

A leadership challenge paper in support of UNESCO Futures of Education 2050

Transforming the Early Years through Moral Education

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As an educator, a researcher, a student of futures studies and a concerned parent, my quest is to rethink and reimagine moral education in the early years. I imagine a curriculum in which young children learn to become empathetic, who leaves footprints of love, compassion, forgiveness everywhere they go (Seidel, 2014, p. 13). The future of moral education could be very different in the year 2050 as we unpack our experiences with the global pandemic and face many unknown crises that are yet to come. This paper will outline how current approaches to moral education can be enhanced by applying some of the tools and thinking from the field of futures studies. Based on my experiences as a research-practitioner in moral education, this paper will offer insights into how moral education programs might be adapted to develop the foresight capacities of young people. First, the paper will use analytical framework to unpack some of the moral issues in Early Childhood Education curriculum. A Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) will be used to illustrate new ways that moral education can be rethought to include a focus on futures thinking. Following, the paper will provide examples of how these changes might be operationalized through a program called Early Futurist School (EFS). EFS is my vision of a pilot program in Toronto which can be scaled provincially then nationally. The paper will conclude with implications and further possibilities tied to the UNESCO 2050 imperative of learning to become.

UNESCO 2050 – *Learning to become*

Through this paper, I hope to contribute to the UNESCO 2050 initiative: Learning to become (forthcoming, late 2021). The Covid-19 crisis has revealed many inequalities and moral issues around the world, but it has also opened up the gateway to many possible futures. I believe decisions that are made in the context of the pandemic, by governments and policy

makers at local and global levels within the educational sectors, will have long-term consequences for the future of early childhood education. Policy makers, educators and communities must make high stake decisions that are guided by shared principles and visions of collective futures. Looking at the year 2050 and beyond, this paper will also suggest strategies for both educational policy and educational practice to adopt in early childhood education. This paper will envisage and analyze the multiple possible futures of technological, social, economic, and environmental disruption on early childhood education and how moral education in early years might both affect and be affected by these futures locally and nationally. I will consider the longstanding UNESCO commitment to a pluralistic, integrated and humanistic approach to education and knowledge as public goods. In sum, this paper will focus on rethinking the role of moral education in the early years, learning and knowledge in light of the tremendous challenges and opportunities of predicted, possible, and preferred futures.

Causal Layered Analysis

This paper employs Sohail Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) as an analytic framework to unpack moral dilemma in early years locally in Canada. The use of Causal Layered Analysis within futures studies is "not in predicting the future, but in creating transformative spaces for the creation of alternative futures" (Inayatullah, 1998, p. 815). CLA supports the design project of reimagining moral education in early years that is being proposed in the paper. In applying CLA to the study of moral education, the paper aims to offer UNESCO – *Learning to Become*, policymakers, administrators, early childhood educators, and curriculum designers and design theorists a methodology for disclosing and organizing school curriculum that is infused with morality.

Causal Layer Analysis is comprised of four analytic layers which allows for a problem and solution to be framed at various levels of social rhetoric/action such as: litany, systemic causes, worldview and metaphor. I will now present moral education using these components as both problem and solution to relearn and reimagine a new curriculum for early childhood education (see Figure 1.1).

Litany

International debates about what constitutes quality education are widespread. It is a well-versed exhortation that more attention must be paid to the moral character of our children and youth. Such appeals are prevalent in the mass media and typically “are justified by data reflecting the misdeeds of youth; e.g., crime, substance use, unwed teen pregnancies, suicide” (Berkowitz & Grych, 2000). While there may be many variations to this debate, the key idea is centred around the ability/capacity of the education system to promote good “values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and nurture creative and emotional development” (UNESCO, 2004, p. 17) in early childhood education. My professional experience has shown me that the early childhood education is typically not equipped with policies, specific criteria and program guidelines for educators to implement an effective moral education program which could provide young children with enough opportunities to become moral citizens.

Systemic causes

In the last several year’s three “top education periodicals (Educational Leadership, Phi Delta Kappan, Journal of Teacher Education) have stressed the importance of character, ethics, and spirituality in education” (Narvaez & Lapsley, in press). Yet, for all the increased interest in implementing character education among school districts, state legislatures and academic researchers (CASEL Connections, 2005), it is a striking fact that few teacher education programs

are intentionally and deliberately preparing preservice teachers for the task (Schwartz, Nucci & Narvaez, 2006).

Also, many educators are not able to provide positive socio-emotional learning environments for young children because of the lack of programs, resources and policies that supports moral development in young children. Similarly, the challenge is also to successfully implement character education so that it has the desired impact on children's character development (Bebeau et al., 1999). There are many obstacles to effective implementation of character education including a paucity of specialized programs and very limited training of pre-service teachers (Berkowitz, 1998; Jones, Ryan & Bohlin, 1999). Central amongst these challenges is the fact that there are no specific pedagogies or clear guidelines as to what teachers must do in the early childhood classroom to promote moral development.

