Teachers' experience of the implementation of values in education in schools: "Mind the gap"

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In many societies violence, crime and intolerance have become an everyday reality. In this context teachers are responsible for facilitating values in education. The study aimed to investigate teachers' experiences of the implementation of values in education in classroom praxis. Constructivism was used as conceptual framework. Data were collected by means of interviews with 14 participants. The findings revealed that there was a gap between policy makers' intentions and teachers' perspectives. This gap related to the teachers' poor under-standing of the concept 'values in education', exacerbated by a lack of reflexivity about the issue; a failure to address the influence of teacher identity on values in education; a need for suitable training; a lack of knowledge on how to address practical challenges with values in education or how to consider the hidden curriculum, and how to use different strategies effectively to facilitate values in education. Our main conclusion is that education initiatives so far have had little impact on the implementation of values in education in selected schools. Recommendations for improvement are made.

Keywords: constructivism; teachers' experience; values in education

Introduction
"What transforms education, is a transformed being in the world" – Palmer (1999:1). This profound statement by Palmer (1999) hints at the importance of values and values in education.

The importance of dealing with values *effectively* in schools is illustrated by the fact that the current generation of youth, particularly from emerging economy coun-tries, countries in developing democracies and countries with scarce resources and high need, has only known a society characterised by rampant change, cultural and religious diversity, dislocated families, unemployment and increasing anxiety about risk. Many schools in South Africa are depicted as sites where disrespect for the law, racial intolerance and violence proliferate. The Department of Education (DoE) has recently publicly acknowledged that violence is, indeed, a problem in South African schools based on data gleaned from a study undertaken by the Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention (Burton, 2008). It is against this background that teachers have to implement values in education.

According to Solomons (2009), it is assumed that teachers have the expertise to navigate impartially between conflicting value-orientations that may co-exist in multi-cultural classrooms such as in South Africa. This is in spite of the fact that different

teachers may have opposing views of what constitutes values in education, which values should be given priority and for what reasons, and what learning theory is involved. Rhodes and Roux (2004) have therefore indicated that there is a lack of comprehensible directives on how to deal with values in education in the classroom.

In consideration of the above, the main research question of this investigation was: *How do teachers experience the implementation of values in education in the curriculum?* Accordingly, the aim of this research was to reveal the problems teachers encounter when implementing values in education in terms of National Curriculum Statement (NCS) policy (DoE, 2000). This may help to stimulate further reflection and debate on values in education. It may also facilitate further research on the issue, the importance of which has been indicated (Hofstee, 2006).

Woven into the fabric of curriculum discourses for values in education is constructivism. According to the DoE (2000), it is important that teachers understand and implement constructivist principles of teaching and learning. Therefore we selected constructivism as conceptual framework for this article even though there are also other philosophies underpinning values in education.

The term, "constructivism", is found ubiquitously in the field of education in many forms and interpretations and its advocates have a considerable number of assumptions about knowledge (Joldersma, 2011:275). However, the different pedagogies based on constructivist theory all seem to have six characteristics in common (Fox in Henze, 2009; Sremac, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978; Watts & Bentley, 1991), which are also applicable to the learning of values:

- Learning, including the learning of values, is an active process.
- Knowledge and insight (e.g. knowledge of values) is constructed and not inborn or passively absorbed.
- Knowledge is formulated, rather than discovered.
- Although knowledge is individual and particular, it is also socially constructed.
- Learning is essentially a process of trying to understand the world.
- Effective learning requires meaningful, open ended, challenging problems to solve.

Against the above background, a literature review is presented in the next section.

Literature review: Values in education

Discourse on values in education in the curriculum is firmly grounded on the Constitution of South Africa and the Bill of Rights that provide the rationale for curriculum transformation that mirror the ideals of a democracy. Initiatives of the DoE that have influenced various debates on values in education include the Report of the Working Group on Values in Education (DoE, 2000). This initiative was the starting point towards identifying the values that would ultimately be included in the curriculum. The report of this working group culminated in a second initiative known as the Saamtrek Conference on Values, Education and Democracy in the 21st Century. This conference

resulted in The Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy (DoE, 2001), that was endorsed by the NCS and served as an example of a set of human rights values (HRVs) which had been constructed socially as a means of supporting texts in a specific educational setting.

