

# Values and Value Judgments in International Education

## *Brief Version*

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### **1....Introductory Considerations**

My talk will be focused upon some selected passages from an extensive paper which was published in the *Festschrift* for Tamás Kozma (Debrecen) last April. As regards the first and second parts I will confine myself to the following introductory considerations which have been elaborated as a revised and extended version of the published one.

In the first part of that extended version I have tried to discuss the concepts of values and value judgements as essential constituents in peoples' lives and their interpretation in religion, philosophy and social sciences. This approach has made me concentrate on the area of empirical instead of idealistic interpretations and on the position of value judgments between descriptive statements and normative judgments which, on their side, directly lead to directions for action.

In the second part the impact of these basic considerations have led me to devise a classificatory model to analyse the value issue in its special relation to education. I have identified two dimensions, namely

- The systemic dimension related to its external and internal determinants.
- The spatial dimension with its local, regional and global ranges (with a special view on the placement of the national range in between).

May it suffice to outline the contents of these two parts and let me realise my actual intention, namely to reproduce the third and concluding part (in the aforementioned revised version) and to talk about where and how educational research can be identified in the light of the value issue

## 2 Educational Research in the Light of the Value Issue

Let me start with the hypothesis that *descriptive* statements which are the results of empirical-analytical or historical inquiries, are not only legitimate. They are even to be considered as aims of the researchers' efforts. This hypothesis, however, cannot be spontaneously transferred to value judgements. Instead, their place in educational research can be considered in a triple approach dealing with the following stages:

- (a) research *on* values in education,
- (b) the issue of value judgment as part of the research process and its outcome.
- (c) the *researcher's* role as an author of value and normative judgments,

### (a) Research on Values

To conclude from the statement that there is an incontestable place of values in educational practice and educational theory, values as well as value judgments can be identified as to its *systemic* and *spatial* dimensions. The systemic dimension differentiates between external and internal determinants. While the external determinant is related to the social subsystems concerned (in the sense of system theory), the internal dimension is immediately defined by specific cultural and educational values. The special dimension, however, is based upon geographical ranges, in particular locally, regionally or globally identified. Moreover, it takes into account historical demarcations with regard to the temporal variability of values and value judgments.

Beyond these two dimensions educational research on values is also aimed at exploring and applying its methodical approaches. This is why the technical literature bears witness of an abundance of theories, argumentations and empirical findings. Within the approaches the *rating*, related to the individual case of a value judgment plays an important role. There is a wide spectrum of classificatory devices, whereby goal and content of the given project demand focal reference. For instance, *classroom-bound* inquiries, placed in the local range and aimed at seizing value awareness among pupils and teachers, are likely to give priority to knowledge acquisition on the one swing on the pendulum or to moral convictions on the other. The same questions can be investigated in the *regional* range. The more educational research tends to grasp *global* facts or developments, the more complicated and also incalculable the conditions will be with which empirically based analysis will have to cope,

due to the expanding availability of statistical data on the one hand and to their unreliability on the other. Consequently, within the global range research on values is dominated by theoretical questions and conceptions, based upon philosophical approaches and supported by historical studies. This is the realm where philosophers, sociologists, political scientists, historians and educationists have interdisciplinary discussions on the paramount problems concerning the traceability and existence of values and value codes as well as their acceptance in universal or pluralistic terms.

### ***(b) Value judgments as part of the research process and its outcome***

Whereas the researcher's competencies as an analyser of empirical findings at the descriptive level, can be commented in an absolutely affirmative way, the involvement of values in process and outcome of *inquiries per se* requires considerations which prove to be much more complicated. At this point we get confronted with the issue concerning the *freedom of value judgment* (Werturteilsfreiheit) tracing back to *Max Weber* whose theses concerning the *value freedom of science* have stimulated the international debate until today. It would overload the time limits of my presentation to reproduce the controversial debates on this issue. Let me only put forward some, as it seems, significant aspects which leads me to the third stage in my approach.