Another systemic cause is the presence of two polar views on moral education: traditionalism and progressivism (Goodman, 2000). Many traditionalists tend to believe that moral values are simply universal and that they can be acquired through "hard" virtues such as discipline, restraint, and obedience. They also believe that behavioral instruction with some consequences for rule breaking will solve the problem. On the other hand, progressives, who represent the dominant voice in early childhood education, believe that moral values are variable and dependent on social context (Goodman, 2000). While most programs acknowledge the need for a character program, educational policies, curriculum developers, teacher training programs and professional development workshops have to provide specific guidelines to educators through explicit training in order to bring moral values to the forefront of early childhood education.

Rethinking Moral Education in Early Years

In order for moral education to thrive during the early years, the design framework presented in this paper will allow early childhood education to effectively implement moral education. In order to reimagine a new future for early childhood education, we need a curriculum that is reimagined and as Seidel (2014) describes we need a curriculum which does not waste children's time and it understands that each moment is important for its own time (p. 10). Similarly, this type of reimagined curriculum has no time to make children feel bad about themselves, about who they are, about their capacities as human beings. It only has time for having love, for being creative, for full and whole days of living life." (Seidel, 2014, p. 10). Likewise, we also need teachers who can reimagine and embrace a new curriculum which allows for children's morality to flourish and bring light to the humanity. We need school leaders, administrators, policy makers, teacher training programs all supporting the moral education.

The Discourse and Worldview

In order to envision alternative futures, CLA offers a way to investigate how the discourses we use to understand the idea may be complicit in our framing of the issue (Inayatullah, 2004, p. 17). Many educators feel like they are alone in bringing morality to the center of schools particularly in the early years of learning; educators and schools feel like their actions are insignificant. Governments should take the lead on moral education, whereas currently, governments are focused on funding academic programs to develop citizens who will eventually contribute to the economy.

Solution

A fully adequate theory of moral education must also be developed and addressed. Part of this work can be accomplished through the Causal Layered Analysis that follows. Likewise,

there must be discussion and discourse on the importance of moral education between stakeholders, educators, administrators, policy makers and governments so that they realize the importance of ethical moral education in young children. A solution to this may be the formation of an organization which focuses on quality training and education of those involved in the educational sector.

A case-based reasoning (Lee & Kolodner, 2011) can be incorporated in teacher training programs and the design of school curriculums to promote multiple perspectives. This contributes to the development of “cognitive flexibility” (Lee & Kolodner, 2011) which refers to the ability to think through a problem from multiple perspectives even when the problem has not been previously encountered (Lee & Kolodner, 2011). Similarly, the “futures approach is committed to helping us see reality as paradigmatic” (Inayatullah, 2020) and the use of such an approach in teaching training programs, along with the infusion of future studies in school curriculums and partnering with future studies research centers can help us enhance moral education and create a more sustainable world.

Myths/Metaphors

In order for moral education to be effective during the early years, a paradigm of ‘education as moral duty’ should be adopted, implicating policy makers, governments, administrators, educators and parents in the construction of learning experiences that are conducive and applicable to young learners. This can be achieved by applying the proposed design framework in the paper outlined in the following schema.

CLA Level

Problems and Solutions

Litany	Problem: Young children are not receiving quality moral character education to prepare them to become moral citizens Solution: High quality teacher training programs/ High Quality Early year's centers/ Funding for children's service learning programs/ Global partnerships/ Nature based learning/ Experiential Future Oriented Education
Systemic Causes	Causes: Nuclear families, Teachers beliefs, lack of quality preservice teacher training, lack of funding/ curriculum is not designed to promote application of moral values/ Conflicting beliefs about moral education Solution: Quality preservice training programs, redesign curriculum for teacher training programs/ redesign early childhood center's curriculum/ service learning
Worldview	Solution: Empower young children to become moral citizens Solution: Sustainable future oriented education Solution: Curriculum Infused with moral values Solution: Service learning through global partnerships with global schools.
Myth/Metaphor	"Education as moral duty" Solution: Everyone rise up and take charge of young children's moral education.