Although it was not clear why certain values were adopted and not others, the Manifesto prescribed 10 HRVs for inclusion in the curriculum which would address social ills such as intolerance, violence and crime. These values were democracy, social justice and equity, equality, non-racism and non-sexism, "*ubuntu*" (human dignity), an open society, accountability, the rule of law, respect and reconciliation. The Manifesto also provided teachers with 16 strategies to facilitate HRVs. These strategies were dealt with in the Life Orientation (LO) component. However, HRVs needed to be integrated across the curriculum (DoE, 2002)

Several documents and research reports further emanated from initiatives from the DoE that support the inclusion of HRVs in the curriculum. For example, the Human Rights Education in Diverse Religious and Cultural Contexts (HREiD) (2013), which was established in 2004, consists of a research group that promotes human rights in education as praxis. However, as Keet and Carrim (2006) asserted, the mandate to infuse the curriculum with HRVs was far from clear. They indicated that the integration of HRVs into curricula should be directed by structured processes, should be configured and reconfigured to suit different needs in contexts and should allow for a multitude of ways of infusion.

This confirms that values do not exist in a void and are therefore open to many interpretations (Du Preez, 2008; Morrison, 2000). HRVs can be viewed as cultural values if they are applied in a particular context (Du Preez & Roux, 2010; Morrison, 2000). HRVs may also be described as universal, communal values grounded in the principles underpinned by the declaration of human rights in the South African Bill of Rights (1996) (Du Preez, 2007). Thus HRVs in curricula can include various identities and respect religious and social distinctions (Morrison, 2000). In consideration of the aforementioned, we will refer mainly to the umbrella-term, values in education, also taking cognisance of the various perspectives and terminologies that form part of the values in education narrative in South Africa.

When implementing values in education, teachers need to understand constructivist notions of teaching and learning, as mentioned. As Terwel (1999:198) asserted, "constructivism is not a robust concept: it seems to flourish under relatively ideal educational circumstances". This issue could impact on the implementation of values in education. Thus, the aim of the research was to investigate how teachers experience the implementation of values in education in terms of curriculum policy. To this end, the following sections explain the research design, findings, and conclusions.

Research design
The research was qualitative in nature as the study aimed at gaining an in-depth under-

standing of how teachers experienced values in education in school. We therefore identified phenomenology as an appropriate research design for the study (Higgs & Smith, 2006).

Sampling decisions were carefully made. Purposive and maximum variation sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010) ensured that key role players from a variety of schools and contexts were involved. The reason for deciding on maximum variation sampling was because we expected that teachers from diverse geographical areas would have different perspectives on values in education. The participants therefore ranged from private and ex-model C schools in urban areas to poor, rural schools. (Ex-model C schools serve privileged students from the immediate school environment. Since affordability was a key issue, the schools were mainly attended by middle class to affluent, white students.) One private school and two ex-model C schools were located in urban areas, a township school was also in an urban area, and three schools were in rural areas. Thus, seven schools were involved. In all instances the schools were chosen for their geographical location and for their willingness to participate.

As noted, at each site, we selected the key role players for the study. This implied asking each school to identify their most knowledgeable or experienced person in values in education, who would be available for an interview and willing to participate. At the schools, this was generally the LO teacher or a manager that was also directly involved in the teaching of LO. In some instances the manager was the head of the relevant department. In another instance, the principal of the township school acted as LO teacher because of her special interest in the field that related to her original training. LO is also often allocated to any teacher or manager to teach when there are not enough "specialists" to do so. This was the case in a rural school where the principal also acted as the LO teacher. District officials or academics who had specialised in this field were also viewed as key role players and therefore suitable as participants. In this way, the interviewees included eight managers, three LO teachers, a district officer in charge of values in education, and two academics who trained teachers in LO.

A pilot study was conducted with a principal at a rural school which was very similar to the rural schools in this study. The study consisted of an informal interview with the principal to gain insight into the potential shape of the study. The pilot study revealed that semi-structured interviews and field notes would be suitable for data collection.

In terms of the data analysis, a bottom-up strategy was adopted by segmenting the data into meaningful analytical units. The significant segments of data were identified by means of categories and sub-categories that pertained to the aims of the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2000).

Ethical measures undertaken included informed consent to clarify the purposes, methods and benefits of the research to participants (Wassenaar, 2006). Permission to tape interviews was also sought. Interviewees were also assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

We used Lincoln and Guba's model of trustworthiness for ensuring that the findings were true for the particular participants and school contexts where the study was undertaken (De Vos, 2005). Thus, we used the following techniques (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010): a lengthy data collection period that allowed for preliminary data analysis and comparison; multi-method strategies that included field notes and interviews; interviews that were phrased in the participant's language; two researchers attended to the interpretation of the data, although all the interviews were conducted by one researcher only to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings; and the use of a tape recorder to provide complete records of interviews.

