Educating Young People about Society in China, England, Mexico and Spain:

similar approaches to values education from different contexts

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Abstract

Following remarks about the nature and significance of values and values education, generally and more specifically in China, England, Mexico and Spain, we explain the methods used to analyse official policies that apply to moral education, citizenship education and character education. We find similarity across the documents regarding five values-related themes: justice and the rule of law; harmony and tolerance; diversity and non-discrimination; international understanding; and equality. These themes emphasise understanding and knowing, with limited consideration of implementation and privileging of dominant values and contextually relevant considerations. We suggest that across countries there are attempts to develop personally responsible citizens (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004) and that further work is needed on how these documents are interpreted in practice by educators.

Key words

Values education; China; England; Mexico; Spain

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Introduction

Values education, unsurprisingly given its intimate connection with fundamental issues about societal and personal norms, is contested. There are fundamental, often divergent, philosophical perspectives and recommendations about pedagogical practice where political and moral values - including knowledge and skills - are to be learned (Lovat et al., 2010; Thornberg, 2008). Halstead and Taylor (2000) implicitly explain why this contestation occurs by suggesting that values are 'the principles and fundamental convictions which act as general guides to behaviour, the standards by which particular actions are judged as good or desirable' (p.169). In this article, we are focusing on education as officially promoted in China, England, Mexico and Spain. We are exploring formal statements about explicit and/or implicit school-based education that aims to promote student understanding and knowledge of values, and to inculcate the skills and dispositions of students so they can enact particular values as individuals and as members of the wider community (Lovat, Toomey, & Clement 2010; Commonwealth of Australia 2003, p.2). Our research focused on identifying relevant official documents (selected according to criteria explained below under the sub heading 'analytical procedure') and completing a thematic analysis of them. We were influenced by approaches to discourse analysis that explore socio-political issues relevant to values education in different contexts. We argue, as a result of this analysis,

that the official documents from these very different contexts are, surprisingly to us, rather similar. There is in the documents we analysed from four countries, commitment to a personally responsible approach highlighting five key values (justice and the rule of law; harmony and tolerance; respect for diversity and non-discrimination; intercultural understanding; and equality) with little attention paid to implementation and pedagogy. The documents vary across countries in terms of contextually specific references rather than substantive difference. While the documents contain contextually specific references this is part of an overarching commitment to a common set of values and is focused on achieving a particular type of outlook by learners. This consensus was stronger than we expected. In the final part of this article we speculate on the meaning of that finding. We suggest there may be an overarching commitment to the maintenance of power and authority over the recognition of fundamental difference regarding values. In the development of official statements policy makers may refer to contextual distinctiveness in ways in which there may be a targeting of similar outcomes across countries that are very different.

Approaches to Values Education

Our awareness of strongly held differences in types of values and preferences for their meaning informed our investigation into the values that are promoted through official documents. There are different kinds of values. There are worldly values that have a material basis (in money, power, status); the mental that depend on our capacity to understand and to feel; and the moral that are characterised principally through relationships and which relate to such matters as justice, freedom, love (Skulason

1995, pp. 143-145).We are, generally, concerned with the latter 2 of these types. There are several frameworks of values education (Halstead and Taylor, 1996; Solomon, Watson, and Battistich, 2001). Broadly, the 'traditional' approach focuses on the transmission of taken-for-granted dominant values, customs and traditions of a society by direct teaching (Solomon et al., 2001). It allows one to internalise societal norms to shape the behaviour of members of a given society (Cox, 2013; Marcus and Fisher, 1999) and as such is an intrinsic element of culture as well as an extension and/or a way of ensuring the transmission of cultural knowledge and practices (Thornberg, 2008; Eagleton, 2013). It reflects political tendencies, government interests, morality, religious beliefs, societal norms and ideologies (Cairns, Gardner and Lawton, 2013) and so attitudes and behaviours are shaped (or, attempted) congruent with historical context (Schwartz, 2012; Silver, 2013). In formal education settings, the main aim is to discipline students and form persons with character and virtues in dominant values to conform to the legitimated authority. The 'constructivist' approach, by contrast, 'emphasizes children's active construction of moral meaning and development of a personal commitment to principles of fairness and concern for the welfare of others through processes of social interaction and moral discourse' (Solomon et al., 2001: 573). This approach favours debates and discussion to analyse moral dilemmas and promote active participation in decision-making processes. The 'critical' approach emphasises the need to question the morals that influence schools, especially in the form of hidden curricula and school discipline and examines the legitimacy of dominant values (Bernstein, 2000; Giroux and Penna, 1981; Jones, 2009).