Figure 1.1 Inayatullah (2009)

Case Study – Early Futurist School

I envision an “*Early Futurist School (EFS)*” dedicated to children ages 4 to 10. It is a reimagined early childhood education program in Toronto equipped with a “sustainability oriented foresight curriculum as a transformative intervention for societies genuinely seeking to create economic and ecological well-being for future generations” (Chen, 2019, p. 80). Moral education at EFS means an ethical education that helps children make good choices between right and wrong. At (EFS) young children will begin to learn and understand some basic principles such as patience, gratitude, empathy, hospitality, selflessness, tolerance, love, generosity, sympathy, charity, truthfulness and kindness. Additionally, through EFS, I envision a

curriculum design which adapts the “experiential futures-based curriculum design approach” (Conle & Boone, 2015). Through the experiential approach, the authors Conle & Boone (2015) noted that the students reconstructed the meaning of events and enactment of moral values in their lives through experiential narratives. Students were also able to interpret their environment in new ways, and constructed visions of possible futures based on this curricular experience (Conle & Boone, 2015).

Accordingly, Hoffman’s (2017) respondents’ drawings of their preferred futures served very well as one of the points of departure for my vision of EFS 2050. According to Hoffman (2017), it appears that the use of media, arts, and design (Van Leemput, 2019) might add dimensionality and power to student’s images of the future, using an experiential futures-based curriculum design (Dunagan et al., 2019) or ethnographic experiential futures intervention (Candy & Kornet, 2019). Its core objective is to develop students’ moral values by linking foresight strategies with long-term socio-cultural prospects of the society. Through the creation of a future EFS center in Toronto, I envision a different future of young learners who care to lead a morally responsible life and are concerned about the overall wellbeing of society. In this design-oriented center, educators at this school seek to engage young learners in activities which promote “thinking about long-term futures and foresight strategies through play, active learning and gaming” (Hoffman, 2019).

Likewise, as a way to promote empathy and care for the environment, young learners will be taught about various environmental issues or moral crises that are predicted to happen in the future. They will then be given some foundational concepts from futures studies and asked to think about their own lives and the actions they will take today to shape the future they desire in 20 years’ time (Chen & Hoffman, 2017).

Designing Deeper Learning Experiences

It is worthy to note that young children at EFS may have difficulty expressing their foresight as their language and cognitive skills are still developing. However, educators at the center will be highly trained to design curriculum which promotes deeper learning experiences (Czerkawski, 2014), integrate technology, arts and other mediums to facilitate moral learning through creativity and imagination. Educators will also be encouraged to integrate problem-based learning, the combination of Goal-Based Scenarios (GBS) and Learning by Design (Lee & Kolodner, 2011) to design curricular units. Most studies on teaching strategies for moral education recommend a problem-based approach to instruction, which is considered to be crucial for young children's moral and prosocial development (Schuitema et al, 1998). The problem-based approach will help young children to engage in perspective taking. It will also allow students to internalize knowledge, communicate and share ideas, while broadening participation to create new futures knowledge and build agency as noted by Hoffman (2017).

Similarly, educators at the EFS center will undergo high quality training programs which teaches them essential skills, resources, lesson plans and nature-based field trips to inculcate the importance of moral education in early years. Likewise, a design thinking framework along with the Causal Layered Analysis (CLA) and similar future-oriented tools will be taught. This will allow educators to apply key resources, tools and skills towards helping their students develop moral values.

Caring School Community

Accordingly, in order to cultivate important ethical values and skills in young children, EFS curriculum will be infused with "Caring School Community" which will allow for "thematic

discussions” (Chen, 2019) on various moral issues such as environmental issues. Through this Caring Community, young children will be facilitated with deeply meaningful learning activities (Fullan & Langworthy, 2014, p.7) and discussions around environmental consciousness and other related issues. A caring community between young learners, educators, parents and other experts will be formed in order to foster collaboration. A caring relationship forms the bridge from adult to child through which mutual influence can take place (Greenspan & Shanker, 2005). A child who is cared for will likely care for others and engage as a citizen in the moral life of the community (Narvaex & Lapsley, in press). Likewise, educators in preservice training and young children at EFS will also take part in deeply meaningful reflective practice. Reflective practice will be integrated into children’s daily learning through drawings, images or digital diaries.

Service Learning

Likewise, in order for moral education to bloom at EFS, educators and students will also take part in nature based learning (Chen, 2019) or environmental based activities such as beach cleaning, tree planting, resource recycling, waste reduction and reuse, wetland preservation, alternative uses of disposable tableware, protecting mangrove forest, experiencing vegetarianism, and biking in nature (Hoffman, 2017). This will allow young children to engage in service learning. This type of reframing and reorientation of early childhood education will shift the learning paradigm from memorization of moral values to learning how to solve moral issues and dilemma’s locally and globally.

