ethical implications of these pedagogical principles in this way:

To recommend that teachers state their personal views on issues does not mean, however, that... they repeatedly attempt to convince students of the superiority of their own positions. To the
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extent that teacher disclosure becomes heavy-handed advocacy, it may reasonable be perceived by students as propaganda or psychological intimidation. In either case, the norm of impartiality would be undermined.

He also suggests that teachers need to adopt ‘a set of strategic correctives’ in order to adhere to the imperatives of impartiality, including (Kelly, 1986, p. 132):

- Praising reasoned oppositional viewpoints.
- Publicly engaging in self-critique.
- Encouraging students to critique their points of view whilst critiquing students who merely parrot them.

These guidelines are supported by critical educators such as Huckle (1985, p. 303) who stresses the importance of ‘commitment to truth as a duty’ and Richardson (1982) who argues that teachers have a duty to protect their students from their own power of persuasion by allowing space for doubts and differing viewpoints. Thus, Harris (1990) argues that while teachers have a responsibility to ‘intervene’ in the moral development of the young, to help them to resist the influences of dominant cultural beliefs and norms, they should not impose their views on students. Instead, he recommends the critical pedagogy of ‘making schooling into a site which develops skills for critical reflection and action in the struggle to overcome injustice and social inequity’ (Harris, 1990, p. 179).

**Conclusion**

This conclusion seeks to provide a practical way of teaching through committed impartiality by distinguishing between two types of affective constructs—values and attitudes. These concepts are similar in that both are a part of the affective make-up of one’s identity although values are more stable and enduring than attitudes. Rokeach (1973) defines a value as an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or desired state of existence is more preferable than others. Values lie at the very centre of what we hold to be important principles to live by or goals to work towards. Attitudes are derived from values and are value-expressive for particular situations. That is, attitudes are beliefs that have been derived from a particular value and express a view about what should happen in particular situations. Thus, while values give rise to the attitudes we might have towards particular situations, attitudes mediate between values and action. In this way, attitudes are expressions of opinion about what should happen in a particular situation, and, thus, guide decisions and action about situations that arise in everyday life.

One of the dilemmas people face in deciding their attitudes towards a situation is the possibility of tension between particular values that they hold. This arises because the degree of personal commitment with which different values are held varies. In addition, situations sometimes arise in which several values may be in competition, and need to be weighed against each other before an attitude can be formed and a decision about a particular course of action made.

What then is the role of committed teachers in relation to values and attitudes related to an ethic of care? How can we teach in a professionally ethical way when guiding young people in learning why and how to care for themselves, for each other and for the earth? There are two parts to the answer of this question. Firstly, in relation to values, the role of the teacher needs to be a pro-active one. This involves planning learning experiences which promote the conscious adoption of an ethic of care and encouraging students to engage in active ongoing reflection on it by consciously seeking consistency between the values or principles that are parts of it. Secondly, in relation to formation of attitudes, the teacher’s role needs to be more circumspect. The role of the committed educator is not to tell students how their values should be applied on particular issues or how they should act as a result. Thus, while teachers have a responsibility to promote particular values, they do not have a licence to direct the attitudes that can be formed from these values.

An example may be used to illustrate this
distinction. For example, in relation to the question of pesticide use in agriculture and chemical residues in food, teachers should promote key value principles in an ethic of care by asking students to evaluate the issue according to principles such as ecological interdependence, living lightly on the earth and meeting basic human needs. This does not mean that such values would be taught as absolutes but as moral guides that people in other times and places have found useful and which students can subject to critical analysis and review, and use as mirrors to examine the contribution they could make to their individual lives and society. However, the ways these values are applied by students when clarifying their attitudes to particular agricultural situations (e.g. what chemicals should a farmer use in a particular local case, in what concentrations and how should they be applied?)—and deciding how to act as a result—are decisions for students to make after a comprehensive examination of the political economy of food production in the area under investigation.

This distinction between promoting the core values in an ethic of care but refraining from teaching particular attitudes is based upon a definition of indoctrination developed by Newfield and McElyea (1984). They argue that indoctrination occurs in education when a teacher leads a student to accept certain propositions about a situation or issue regardless of the evidence, i.e. when the evidence is not challenged and evaluated, when it is presented as secondary to belief or when it is simply not presented at all. Such a view of indoctrination clearly refers to the teaching of attitudes not values. Being principles for living, values generally stand independently of evidence. However, attitudes relate to particular circumstances and demand the application of reason through the marshalling and evaluation of evidence about particular circumstances before they can be formed. To return to the example of pesticide use in agriculture, teachers could encourage students to assess the relevance of value principles such ecological interdependence, living lightly on the earth and meeting basic human needs when evaluating alternative proposals for types of sprays and application levels, and various means for regulating and monitoring compliance with local legislation. However, the attitudes that students form, and the actions they take, would be determined by their assessment of appropriate evidence about the social and environmental contexts and impacts of agricultural practices in the region concerned and the nature and likely impact of the particular proposals. This clarification of attitudes is akin to the process of critical thinking outlined by Mogensen elsewhere in this issue.

Teaching for values and not particular attitudes would seem to be a practical and ethical approach to issues in health and environmental education because it resolves many of the questions concerning indoctrination. It acknowledges the inevitability of values and ideology in the curriculum by advocating the promotion of the values in an ethic of care but does not dictate how students should respond to particular issues.

References


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