### ***(c) The researcher's role as an author of normative judgments***

The researcher's legitimacy of investigating values and giving value judgments includes the following fundamental question:: Is there a justifiable place of normative judgments as *part of educational research as such*, related to process and outcome? My attempt at answering this question anticipates our attention to the researchers as thinking and acting individuals. Their claim to pass normative judgments concluded from both their own analytical findings or from values judgments passed by other researchers is legitimised by their status of *democratic citizens*. It is their expertise which has provided them with a degree of responsibility which cannot be expected from citizens with less information and knowledge. The researcher will have to cope with this ambiguous privilege, when being asked to evaluate the plan or outcome of an educational innovation or a scientific project or to assess the standard of an individual school or research institute. The ambivalence of such a task will increase with the intricacies of the objective criteria and uncertainties of both value and normative judgments, in particular in cases where the evaluator is not *directly* competent. For instance, errors easily arise in cases, when a project dealing with international or intercultural comparison is submitted to educationists who have no or only insufficient insight into matters beyond their

national experience. (This comment may be regarded as a plea for the legitimacy of Comparative Education!)

To conclude from the present considerations, researchers are right to claim not only freedom of value judgment, but also free expression of normative judgments, as long as they are aware of the Rubicon between the valuing and normative domains and, moreover, as long as they articulate their crossing the bridge to their readers at the given moment. In principle, this statement was entirely acceptable, unless there were the 'stumble-stones' which must be taken into account and avoided. They appear at these two levels:

On the one hand one has to take into account that the researchers' analytical categories have been developed under *autobiographical conditions* and within a *socio-political and cultural framework* which have shaped their personal views, attitudes and actions. For instance, in the local or regional range within the spatial dimension of the value issue, inquiries on religious or sexual education are likely to be influenced by the researcher's bias which is reflected in how he formulates the objectives and constructs the questionnaire. As far as the *research process* and the *results* are concerned, in certain circumstances it may be difficult to draw a strict demarcation line between descriptive, value and normative levels *within* a statement or judgment, for instance in an – apparently harmless – sentence like this one: "*the educational law which recently passed the legislative procedures has pointed the way to an effective improvement of the pupils' motivations in the learning process.*" This sentence as such, in regard of pointing to the effectiveness of the legislative procedures, does not disclose whether it contains a *descriptive* statement perhaps resulting from the installation of a tested soft-ware programme or whether it *insinuates a value judgment* with regard to legally codified goals of the learning process. Finally, due to the disregard of what 'improvement' means in the given formulation, the sentence gives no insight into the researcher's – possibly existing – subjective expectations. Such expectations may be rooted in his religious faith or ideological view of life in the assessment concerned, as regards the pupils' intrinsic motivations of (or aversions to) learning. Let me quote an exemplary comment: What is the meaning – or estimation - of industry, punctuality, thoroughness or laziness in a given cultural configuration? Comparative observation gives ample evidence of differences. In this context the comment should be added that the PISA studies are certainly loaded with an ideological bias which traces back to the appreciation of the achievement-based society as a universal value *per se*, as devised by OECD as the initiator of the studies. This train of thought will be resumed with regard to the so-called 'secondary virtues'.

On the other hand, the value issue in educational research is determined by its focal *subject*, namely *education*, in particular its *goals* in the child's and adolescent's mental and moral learning process. At this level of discussion the linkage between *value* and *normative* judgment reaches its culmination. Can education be considered as a 'neutral' phenomenon oriented to the development of *human* personalities or, according to the concrete case or task, to the training of burglars, killers, terrorists or functionaries of a totalitarian system? The educationist's commitment to the *truly* "pedagogic creed", to cite the title of *John Dewey's* early essays, will doubtlessly affect not only the choice of his research subjects, but also methods and instruments to be applied and, finally, *style* and *argumentation* of his study or report. Above all, the 'true' educationist is distinguished by accepting and sticking to the paramount value of *the child's physical and mental inviolability* as a human being.

When including the educationist's professional ethos in our considerations as a necessary obligation, we inevitably end up by the statement that values and value judgments cannot be excluded from any educational research. This statement including the value judgment in itself opens the door to the differentiating question concerning *kind*, *degree* and *place* of value judgment in the framework of the educational disciplines and sub-disciplines and the corresponding methodical codes. At this point I want to make a stop, the more so I think I have stimulated further questions instead of having discussed them myself. Instead, allow me to end up with discussing some concluding thoughts.