The above does not reflect all perspectives. Jones (2009) differentiates the critical approach from a postmodern orientation to values education: the former emphasises the engagement of students in issues related to political activism and social justice and the latter focuses on deconstructing social values and practices by questioning hegemonic ideologies. Perspectives on values may be seen in the debates within specific fields. Some, for example, have made a distinction between 'soft' and 'critical' global citizenship education (Andreotti, 2006); the former is based on humanitarian normative principles of helping powerless others and framed around values of harmony and tolerance, while the latter is based on political normative principles of social justice and challenging structures and power imbalances. Westheimer and Kahne (2004) discuss the 'personally responsible citizen', the 'participatory citizen' and the 'justice-oriented citizen'. The first is a 'soft' model in which people obey laws and pay taxes, the second encourages active citizenship, such as organising events to help others, while the third proposes an education that seeks to explore cause of the issues so as to challenge injustice. Bryan (2012) argues that formal education reproduces values that can tend to encourage 'personally responsible citizenship'.

There is a need to consider which (if any) of the above approaches are relevant to official education policies. We wish to add to the research that has been conducted in this field and began this work because of a desire to identify whether government policies in different socio-cultural contexts would be associated with a set of particular values in education. Some of the currently available literature relevant to our focus is confined to European contexts (e.g., Veugelers, de Groot and Stolk (2017), or, although having a wider geographical reach, has a wide ranging purpose and so does not principally target values education (e.g., ICCS 2010). Many studies focus on the

philosophy of values and values education, the understandings and perceptions of teachers and others, or the ways in which professional activity may take place

Methods

In this section we state and explain our research questions, and describe and discuss why we focused on 4 particular countries and how we selected and analysed the documents that we analysed.

Research Questions

Our research question is 'what does official documentation tell us about values education?' In exploring official documents we wanted to know what key words mean, what are the issues about those key words and how are those words applied. We wished to explore whether there were any links between the values education in official documents and the approaches to values education as discussed above.

Sampling of countries

We are not aware, however, of research on the analysis of official documents from the 4 countries of Spain, Mexico, England and China which focuses on values education in the curriculum. The countries we have selected are not representative of types. Rather, and simply, we recognized that the economic, cultural, political and social variations within and across these countries play a key role in influencing and shaping not only the values in these societies/countries, but also the teaching of such values. As a result, we were interested in exploring the extent to which these variations influence and/or are reflected in policy documents. This is to say, what do these variations tell us about values education? This is directly connected to our research question (see above).

We expected that there would be differences between the documents. These four countries have very different approaches to and experiences of political democracy; colonialism and post-colonialism; 'east' and 'west'; diversity; and equality. Mexico and China are republics; the UK and Spain are constitutional monarchies. Economic variation and educational performance (as shown by PISA data) vary strongly across these 4 countries. These labels that indicate difference are at best only generally indicative and not mutually exclusive. Of course, there are connections between these countries but even here, links are often indicative of clashes of ideology in which barriers are being crossed and new ground explored. There have been links and influences involving high profile individuals (e.g., Bertrand Russell's and John Dewey's visits to China, 1919-21). In relation to colonialisation (attempted and achieved, in part or whole) there is clearly a connection between Spain and Mexico, and also between Britain and China. Migration is a current priority and concern as well as being historically based (in the atrocity of slavery, Spain traded people from China to Mexico and the UK from Africa). The European tradition relevant to colonisation is pertinent to values education, influenced by Christianity. In China and Mexico, revolutionary politics and established ethical / religious positions (Confucian harmony and Christianity) occur in societies influenced by socialist principles. Another connection between the countries is revealed through the work of Hofstede (1980). Cultural Dimensions Theory indicates that China and Mexico are regarded as collectivists (relatively tightly knit frameworks in which individuals expect people in their social groups to look after them) while England and Spain are individualists (weaker social frameworks). We were motivated by the sense that there could be some

