

Values in Education – Education about values, through values and for values

Forewords

I think citizenship education, as well as any education, is based on the values. As a kindergarten teacher I have worked a lot with values. This essay will focus on those values which has important meaning also in the Human Rights and Citizenship education.

Values are always bound in the culture and the society surrounding us. Nobody can be global without his own cultural heritage. Jim Ife discusses in his book *Human Rights and Social Work* about the issue of cultural relativism and the critic towards Human Rights as Western values. Even if basic right to have safety and shelter wouldn't be part of every culture (which I somehow think it is) I think I have responsibility as a Finnish kindergarten teacher to offer and demand them for all children I get involved to.

There are also problems in Declaration of Human Rights and the Western values in it. Our high individualism and competition has been taught children from very beginning and the rational (scientific) culture does not leave room for feelings. These are value based problem that we need to understand and become aware when talking about values in education.

The Teacher's point of view

Children from different families, from different cultures come to the kindergarten both to get nursing and to get education. Their parents have their own values, often unidentified, which the child learns from an infant. Values are the first controversial issues showing up between parents and the teacher and sometime it even can cause big problems. For this essay I had short conversation with Nick after class at 10.12.2009. We discussed about different values in families and controversial issues those can cause. My main goal with under tree year children is dealing with very basic values they have. To make them visible, to open them and trying to teach acceptance towards different values. Nick also thought that some attitudes parents have can't be acceptable in the kindergarten. We spoke about parents who don't want different colored or disabled child in their child's class. I think those "miss-values" are more about fearing unknown and therefore parents too need teaching and open conversations to learn tolerance toward different people and things.

When talking about values, I can't think my values are better or more right than values of somebody else.

At same time I need to deal with my own values of education for to reason and to justify my right and responsibility to teach, to educate. The basic human rights are present everyday in the kindergarten, when I'm interacting with the small children. Ideas of discipline, socialization, safety, interplay, multiculturalism, equality, freedom and spirit of brotherhood are part of my daily work. Adding there the rising trends of sustainable development, partnership with parents and participation makes the education even more based on sometimes controversial values. I hope that by identifying and discussing openly of my values as a teacher I make my teaching also acceptable and good quality. I hope that I can find the 4-A-scheme (present in article by C. Lohrenscheit) through my job as a kindergarten teacher.

Naming and opening the values for children

For many Finnish children is impossible to understand the value of basic needs: food, shelter and clothes, because there is not a chance they ever need to live without them. When they still view the world as an egocentric, talking about hunger and poverty can't be understandable. I have heard school aged children to offer to send their school meal to Africa when teacher has been criticizing the fact that children leave food uneaten. So that is not an option to start discuss and teaching the basic values.

Instead of speaking poverty and famine I think it's important to show my students other children living in different places and different conditions. I found the video "Person to Person" (that was shown by Jari Kivistö) interesting. I have too faced the problem that the global issues are scary, sad and negative. I think that positive point of view might make the issues easier to approach. Stories and fairytale from other cultures are good starting point to the global education. Pictures and letter, where children tell or draw their life are also usable material. Even a small child can tell important thing in his life (often mother, father, home, own toys, favorite food etc.). I think in these stories there is much common when comparing children from Finland to children from developing countries. The shelter, the safety and the family are in every child's story. And these needs are very value-laden as Jim Ife describes about needs in his book.

Same methods work also in sustainable development. I can teach it by doing it. Small children cannot choose what kind of diapers or clothes to wear, but they can learn to see values in the

sustainability. When most of the children living in cities have become estranged from nature and origin of products, kindergartens and schools have nowadays responsibility to teach children to understand the origin, life cycle and the sustainability of many different products surrounding them from an infant. Children can learn to repair (with teacher of course); there can be workshop days for repairing toys (and even clothes) and making art and toys from different materials. Many families are interested to get knowledge about the sustainable development, so with children we can teach also their parents. In that part the education becomes also adaptable and available (to both parents and children).

A Group full of individuals

In kindergarten we don't use book for learning and curriculum is not so exact. It gives us teacher freedom to choose what and how to teach. However there are values and principles that are needed to pay attention to. I think to make teaching adaptable, relevant and suitable, there has to be learning focus instead of teaching focus. With small children teacher make lot of decision about subjects and methods. Teacher should be open to the ideas that children are bringing out and use them as much as possible. Children are curious and innovative, but can also be scared and reluctant front of new things. Therefore emotion education needs to be present. Collaborative environment and learning with others help children to learn and teacher can be with them wondering and searching, not directing and knowing the right answers.

Even if groups are necessary and co-operation is important skill to learn in the kindergarten, are small children individuals too. For developing of their self-esteem and confidence there should be time and space for every child's opinions, emotions and questions.

The Human Rights have been criticized (in *Human Rights and Social Work* by Jim Ife), because people use them to empower their wants. In this subject children are honest when saying "I want!" Their parent however might use expression "It's my child's right to have/need/get..." when arguing for special treatment they want for their children. I think as a teacher is also important to recognize these wants from true needs and discuss about them. At the same time qualified teacher can help parents see the true needs of children they maybe are not getting filled from their parents.

Even a small child senses unfairness when he faces it. The base of education and therefore working as a teacher should always be equity. That don't mean that every children has been similar, because they have right to be individuals. That is controversial issue that I often face in my work. I try to

share my time with all the children, to focus their best part and skills and to encourage and help them to learn different things that they need. By giving everyone about same amount time and attention I try to be as fair as I can. But what then if someone needed more time to learn than somebody else? It's unequal to focus on him more than others, but also unfair, if he can't have the time and attention he needs to learn. Because the learning is more valued than just spending time and paying attention, I often need to focus on the learning problems.

Maybe we teachers are too much paying attention to quality of education we are giving. Of course quality with relevancy, suitability etc. are key factors when talking about the acceptability of Education (from the 4-A-schema), but when talking about development of Human Personality as a goal of education, I think being present and listening children is as important part of education as teaching itself.

Participation

To right to take part, to participate is in both the Declaration of the Human Rights and the Convention of the Rights of the Child. The right to participate is also one basic value of democracy and western life which mean it is absolutely important part of citizenship education.

It natural for small child to participate, child wants attention and practices skills of co-operation from an infant. However when going to school children already have learned that their opinion aren't as valuable as adults opinion and they don't have ways to take part of commons. Those tools to take part, to influence issues both micro and macro level do not grew out of nothing, they need to be practiced and learned and for that children need teaching. In kindergarten level children need also practice those skills by taking part in something real, not only heard stories about somebody else's participation. John Dewey's "learning by doing"-theory is included here. By example children and adults can together decide the rules of class, there can be discussion, voting and debate about them. Children can tell and draw their opinion of good learning environment and actualize some of those plans. The learning themes for groups should be based on children's interests. In some communities in Finland children have chance to be part of bigger decision making which is good because children don't have right to vote in elections. When learning to take part children also learn to understand other's opinion and accept that their opinion can't win every time. They learn to make compromise and respect each other.

Participation is a right but somehow it is also a responsibility. The democracy doesn't work, if people are not active. With children participation also means the right of withdraw. To participate

don't mean that child need to take part everything and there need still respect for independent choices. Child can be tired or bad mood and he has right to be unattended. With adults participation can be seen also as obligation.

Participation in learning and studying is important with children, because participation increases motivation and involvement towards learning. With pre-school aged children this is one of the most important parts of planning the teaching and learning. Learning material needs to be adaptable for children age and development stage. Children are curious and they get excited easily if the teacher can bring new materials and themes out interesting way. Keeping up the motivation demand more skilled teacher and it is one form of quality of education.

Sources:

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