The next section reveals the range of problems teachers encountered with the implementation of values in education. For ease of reference codes will be used to indicate who the participants were: Te (teacher); Ma (manager); Ac (academic); F (female); M (male); Ur (urban, ex-model C school); P (private school); R (rural school); T(township school).

Findings and discussion
Lack of in-depth reflexivity about values in education
The participants did not understand what values were. This was in spite of the fact that, as professionals, they were involved with values in education, in addition to living with and according to values everyday, even if they did not do so consciously. This was revealed by the fact that, when they were asked about the value(s) that received the most attention in their schools, they were uncertain. This appeared to be the case even after some probing. These were some of the comments:

Values…uhm…can you say that again? Mmm…what can I say now…can you come back to that question? (Ma, M, P)
Nothing comes to mind right now, no, okay, the first thing that comes to mind is respect (Ma, F, R); and
Uhm…I suppose if we do not know solid values there will be confusion and despair (Te, F, T). After some probing about what the teacher meant by solid values, she responded:
"*Well respect, I suppose...respect, is a solid value. But respect can be different...I mean from one culture to another*."

This confirmed Solomons and Fataar's (2010:225) statement that the term "values" was a fluid concept which left room for speculation and which could be influenced by teachers' own cultural and religious backgrounds. Thus, teachers could get disconnected from that which should be known in the curriculum or "the subject-matter field" (Terwel, 1999:195). Reflection should rather lead to a universalist perspective that enables the formulation of a set of values applying to all cultures (Evanoff, 2004).

A core value which all the participants highlighted was *discipline*: As a principal remarked:

"*One of the very first values to teach is discipline. Once you have discipline everything falls into place*" (Ma, F, P).

However, with regard to *discipline* it should be noted that this does not constitute a value but is rather a *descriptive* quality that can be connected to values. It seems that the teachers' conceptualisation of discipline as a core value arose through prior conception of the importance of its role in an educational setting. It also appears that some teachers believe discipline can only be maintained through the elevation of cultural values (particularistic). It was thus evident that the teachers' views on discipline were constructed on the basis of constraining influences. We agree with Du Preez and Roux's (2010) claim that maintaining positive discipline in classrooms necessitates a firm value base that is understood and constructed by all through a process of dialogue that transcends comfort zones. This requires a constructivist approach.

In particular, a lack of clarity pertained to the HRVs enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) and in the curriculum. When referring to the HRVs, the responses indicated confusion. One principal from a township school blamed the education initiatives for the "chaotic" way in which values were dealt with. According to her:

> *Curriculum planners must go back to the drawing board…*[HRVs] *are not stated in the NCS, we need training, there is a lot of confusion…in the end the learners are suffering* (Ma, F, R).

One can deduce from these comments that either this principal did not read the policy documents or simply did not understand them.

Another LO teacher (Te / F / T) commented that values had always been part of the curriculum although they were now called HRVs, that it was a sensitive matter and a very contentious issue. According to her, teachers needed more openness and discussions for support.

It is clear from the above that it was not sufficient merely to affirm HRVs in the curricula but that it was imperative that they be debated regarding their practical implications. This is in line with Von Glaserfeld's view (Joldersma, 2011) that learning is a conceptual activity and should be open to reflection and conversation. From a constructivist perspective, there should be active meaning making within the wider context of values in education or as Evanoff (2004:439) argues, "a dialogical process in which the participants attempt to critique existing norms and values and arrive at a more adequate set of norms and values which are capable of resolving the specific problems they face". This underpins relevant features of strong constructivism.

Lack of clarity on key values: the influence of teacher identity
All the participants viewed respect as an important value that should be entrenched in all aspects of the learning and teaching situation. Examples of comments include:

> *Our learners must learn respect, they do not have respect for their bodies, for the teachers, for the buildings* (Te, F, R); and
> *Learners must learn to respect themselves, respect others and respect God, and show tolerance to all people* (Ma, M, R).

In accordance with Du Preez and Roux's (2010:) view, the above participants tended to intuitively choose the particularist perspective rather than the universalist perspective of respect. It could be that this viewpoint posed fewer challenges for individual teachers. However, the relativity of the construct of respect has to do with various interpretations assigned to it, depending on the cultural and religious identity of the teacher. For example, the concept of ubuntu was regarded by many (black) teachers as a key value that should be developed in all classrooms. The following comment illustrates this:

> "*Ubuntu is the key one…we respect every person that comes to the school, so that when they join the broader community they show respect to all people*" (Te, F, T).

