An Investigation of Primary Education in Bangladesh from a Values Education Perspective: Case Studies of Government Primary Schools

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signed………  …………………Date: 25/03/2013
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Abstract

Values education is a pedagogical approach that centres on the whole-person development of children. It stresses creating a school environment supported by respectful relationships, where students feel safe to express their thoughts, emotions and values and learn about others, where children are given choice and power over what and how they learn and where they can participate in active and cooperative learning experiences. Over the past ten years, educational and psychological research has confirmed that children not only thrive socially and emotionally in such environments, but this is where they also learn best. Values Education has been implemented in both developed and developing countries including the USA, Australia, England, Scotland, and the Philippines. Research emanating from values initiatives in these countries has identified a number of common core features that characterise effective values pedagogy.

Bangladesh is a small but densely populated country in South-East Asia. In recent years, substantial advancement towards access and equity in primary education has been made in Bangladesh. The government is now focusing on quality improvement issues, ranging from the teacher and teaching qualities to the curriculum and textbook reform. Given that values education provides a wider platform for young learners to grow as moral human beings and as responsible members of the wider community, the present study seeks to examine the extent to which primary education in Bangladesh supports the key implementation aspects of values education, namely: i) awareness of values among the key educational authorities and school leaders; ii) the cognitive, affective, and behavioural domain of values learning; iii) explicit/implicit provisions for the articulation of values; and, iv) support from the learning environment. The data collection and analysis included: i) document analysis of the educational policies and relevant documents, and the curriculum, textbooks, and teachers’ manuals developed for primary-level Social Studies and Religious Studies; and, ii) case studies of six government primary schools (two for each of the metropolitan, urban and rural schools) comprised of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with the teachers, and observations of classrooms and school-wide activities.

The findings suggested that the government is increasingly urging schools to establish a student-centred, participatory learning environment, and to engage students in meaningful learning experiences, goals which evidence suggests could well be facilitated by values education implementation. However, most of the teachers included in this study had a limited understanding of values education and restricted opportunities to implement the kind of student-centred, cooperative learning activities that assist children to reflect on and enact values. In addition, the curriculum and the textbooks for Social Studies and Religious Studies showed little to no awareness of values education perspectives and rarely included activities to promote critical thinking skills, emotional and social skills, or problem solving and decision making abilities. As well, most of the observed lessons were over-reliant on textbook content with the lesson delivery being teacher-directed and prescriptive, and activities focused on the rote-learning of the textbook content. This study suggests the need for the Bangladeshi education authorities to revisit and reform the aims and objectives set for primary education, and to revise the primary curriculum, textbooks and evaluation methods, to ensure that all of the educational initiatives undertaken are aimed at creating a safe, supportive and child-friendly learning
environment. The thesis suggests that much of this reform could be achieved by greater attention being given to values education research and practice.