

In articulating how to educate in values- educar en valores, I have to clarify to myself what influences I value, values I hold, and if those values are evident in my educational practice. Are my values constantly transparent in my practice, or is my practice at times in conflict with my values? In other words, what inspires me, and do I practice according to what inspires me?

I consider that my own experience at school as a child with very short concentration span, has a strong influence on my educational practice. It enables me to recognise the experience of growing numbers of dissatisfied children. As a child, whilst I never fully participated in what was happening in the classroom, I was always very aware of myself, and was terrified by questions. I could never remember what the teacher had just said, and was made to feel as if I was an offender. I experienced intense guilt for not being able to please my teachers, and I dreaded punishments. I was very vulnerable to what I perceived were teachers' looks of triumph as they caught me not paying attention.

My academic background as a pharmacist, together with strong family links with medical doctors, enabled me to approach education with a distinct sensitivity. I felt something was missing in the theoretical arena of learning that relates to how the body influences the functioning of the brain. So to incorporate theoretical and empirical knowledge of anatomy and physiology, with psychology and sociology in education I proposed the model multisensorial communication strategies. It aims at supporting educators in developing challenging and emotionally safe enabling environments where children learn by moving around, discovering and developing creatively. This model can constitute an alternative, a complement, or a theoretical framework to existing educational practices.

Finally, I am constantly seeking to exchange knowledge and experiences with other educators. First-hand accounts of educators who intentionally embody their values in their practice and take life as a continuum of transformations, constitute invaluable opportunities for myself to contrast, debate, and evolve as an educator. This text is itself a product of myself as an evolving educator.

My own childhood experience, my academic and family background and learning from other educators forms a basis for what I value in my educational practice: enabling pleasure; redressing power dynamics; promoting collaboration; and respecting and acknowledging difference. To illustrate how I incorporate these in my practice I shall use examples drawn from teaching mathematics to small groups of 6 year old children in England.

What does enabling pleasure in the classroom mean, and how does this inspire me? I believe that young children, like all human beings, thrive for pleasure. When faced with a new context- physical, intellectual, emotional, social- children readily explore that context to construct meanings about it. The exploration process is fuelled by tension generated in seeking to understand. By tension, I define a feeling that is intense and short in time. Tension either results in pleasure if a positive, rewarding outcome is reached, or in stress, if prolonged, frustrating and unrewarding. Stress is emotionally and physically unpleasant and can become harmful. It is therefore naturally avoided.

So let's go back to the child placed in a new context. If the new context becomes meaningful, there is a feeling of relaxation, and reward that is pleasurable. Pleasure has two powerful effects. It strengthens what was learnt about the new context, and also it contributes for the child to become receptive towards learning more about that and other contexts. But, if the child can only perceive the context in terms of unrelated, meaningless fragments, and after repeated attempts still fails to construct meanings, feelings of purposelessness result that contribute to stress. Feelings of pleasure and feelings of stress are associated to the secretion of a number of hormones that act in the body and in the brain, to produce powerful memories. Early memories of learning environments can condition young children's attitudes to learning that may affect all their lives.

For many young children formal education provides a wealth of pleasurable experiences. But for others, the pleasure of learning and achieving is denied, and life at school can become an endless zigzag of profoundly dehumanising experiences.

What emerges is that as educator I value most enabling environments where children and

educators feel pleasure- the pleasure to connect with the other; the pleasure to learn; and the pleasure to enable learning. So I could say that enabling pleasure is my prime value. However, I feel that pleasure cannot be fully separated from other valued principles that emerge in my practice as follows.

It always surprises me how research into learning focus primarily on how the brain works. The relationship between brain and how it is affected by the body, is frequently ignored. However, there is strong theoretical and empirical evidence of human anatomy and physiology that indicates that human beings are not biomechanically designed to be constrained by the physical postures imposed at school. Such postures include sitting down, and tilting the head forwards for long periods of time. Over the years, these can constitute prolonged aggression to the body and the brain, with implications for general health, and also for learning. A conflict emerges between what makes us feel good in our bodies, and socially constructed scenarios that effectively contribute to damages to the body.