potential value in beginning to explore a comparative analysis regarding values promoted in contemporary society through education that emerged from these historical contexts. Given the differences between these countries (and it would be possible to have sampled another 4 countries) we expected there to be differences in statements about values education.

Analytical Procedure

In our analysis of official documents, we recognized that we would largely proceed descriptively but nevertheless wished to be as thorough as possible. The discourse-analytic process is concerned "with the ways in which language constructs objects, subjects and experiences, including subjectivity and a sense of self" (Stevenson, 2004, p. 18). There are several approaches to discourse analysis (DA) including the post-structuralist, post-Marxist, critical, critical realist and so on. Our discussions prior to the implementation of our descriptive approach, principally focused on the Foucauldian (see Parker, 1999) and the social constructionist (see Wetherell and Potter, 1992) as suggested by Stevenson (2004). Whilst the latter suggests that there is nothing beyond the text and is concerned with what speakers achieve through discourse (Billig, 1991; Holstein & Gubrium, 2013), Foucauldian DA is interested in the way in which the reproduction of relations of power, is embedded in the position of the speakers who produce the discourse, suggesting that "words and phrases are organised into systems and institutions" (Stevenson, 2004: 20). We do not claim, however, that we have undertaken an in-depth Foucauldian study (or, that we have employed an in-depth analysis based on any one particular theoretical model). Rather, we have established a simple thematic analysis. We were aware of the existence of various models of DA and

we felt particular influence from politically framed approaches. Our largely descriptive analysis has been applied as we attempted to identify the interplay between the way in which socio-historical and cultural factors influence policy-making and how these in turn, are worded in relation to values portrayed in the discourse of official documents (Fairclough, 2013) and embraced through education to promote certain kinds of citizens.

We explored research on values education in the four countries of China, England, Mexico and Spain (e.g., Soriano, Franco and Sleeter, 2011; Yuste and Atienza, 2015; Zhang, 2012; Arduin, 2015; Bates, 2016; Village and Francis, 2016; Díaz-Barriga, 2006). Each author identified relevant education policy and curriculum documents from his or her country of expertise, focusing on both primary/elementary and secondary/high school level. We decided that each person would use the following criteria for document selection. The documents would be:

- produced by the government

- perceived by the relevant team member as being significant in a national context

- likely in our judgment to be something that teachers would be aware of

- produced roughly within the last 2 decades (i.e., 1997-2018) but preferably from the last 5-10 years in order to allow us to focus on contemporary society and capture key issues and events including advisory reports, changes of policy, changes of political structure (including national boundaries)

- relevant to values education in relation to general political developments (e.g., in the UK the Prevent policy), curricular initiatives (e.g., in Spain the changes to the national curriculum), and pedagogical guidance.

The above shows that we employed a common system across the team to inform document selection about time, status, provenance and academic and professional relevance. Within that we were prepared to accept documents that might be addressed to different audiences and be perceived in precise terms to have different functions. There was necessarily a measure of individual judgment about which particular documents were selected.