Local and Global Partnership

At EFS, moral values will flourish in both teachers and children through networking and partnerships with local and global schools and organizations. The global partnerships will help to

break the barriers that exist between education and the real world. This will be accomplished by taking young children's education into the real working world and by bringing the world into the classrooms. As example of this would be to bring professionals and other experts into the classroom to teach. Young children will be provided with opportunities to contribute or work on projects for real organizations such as food banks, Sick Kids hospital, UNESCO or other such local or global charity organizations. Through local and global partnerships young children and educators at the center will understand the real problems that people are facing so that their learning is shaped around existing problems rather than just learning from textbooks or videos. Thus, the caring school community, nature-based learning, service learning and global and local partnership's will all contribute to a positive development of socio-emotional learning in young children.

Socio-Emotional learning

Undoubtedly, EFS will strongly aim to support Socio-Emotional Learning (SEL) in young children by adapting its framework as a core methodology. SEL is an approach which helps youth develop and manage peer relationships, express and identify their emotions, understand the perspective of others, apply problem solving strategies, demonstrate empathy and make responsible decisions (Dusenburry & Weissberg, 2017). Through SEL, students will learn to internalize knowledge, communicate and share ideas, broaden participation to create new futures knowledge and build agency (Hoffman, 2019).

Implications for UNESCO *Learning to Become*

As one of the specialized United Nations agency for education, UNESCO should look into strengthening the global and regional leadership in early childhood education across the

globe. It must look into ways to further strengthen early year's programs, teacher training services, and responsive to the global needs of early childhood education. We need to mobilize resources and support, from developed countries in particular, towards reimagining early childhood curriculum infused with deep moral values, for new financing of teacher training programs and reassessment of early childhood educators' wages. Through moral education, our young children should be made aware of the inequalities, disparities, digital divide and moral issues around the world. Young children should be part of the global partnerships with schools from developing countries. There should be collaboration between educational sectors from the developed countries and the developing countries. We urgently need investment and structural change so that moral crises do not grow into larger, long-lasting problems.

By supporting EFS (Early Futurist School) and its proposed model of sustainability-oriented foresight curriculum, UNESCO, *Learning to Become* can help early childhood education transform into a future oriented school which aims to make the future better. Moreover, even though values education is of significant political interest in many countries, there has been limited attention paid to how young children learn moral values in the classroom. Educational programs should support moral values for active citizenship (UNESCO, 2004) but how, and if, those outcomes are to be achieved appears to apply more to primary and secondary schooling, than the early years (Brownelle et al, 2012). Hence, adopting the vision of EFS has strong implications for immediate steps for curriculum design and teacher training programs in Ontario. In order to be assured that the moral formation of students will be in good hands, UNESCO can ensure that “pre-service teachers are prepared to be outstanding teachers as character development is an outcome of effective teaching” (Narvaex & Lapsley, in press). I hope that UNESCO will cherish and embrace my vision. I hope UNESCO will realize that “a

Curriculum for Miracles knows that life always unfolds from here and now, from this moment lived well with generosity and goodness. It does not waste children's time and it understands that each moment is important for its own time. This curriculum has no time to make children feel bad about themselves, about who they are, about their capacities as human beings. It only has "time for having love, for being creative, for full and whole days of living life." (Seidel, 2014, p. 10).

Indeed, teachers with positive attitudes about students are more likely to foster student achievement and ethical behavior (Haberman, 1999). Similarly, teacher training programs have to rethink and realize the criticality and strong necessity to integrate strategically and explicitly future oriented thinking, service learning, global partnerships and resources, as well as support programs and training in designing curriculum that is infused with moral values. At the level of curriculum design, early childhood educators have to be resourced to provide effective deeply meaningful learning experiences which will allow young learners to flourish and become moral citizens.

Conclusion

This paper urges UNESCO 2050 to embrace the reorientation of early childhood education by advancing the need for quality training of preservice teacher and retraining of existing educators in early childhood education programs. Likewise, there is a need to redesign educational systems, curricula and classroom spaces with authentic problem-based, integrative learning, and a culture of forward-thinking and visioning for sustainable alternative futures. Most importantly, for Chen (2019) and Hoffman (2017), ECS can become the focus for change agents for fostering alternative moral values and sustainable behaviors. Finally, there is a demonstrated need for moral education as "over the last few decades a gradual increase has been seen in the

so-called post materialist values, which emphasize individual autonomy, self-expression and environmental stability at the expense of goals related to economic survival and physical security (Chen, 2019). Hence, when a child becomes virtuous, truthful, patient, grateful, responsible, empathetic and compassionate we will see positive outcomes in the future and as such will support the vision of UNESCO to help support from the early years and beyond, a “curriculum for miracles which is ecological, bursting forth from the understanding that the more diverse an environment is, the more creative and emergent the possibilities (Siedel, 2014, p. 13).

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