Some children are particularly sensitive emotionally and physically to postural aggression, and strongly resent having to remain constrained. They often assume marginalising behaviours by either becoming trouble-makers and refusing to conform, or by simply switching off and developing convincing compensatory strategies. The right to learn with pleasure is taken away from these children who are in effect being discriminated against, since their learning needs are not being addressed. Having this in mind, I abolish chairs in my practice of teaching mathematics to 6 year olds. Activities are designed that start with the children stretching, and that depend on the children moving around with no shoes on, and learning as they interact with others. The shoes and other objects become part of the learning games-buying and selling, going to the bank- that I implement as realistic contexts for utilising mathematical relationships.

I value redressing power in the relationship with young children. This is because I am puzzled by how some educators unwittingly abuse and subvert the power that they hold, as they relate with children that in effect are in a position of vulnerability. The dysfunctional role-models provided by such educators are easily adapted and adopted by the children, and are quickly transferred into children's relationships with their peers. Instead of structures of co-operation and support, competition and anticipation of failure develop. I believe that healthy boundaries can be achieved without resorting to criticisms and exploitation of children's inadequacies. Trusting, fun, enabling environments can then be created.

I discourage criticisms in whatever learning environments I create with the children, and I involve all children in enabling the development of a friendly, welcoming environment. When criticisms arise, I simply stop the game and ask children to consider how what was said makes them feel. The children's response is usually that they feel bad about the criticism. I then check that we all want to learn mathematics with fun, and that we all need to collaborate towards making everyone else in the group happy. I also share with the children difficulties that I faced as a child, so that they can relate it with their own experiences. In my practice, I have noticed that by using supportive language and actions, children's fears of criticism due to making mistakes or being too slow disappear. Children become more daring in experimenting and being creative which is very pleasurable to observe as an educator.

I recently attended a memorable workshop, where I was introduced to practical games that promote collaboration, in contrast to games that are competitive. The concept is simple and highly inspiring: deconstruct traditionally competitive games, and creatively redesign them into games of sharing, co-operation, and support. These games can then evolve into demonstrations of love, or at least respect, for the other. The original aim is to build up relationships of trust and love between children engulfed by hatred, poverty, and death, for whom fear is so deeply entrenched that it establishes a strong fear of the need to be loved. I was very much impressed by accounts of work carried out with children from areas of war/conflict/political oppression.

Whilst I mostly work with children that have not endured such disintegrating experiences, I valued this principle of enabling pleasurable learning environments, and was very interested in turn to embody this in my own practice. In theory I knew that there are several ways of motivating children to perform, but had until then not experienced realistic and useful examples. Accounts from high achieving children support my concerns that competition can

be detrimental to both winners and losers. This is because despite the rewards and attention given by educators to high achievers, in the playground they are often teased and despised by resentful peers. This contributes to the development of distorted social interactions, and deep feelings of isolation.

In embodying collaboration in my practice with 6 year old children, I encounter challenges. The schooling system I experienced as a child expected universal recognition and admiration for the best, the fastest, the one who could remember all details, the most intelligent- usually the same child! So I am particularly aware of how my communication with the children is affected by my own entrenched experience and expectations.

So if a child is doing particularly well, I take the child's expertise as a resource for all to learn how things can be done differently, and at different speeds. And I do the same with slower children as I reassure all that I myself need lots of time to finish tasks, and that I have great pleasure in engaging in the tasks. I avoid comments such as "wouldn't it be good if you were all like X" were a hierarchy is blatant. In fact, I feel that as I evolve in my practice I am more aware of the subtleties of verbal and non-verbal communication.

Another challenge is that children often digress back into competitiveness especially if it is the first time they are learning through playing in a collaborative manner. So I remind them of the aim of being together, and that we all learn with fun, and that makes us all winners. In fact, all the children I work with are visibly having pleasure to learn mathematics in contexts that mimic real life.

In highlighting that no one individual is expected to win, and that we all are different and all approach the game differently, I am embodying the respect and value I hold for difference. Children learn what I value by experiencing the ways in which I discourage or encourage a multitude of stances as they develop relationships with each other and with me. And they learn with fun.

In this text I share evolving stances regarding what I value as an educator. I believe that enabling pleasure, redressing power dynamics, promoting collaboration, and respecting and acknowledging difference are great inspirations to me. These are present as I develop learning environments that enable children to play with fun, and allow them to experience different approaches to human relationships. I recognise strong influences in what I value from my childhood experience at school, my academic and family background, and learning from other educators who also thrive to embody their values in their educational practice. Recognising the influence of entrenched experiences is important to minimise conflicts between values and their embodiment in practice.

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