There were specific challenges. For example, in the case of Mexico documents published by the Ministry of Education (Secretaria de Educacion Publica) were obviously relevant although in some cases these were hard to find. Santibañez, Vernez & Razquin (2005) have reported the lack of published and reliable data in Mexico's educational system given that this data is usually hidden/controlled by the MoE. As such we had to make judgments about which documents we would choose on the basis of what might not an entirely comprehensive knowledge base

We did not see any value in creating artificial and inappropriate quotas by requiring each team member to select the same number of documents. We accepted that our approach would be reflective of the different approaches to document production. Certain countries produce more than others (and here the number of Chinese documents is larger than that for other countries). The imbalance in numbers of documents did not

create any difficulties in our analysis as we were not simply counting incidences relevant to our questions but rather coding based on analytical categories.

Key words were identified by each team member and then agreed across the team as the values that were officially cited in at least two of the countries. This was done over a period of time allowing for initial discussion, individual reflection on the documents to be selected and collaborative decision making about the final list. We do not pretend that the words in our final list were discussed so that we would be able to achieve a philosophically robust rationale. But our individual reading and our collaborative discussions suggested to us that these words seemed to us to capture what we each felt could allow us to analyse our own national documents and that these terms were meaningful not only in that one context. The list allowed us to capture political, economic, social and cultural matters; private and public considerations; issues of collectivity (such as harmony) and individuality; 'western' and 'eastern'; civics and citizenship; key traditions including the civic republican, liberal and Confucian; and educational perspectives that were radical and conservative, to do with inculcation and opportunities for clarification for morals or other matters. The list of key terms would not stand analysis as a complete characterisation of social studies education in recent decades but it is a conceptually based list that is inclusive, comparatively meaningful and allows for focused but open-minded analysis.   Our key words were:

- Freedom

- Human Rights

- Prosperity

- Democracy (participation)

- Equality

- Justice

- Rule of law

- Patriotism

- Dedication/honesty/kindness

- Harmony/tolerance/civility(politeness)

- Solidarity/consideration

- Socioeconomic development/civilization

- Respect for diversity/non-discrimination/non-prejudice

- Intercultural understanding

- Peace/non-violence

For each key word, each member of the group answered three questions for their documents:

What does this mean?

- How is it referred to in the curriculum document?

- Are there examples to demonstrate what it means? (What are the contextual factors that underpin the way that values are interpreted?)

What are the key issues about it?

- Does it relate to particular contextual political moments or ideological perspectives? (What ideologies are implicit or explicit in the documents?)

- Does it focus on local /national/regional/ international level (for example does it mention solidarity in terms of global citizenship or only national or democracy at national or regional level etc.)

- What evidence is there about who decides on the appropriateness and application of the values? (Who controls the orientation of values education?)

How is it applied?

- How are each of the terms referred to? For example, does the policy say 'respect human rights' or 'recognise human rights'; does it say we should 'understand justice' or should we 'enact/take part in justice'? (i.e., is it about knowledge and understanding; attitudes and value development; or action and behaviour based on values development?)

- What practical approaches to the teaching of these values is explicit within the documents? (How is values education to be implemented?)

A nationally-specific paper was produced by each member of the team. Careful consideration was given to issues of translation (e.g. Piazzoli, 2015; Temple and Young, 2004). Each member of the group is fluent in the language of the country they investigated; each had experienced lengthy periods of residence and/or citizenship in that country. All members of the group are fluent in English. Three members were fluent in Spanish and English and were able to discuss and check each other's interpretations. Only one member of the group had good working knowledge of Standard Mandarin (Putonghua) and English and, as such, additional checks were made

in discussion with another fluent speaker of both languages. Several drafts of the overarching analysis document were produced. Our approach to collaborative analysis of the documents which had been published in a total of 3 languages was informed principally by reference to research literature available only in English. This limited the perspectives that were brought to the analysis. There were of course contributions to our discussions drawing explicitly or implicitly from literature in Spanish and Putonghua as well as English.