Ubuntu, in this sense, embodies the concept of mutual understanding and the active appreciation of the value of human difference. Ubuntu includes values such as love, tolerance, peace and compassion. One may deduce from the participant's response that ubuntu as a communal value represented an overarching term that subsumed almost every other value. In other words, the participant's mental construct of ubuntu was all-encompassing and implied a more viable style of experiencing and knowing. However, the interviews indicated that for participants in the public (previously model C) schools and the private schools the meaning of ubuntu was still predominately tacit. It seemed that a lack of dialogue and reflection around values in education to de-mystify the concept and to provide meaning to this multi-dimensionality resulted in a deficiency in constructive processes. For this reason, relevant and sustained training in accordance with constructivist learning principles is required. The issue of training is discussed next.

Lack of suitable and sustained training

Although training is an imperative aspect in addressing values in education as highlighted in the literature, discussions on how to infuse values in curriculum activities still elicited the following responses:

> "*How must we know all these things? It's different here in the rural schools. Our policymakers think we must think out these things by ourselves*" (Ma, F, R).

This highlighted the need for more suitable training, using constructivist learning principles.

However, when training was provided, some of the participants criticised a lack of knowledge and experience of the facilitators who had been appointed by the DoE to empower them for their task. When this issue was raised, a female departmental official, in charge of the training of teachers in values education, declared:

> *Do you know how much training in values we received? One week, that's all. How can we train the teachers if we only had one week's training?*

Although other officials may have had different views, the general impression given by the participants was that they experienced themselves as ill-equipped to address values in education because, according to them, the training they received was not suitable and not well-sustained.

Practical challenges with the implementation of values in LO

In terms of LO the content in the curriculum addressed human rights issues directly (DoE, 2002:4). Yet, the participants indicated that, because LO is a non-examination subject, the students were not serious about it and considered LO to be "a silly subject" with no career opportunities. They therefore tended to use the LO periods to do their homework. For example, one principal said,

> *I think LO is a very important subject, especially when it comes to values. They have, unfortunately, chosen a flyhalf, but took his boots away. With LO it is the same. They create the perception in students that it is not important, because it is not part of an external examination. I don't think they give it its rightful place in the curriculum (*Ma, M, Ur).

Another barrier to the successful implementation of the LO programmes was the teachers' struggle to understand how to address different and sometimes opposing values in multicultural classrooms. This is illustrated by the following comment:

> *"In a multicultural classroom, where the cultural background and mother tongue of the teacher and the students differ, the teaching of values, in particular, is a challenging task"* (Ac, M).

However, the teaching of HRVs underpinned all subjects, even those that have been traditionally regarded as having very little social focus (Du Preez, 2005). For instance, mathematical knowledge and skills were also meant to enable students to contribute responsibly to the development of society by using mathematical tools to expose inequality and assess environmental problems (DoE, 2003). All the subject documents in the curriculum contained a similar theme in that they all showed the relationship between social justice, human rights and inclusivity in terms of their content, skills, knowledge and assessments. However, this was not always highlighted. In this regard, Carrim and Keet (2005:101) adopted the notion of "infusion" which may be seen as an approach to facilitate the integration of HRVs into curricula. According to these researchers, curricula do not treat human rights education in a maximum infusion manner in all the subjects. In other words, the message is conveyed through the hidden curriculum. Dealing with human rights issues is less important in mathematics for example, than in LO.

Most of the participants agreed that dealing with values in education across-curricula was both problematic and a sensitive issue for many teachers. A male academic stated:

> "*Integration…uhm…that's a tough one. No, I'm thinking about the teachers. It's senseless when you come up with ideas to integrate values and teachers are opposed to it*".

When I probed it was apparent that the participants had never consciously reflected on integration. This implies that curricula may not be clear on this issue.

A teacher stated:

> *It depends on the type of teacher and the subject. Some teachers can do it, like the English teacher. It's much more difficult in science or maths. These teachers are*

more focused to get through the syllabus (Te, F, P).

However, values may be readily transferred to other content areas. For example, all the participants agreed that the concept of 'perseverance' may be found in all subjects with cross-curricular teaching both supporting and promoting this transfer.

Although cross-curricula integration has always been one of the design principles of all the previous education models, the NCS Grade R-12 (Department of Basic Education, 2012) neglects this aspect entirely, which suggests a further fragmented, atomistic approach regarding values in education. This implies that education initiatives fail to deal with values effectively in a 'maximum infusion' manner. The practical implementation of values in education was not only problematic but also ineffective and dysfunctional.