### **3...Concluding Thoughts**

My concluding thought will concentrate on the relation between *value change* and *value validity*, both of these notions understood as general concepts of *universal* (global) *range*. Let me begin with an, admittedly fragmentary, comment on the 'decay of values' which is frequently articulated and deplored at many places all over the world and is mirrored in manifestations of different depth and clearness. In political speeches and everyday slogans, but also in educational debates this notion has often been degraded to a meaningless slogan. Consequently, *complaints* about the 'decay of values' are irrelevant, if they are proposed with the claim to *universal and unspecified validity*. They can, however, awaken a certain degree of plausibility when they are related to the *specific topic* of 'secondary virtues' which have a long past of appreciation, in particular as part of the Calvinist ethics. beyond the aforementioned qualities, they include *attitude to work*, *fulfilment of duties*, *etc.* In this context we get confronted with what *Michael Walzer* has identified as "thick" morality which is codified in specific variations as manifestations of *cultural diversity*.

In Walzer's considerations they must be distinguished from the higher-ranking level of "thin" morality which can be ascribed to *all* cultural configurations. It is universally based included at the bottom of *all ethical codes*. Consequently, it come near what is identified as core of basis human values comprising *respect of life and its inviolability, tolerance, solidarity and readiness to help our ,neighbours'* (in the broadest sense of this word). Complaints on violations of this core of values must not be disregarded as partial occurrences in the global and local society. In this sphere of life they must not be played down, due to our perception of the gloomy occurrences in our nearer or further environment: *criminality, abuse of drugs, and destruction of nature* on the one hand; *wars, genocides* or other manifestations of violence on the other. Without devaluating this perception, we should not misuse it, however, as an excuse for evading the following question. When articulating these violations in the current period, do we not tend to idealise or even glorify the past? Features of inhumanity and cruelty as just outlined can be identified in *all* historical periods. The manifestations we observe today are less related to values *per se* than to their *traditional mechanisms of protection* in form of institutions and rules. It is true that in *post-modern* societies values, when bound to the democratic and liberal norms of today, are exposed indeed to strong, increasing and by no means unsuccessful assaults and restrictions. On the other hand, in modern democracies legal norms have been 'liberalised' in favour of freedom to be claimed by the individual citizen. Furthermore, this trend can be also perceived in regard to the weakened position of the big Christian denominations in modern societies, in particular in Europe, as well as to the fundamentalist aberrations besetting the Islam as one of the world religions. Yet, losses of rules and norms which had been sustained by these mechanisms of protection in former periods, can hardly be equalised with any 'decay of values' in historical terms. On the contrary, there is growing evidence about common acceptance of basic human values *all over the world*, i.e. in all universal religions (through frequently beside, outside or even in opposition to the established Churches) and humanistic philosophies. Needless to add that the norms which are rooted in European *Enlightenment* have produced worldwide effects, and this process has not come to an end yet.

The perception of these universal commonalities is dependent upon great conceptual efforts, and their implementation in the political and educational reality meets with persistent and even radical resistance. The hardship of this process on the whole is not only caused by the power and terror of fundamentalist movements of various descent, but, the more so, by the observable trend to include the basic human values as the *common bottom* of the 'thin' morality in debates on *cultural* pluralisation as well as in equivalent initiatives and projects. In this context we get aware of their relative devaluation. This trend comes to the foreground, for instance, in how the interrelations between men and women, as individuals and members

of the society at various levels, among the generations, between individual and community, and finally between law and ethics are discussed and harmonised under different cultural patterns. Furthermore, the global range of cultural diversity should not close our eyes to *intra-regional* and even *intra-local* dichotomies, which, for example, determine the relations between *competition* as paramount value in market-bound societies and *equity of opportunity* geared to social justice and human co-existence in people's lives. Coping with these pluralities and their impacts on the value issue, including its normative extension, has become a fundamental challenge to education and, consequently, to educational research. As members of the scientific community in our genuine field we have to accept this challenge. Doing so, we should be fully aware of the overarching dichotomy which exists between scholarly objectivity and value awareness, the latter gaining its particular manifestation in people's commitment to *human rights and human dignity* in general and in the implementation of these human basic values in the educational domain.