Cross-case Analysis of Values

There is across countries, a sense of hierarchical relations with movements (political, social, economic and cultural) emerging from a concern to achieve the 'good' society. Political approaches and ideologies give rise to different emphases across the four contexts, with socialist, capitalist, colonial, and religious influences respectively having some predominance in the development of education in the four contexts. There are significant differences around individual and/or collective characterisations of the perceived influential agents of change and the extent of the acceptance of tolerance and diversity. However, while the specific contexts of the four countries vary extensively there are striking similarities in the documents. The need for personal development through education is prominent in all four countries, and in each case this contributes to national goals, whether in terms of reproducing national identity, instilling religion or promoting economic growth. All emphasise knowledge/understanding, attitudes/values, behaviour/action, and all refer in some way to the formation of 'responsible' citizens. The five values that emerged across all four contexts were: justice and the rule of law; harmony and tolerance; respect for diversity and non-

discrimination; intercultural understanding; and equality. We examine each in turn below.

Justice and the rule of law

Justice is mentioned (variously) in all four countries as a key element of values education. In China, justice is a Socialist core value, relating to proportional equality for responsibilities taken. The Ministry of Education states that 'to know to obey rules and maintain social justice are important to social stability' (2011). Students should 'know that law is a special code of conduct and everyone is equal before the law'. Moreover, students should 'know [that] any behaviour against the law will lead to punishment by law' and they are encouraged to know 'how to use law to protect the legitimate rights and interests' (Ministry of Education, 2011). Since 2016 the compulsory curriculum for values education in primary and middle schools has been titled 'Morality and Rule of Law' (Ministry of Education, 2016).

In England general curriculum documentation is part of a regulatory framework and as such justice is often implied. Insistence on fundamental British values means pupils should be 'aware of the difference between the law of the land and religious law' (HM Government 2011, p.4). Teaching standards include a statement that personal beliefs should not be expressed in ways which exploit pupils vulnerability or which 'might lead them to break the law' (Department for Education 2011, p.14). The National Curriculum for citizenship describes the need for a sound knowledge and understanding of the role of law and the justice system in society and how laws are shaped and enforced.

In Mexico there is a close relationship between what is described as justice and respect for the law, and fairness; that no one is above the law. The rule of law is one of the eight key competencies in the Mexican curriculum. There is adherence to a guiding principle 'involving the unrestricted observance of the law'.

In Spain there is explicit mention of understanding the concept of justice and fostering values of justice. Justice is a key competency and a core value but the implications of that are not made clear. Respect for the rule of law is mentioned as a core value. The focus is on *understanding* the codes of conduct accepted by society, but not explicitly in terms of attitudes or behaviour.

Generally, across the four countries there seems to be more focus on *understanding* the rule of law and *knowing* what is expected of citizens, rather than how this looks and feels in practice or any exploration of how different behaviours and attitudes fit within this. The only sign of a disposition is the expectation that students will learn to respect the law. There is no explicit mention of ways in which ideas of law and justice might be practically enacted by students, although it is perhaps possible that China and Mexico reflect a more traditional approach to values education while England and Spain are, arguably, promoting a more constructivist stance.

Harmony and tolerance

In order to explore meanings across different linguistic contexts, we looked at promoting harmony and tolerance along with civility and politeness. We found that in China the national curriculum explicitly mentions the need to 'learn to think about others' positions, understand and tolerate, respect and help others, and think for the

good of others.' (Ministry of Education, 2011). This connects both with the Confucian five constant virtues of benevolence, righteousness, courteousness, wisdom, honesty, (Dai Mucai, 2011, pp. 39-44) and the urging by Mao of Serving People in a full-hearted manner, with complete~~ly~~ impartiality, and utter devotion to others (Wu Xinwen, 2009, p. 76).

In England these concepts are most clear in relation to the Department for Education's guidance about Character Education where neighbourliness, community spirit, tolerance and respect are emphasised. This may indicate a commitment to cultural practice and an avoidance of the political although there are also references relevant to harmony in the emphasis in citizenship education on social and moral responsibility. The Prevent Strategy (HM Government 2011, pp.5-6) highlights the need for 'mutual respect' and 'tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs'. Those training as teachers are required to meet standards involving: 'treating pupils with dignity', 'building relationships rooted in mutual respect', 'showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others'

The Mexican documentation refers to the importance of solving everyday conflicts without using violence, favouring dialogue, cooperation, negotiation and mediation. Harmony and tolerance are included in the eight key competencies in terms of resolving conflicts and social and political participation; acting towards the common good and being tolerant of difference.