The hidden curriculum

The messages within the hidden curriculum usually deal with attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviour while numerous of these messages are conveyed indirectly. The following comment illustrates this:

> *We talk Christianity here. Fear God, love and respect yourself and one another. I say: "The neighbour is the one I am sitting with in my desk, my teacher, my staff member, the clerk, those who are cleaning". Every day I pray for God to lead me. I read to them from 1 Corinthians 2, 9-12* (Ma, F, T).

It is clear that this principal held a particularist value perspective and indirectly promoted Christianity through the hidden curriculum. According to Du Preez and Roux (2010) a value system that is based on only one particular religion means that only one narrative is taken into account. That could jeopardise the realisation of the multicultural ideals of the democratic education system in South Africa.

One of the participants (Ac / F) referred to research she had undertaken in certain schools in the Cape Flats in which gangsterism, drug dealing and violence were rife. Although the principal concerned had pointed out that the school was run according to Christian values and that he was passionate about education, the hidden message that was conveyed and filtered through the school was one of fear. In other words, the values of the school were influenced by a culture of threats, fear and violence. In such sensitive cases there should be a concerted effort for ethical reflexivity to create conducive teaching and learning environments.

Uncertainty regarding strategies for dealing with values in education

The study revealed that teachers were uncertain and/or uninformed regarding strategies that could cultivate HRVs in a multi-cultural school environment. Few teachers were aware that there were 16 strategies listed in the curriculum which could be used to inculcate values.

After careful prompting, certain strategies came to light. These included storytelling, poetry, song, dance, debates, role models and even the use of Facebook. However, all the participants appeared to use these strategies almost as an afterthought, and

did not seem to understand how they could be used explicitly and effectively to infuse HRVs. Without exception, there was a plea for curriculum developers to provide training on precise strategies to address HRVs in classroom practice. One rural teacher exclaimed that "*anything will help*", revealing a desperate need for support. A principal added,

> *There's too little focus on teaching values from the side of the policy makers. If we knew what values to teach and activities to teach them and teachers got more training, there would be a unifying element that could have immediate results and a lasting effect but it will depend on the quality of the training* (Ma, M, T).

The findings indicated that the practical implementation of values in education is ineffective and revealed a gap between policy makers' intentions and teachers' understandings and practices. The effective implementation of values in education has been hampered in various ways. The teachers should understand how to construct learning environments which are appropriately contextualised, and communicate effectively showing recognition of and respect for differences in values. Moreover, teachers should act as facilitators of learning. If these skills are absent and teachers are not trained effectively, they become mere technicians of a curriculum with no critical involvement in curriculum design and implementation. This research revealed that teachers had difficulty in structuring learning environments that encourage reflexivity and provide challenging and active learning experiences. Such experiences could help both the teachers and the students to reflect on and construct their personal values.

Conclusion and recommendations
The significance of values in education is illustrated by the fact that the youth, particularly those from emerging economy countries such as South Africa, live in societies where violence, crime and racial intolerance are rife. In this context teachers, who endorse different values in accordance with their own cultural and religious identities, are responsible for values in education in classroom praxis. Thus, the study aimed to investigate how a group of teachers experienced the implementation of values in education in the curriculum.

Although the study was limited, the interview data revealed a gap between policy makers and teachers. This gap related to: the teachers' poor understanding of the concept of 'values in education', exacerbated by their apparent lack of reflexivity about the issue; a lack of active consideration of the influence of teacher identity on the implementation of values in education; a lack of suitable and sustained training; an absence of knowledge on how to address practical challenges with values in education, consider the hidden curriculum, and use different strategies effectively to facilitate values in education. Our main conclusion is that education initiatives so far have had little impact on the implementation of values in education in participating schools. Further research is needed on various issues, including how teachers' identities influence the practical implementation of values in education.

Regarding the gap between policy makers and teachers, we recommend that curri-

culum planners of values in education make a concerted effort to involve teachers in curriculum development so that insight may cascade down from national to school level. Teachers should be given a sustained platform that elicits debate on how to implement values in education. Through training, teachers should learn to reflect on their own identities and values and how these influence their teaching. They should pay attention to questions relating to values. In line with constructivist learning principles, they should solve meaningful, open-ended and challenging problems. This accords with the thinking of Joflli and Watts (1995). Such training could, in turn, help teachers to support students to analyse, deconstruct and reconstruct their values, while at the same time respecting the values of others. Schools also develop and sustain values in the hidden curriculum. This fact requires more ethical reflexivity on decisions and actions on the part of managers.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to local values in education discourses. We also located the development of values in education in South Africa within the broader processes of a global discourse since this drew together insights gained by employing tenets of constructivism in a novel way.

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