

Keeping the student at the focus – character education in a multicultural and internationalised context

FR. MARK ELLUL

Overview

- ▶ The effect of family, peers and the media on the individual
- ▶ Schools as institutions that help in values and character formation
- ▶ Schools as normative institutions
- ▶ Nature of the research
- ▶ Findings

Background for interpretation

- ▶ Humans are social beings – foster belonging
- ▶ Groups of belonging/society aid in the development of character and values
- ▶ Malta witnessed multicultural influx – different values hierarchies



The effect of family,
peers and the media
on the individual

Family



Affection influences personal development and trust



Trickle over other aspects of life – bonding, esteem and worth



Ethnicity, demographics, social backgrounds,
educational level of the family

Provide a different interpretation of the world (different cultural paradigms) and impact access to resources



All these have an impact on education

Peers



Nurseries and schools –
first stable peer group

More defined during
adolescence – chosen



Each group has its own norms, beliefs and
behaviour



The group provides a certain curriculum



One adjusts one's behaviour to belong to
the group

Media



Provides a virtual curriculum

Shift from qualitative to quantitative friendship



'Likes' determine self-identity and worth



Virtual peer group – global – makes one question one's values and beliefs

Not confined to the city/country



Great influence through adverts

Critical reflection



Virtual reality has the same emotional effect as face-to-face interaction



Children need guidance to reflect critically on how family, peers and media affect their beliefs



Schools are institutions that help to generate this reflection



Reduces social reproduction



Schools as institutions
that help in values
and character
formation

Adults at school



Social values influence interpersonal relationships



Schools examine these values – expose individuals to a set of core values



Adults in school reinforce virtues and help in the discovery of latent skills



Help individuals to transform the basic core values into behaviour



The attitudes and interaction of adults reinforce character formation

Character Education



Systematic approach to instil basic values – school wide



Linking moral belief to daily practices



Does not rely on didactic practices but on interactive teaching and critical reflection

Teacher becomes mentor



Should help the child arrive to higher order thinking to solve dilemmas



Aim to increase the socio-emotional capacity

Assessing Character Development



Was defined as the manifestation of virtues – however, it is a limiting definition



The context and culture defines and determines the manifestation of virtues



Character develop consists of becoming aware of the surrounding to become a moral agent



Analysis of development should seek coherence and not consistency

Acting in a sensible manner



Schools mimic society this provide a good testing ground for values formation



Schools as normative institutions

Curricula



School community should be responsive to the surrounding culture



Teachers have a crucial influence on student's character formation



They should act as mentors – empowering and being role models



Student-centred approach to ensure holistic education

Curricula



Diverse curricula to strengthen every individual's abilities
- engaging



Values education – can be a subject on its own or
embedded



Reflective thinking – helping students formulate their
own ideas



Teaching for life and not for the exam

Curricula



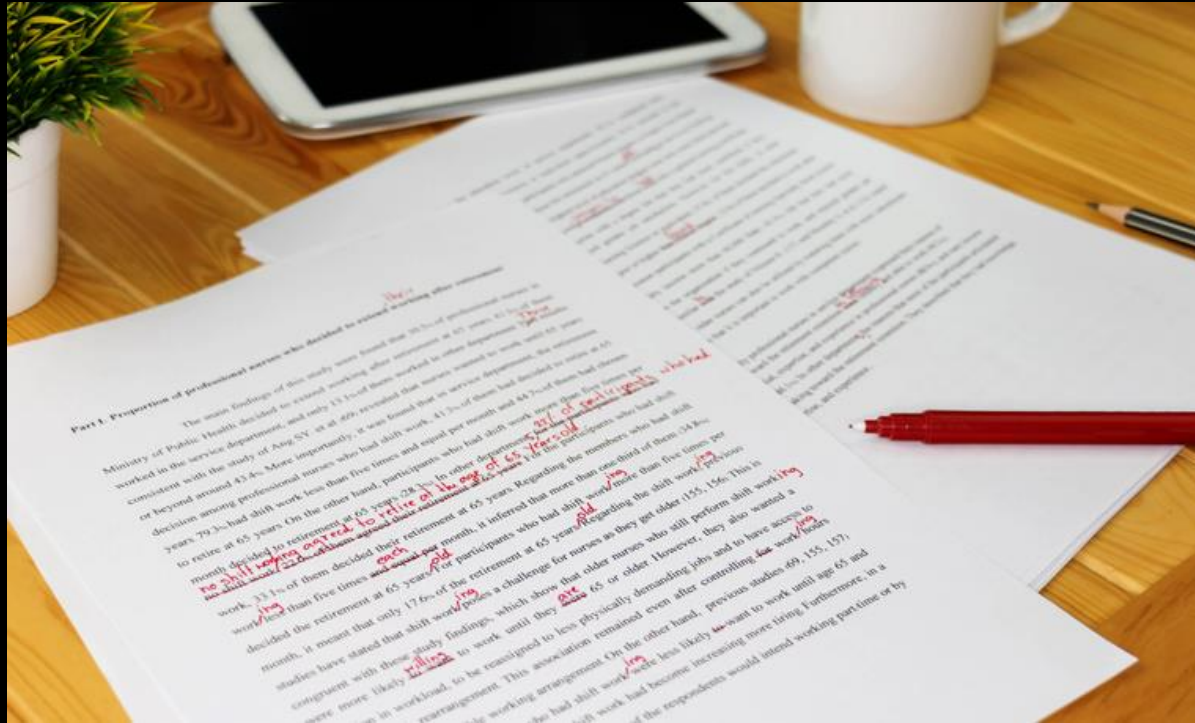
Schools should be a safe environment where students belong



Belonging and integrating the positive values generates a whirlpool of positivity



Provide constructive feedback which feeds reflection



The research

Nature of the research



Intrinsic case study

To understand individual and shared social meanings



Interpretative – against one's social construct



Four focus groups – all boys – ages 11-15 – Maltese



Middle-class families with good educational background



Children had quite a stable level of care

Focus groups



Parental consent was obtained – assured confidentiality and anonymity



Discussed – nature of the study and how it will proceed



Semi structured interviews



Care was taken so that all participants contributed in the discussion



Opportunity to add to the discussion through anonymous envelop

Data Analysis



Thematic analysis through NVIVO



Themes and hyper-themes where created



Findings



Pupils commented on the safe - caring environment that helps them to develop



Teachers were perceived as caring and friendly – helped students be themselves



Boosts self-esteem and trust in adults



Academic achievement was seen as a means to better themselves – appreciated enquiry based – hands on approach



Older students linked this achievement with future aspirations



Discipline was seen as a mutual agreement rather than obeying rules – this was more evident in older groups



School leadership was perceived as reachable and caring



Students long for face to face interaction – play



Spend a lot of time on social media



There was no distinction when discussing real and virtual friends



Realised that virtual reality shapes their interaction in real life



During the discussion the students referred to different ethnicities and beliefs (even online friends)



Values such as respect, a sense of communion, honesty, mutual help and appreciation for all transpired from the discussion

CONCLUSIONS

A.

B.

C.

Conclusion



Values and character is formed through various voices – family, peers, schools and the media



Every group has its own 'curriculum'



School has limited ethnic representation but students still discussed tolerance and inclusion



The positive culture sustains a language of values



Education to provide a narrative for social sensitivity