Article 11 of the Spanish decree states that: 'secondary education should contribute to the development of students to allow them to … practice tolerance'. There is a clear focus on knowing how to communicate in a constructive way and to *demonstrate*

tolerance. This is a key competency in terms of behaviour and a value to be fostered rather than simply understood.

Across these contexts, little is written about implementation but there does seem to be reference to how we behave in everyday life in a way that acknowledges tolerance and civility. In England harmony and tolerance are promoted through ethos and behaviour in the classroom and community and in Spain and Mexico it is a key competency in terms of behaviour, with the Spanish documents discussing practising tolerance and the Mexican documents discussing social and political participation. In China there is reference to our actions towards others.

Respect for diversity and non-discrimination

Respect as recognition of diversity and the need to reject discrimination and prejudice is at least implicit in each country. In China the Ministry of Education (2011) states the need to 'know the diversity and richness of culture, respect different cultures and customs, communicate in a friendly way to people of other nations and countries with an equal attitude'. There are references within documents to the value of observing the cultural life of different areas, groups and classes and appreciating the cultural essence of different nations, confirming the value of cultural diversity and respecting cultures (Ministry of Education, 2004).

Respecting other people is a 'fundamental British value'. Much of the input regarding diversity and non-discrimination comes from the Prevent strategy, which stresses the importance of recognising that 'the ideology of extremism and terrorism is the problem; legitimate religious belief emphatically is not' (HM Government 2011, p.1).

This is different from the way that diversity is discussed in the Mexican documents where there is explicit mention of respect and *appreciation* of diversity. There is the need to recognise equality of people's dignity and rights and to respect and appreciate the differences in their way of being, acting, thinking, feeling, believing, living and co-existing. In Mexico diversity is one of the eight key officially-declared competencies, an inherent condition to any form of life and is expressed in aspects such as age, sex, religion, physiognomy, customs, traditions, ways of thinking, tastes, language and personal and cultural values. The General Law of Education (Ley General de Educación *(LGE)*) emphasises the need for students to have an awareness of linguistic diversity as well as respect for indigenous communities.

In Spain, the curriculum focuses on the importance of understanding 'concepts of equality, non-discrimination (between women and men and different ethnic or cultural groups), society and culture' as well as 'a disposition which overcomes prejudice and respects difference.' There is mention of sexual orientation requiring knowledge and value of 'the human dimension of sexuality in all its diversity'. Respecting diversity is a key competency for knowledge and attitudes. There is limited inclusion of this as behaviour in relation to an emphasis on 'demonstrating tolerance'. Diversity between ethnic and cultural groups is mentioned in terms of understanding.

China and England emphasise knowing about cultures and understanding extremism. Mexico and Spain seem to work with a wider definition of diversity and discuss the importance of dispositions that overcome prejudices, which implies more of a focus on attitudes than knowledge, and to some extent leans towards promoting particular types of behaviour.

Intercultural understanding

Intercultural understanding is implied throughout much of the documentation, from the need to promote tolerance and diversity and the importance of world peace to the ability to compete in a global market place. In China the emphasis is on improving 'the consciousness of communicating and dialoguing with other civilizations in the world' and 'the consciousness and will of the world's peace and development.' (Ministry of Education, 2011). In England reference to intercultural understanding is now less explicit than it once was since the national curriculum for citizenship has been changed in 2014 (the explicit focus on identity and diversity has been removed). But there are other references, principally in the statement of fundamental British values, of the need for mutual respect.

In Mexico ideas of respect for diversity and appreciation of dignity are promoted at national and global levels and are a key part of citizenship formation in a plural society. In Spain there is explicit reference to understanding the 'intercultural and socioeconomic dimension of European societies' and knowing, valuing and respecting 'the basic aspects of the culture and our own history and that of others, such as artistic and cultural heritage'. The focus is on knowledge rather than attitudes or behaviour, but intercultural understanding is a key competence. There is explicit mention only of European societies (there is no mention of places outside of Europe in the entire curriculum).

Again, we see a general focus on knowledge about intercultural competence, where the value of intercultural understanding is central. Only China refers to the importance of this understanding for peace and development and improving 'the consciousness of communicating and dialoguing with other civilizations in the world'. There are no

examples in any of the countries about exploring what we mean by intercultural competence or any evidence of consideration of the factors that impact upon it, or indeed, how it could be put into practice.

Equality

Equality is implied throughout all the documents. In China, the focus is on equality in terms of legal status and 'the right to participate and develop equally' (Ministry of Education, 2011). In England, equality is not highlighted in most curriculum documents but there are references to significant legislation, principally the Equality Act of 2010 which brings together anti-discrimination laws. In Mexico, the right to participate in the design of inclusive and equitable forms of life and to commit to common projects are emphasised. Cultural values are mentioned as a way of expressing equality.

In Spain, the concept of equality is connected with non-discrimination; students should 'understand concepts of equality and non-discrimination between men and women and other ethnic or cultural groups' and 'understand concepts of equality, justice and citizenship'. Gender equality and equality for disabled people are emphasised. Political pluralism is mentioned. Equality is a key competency in terms of knowledge and also a core value in the curriculum documents. Generally, the focus is more on understanding rights and the concept of equality, rather than attitudes or behaviour.

Discussion

The five areas referred to above are characterised in ways that reflect three overarching points. We suggest that there is general commitment to the personally responsible

citizen and so of the various possible approaches outlined earlier in this article, we are making a particular link with one of the options provided by Westheimer and Kahne (2004).

Our first overarching point is that there is greater emphasis on understanding and knowing about the rule of law and what is meant by diversity, than values such as respect, intercultural understanding or equality. The only value that consistently is discussed as an attitude and behaviour in and through education is tolerance. We argue below that this approach indicates a particular perspective on values education. An emphasis on knowing not acting and on tolerating rather than respecting may be characterized as a conservative and conformist stance.

Secondly, we argue that implementation both generally and regarding pedagogy is given limited space. Indeed, there is barely any acknowledgement of active learning or participative approaches to exploring some of these complex issues in these documents. The exceptions to this are the references to community service in China and volunteering in England. Again, although our discussion of what this means is developed more fully below we wish to note here that the absence of professional guidance is unlikely to mean that there is encouragement of radical action. Rather, it is likely that the policy documents are intended to provide broad based signals about the need to promote personally responsible behaviour.

Thirdly, key contextually relevant values are noticeable in the education documents we analysed. This is particularly clear in China where both Confucian and Socialist ideals are explicitly reinforced through the documents. In Spain the role of the Catholic Church on education can be demonstrated, despite formally being separate from the State. In England the role of education to generate a workforce and grow the economy

is clear. The emphasis in England on equality and education is muted in its framing in general legislation. In Mexico, there seems to be an emphasis on diversity, justice and democracy, but no explicit reference to pre-Hispanic values or indigenous knowledges. In all four countries economic productivity and employability are rooted deeply in education. Social dimensions, such as the extent to which education encourages multi-culturalism or promotes values of tolerance in the wake of terrorist attacks or violence in society, as well as economic crises and austerity programmes and the role of social movements are highlighted.

These three overarching points mean that a particular characterisation of values education is being promoted. We argue below that such a degree of consensus is of significant interest given the diversity of the 4 countries considered in this article. The explanation that is given below emerges from the common legitimation of the personally responsible citizen. In each country the documentation on values education is heavily influenced by morality and personal integrity, emphasising the status quo and requiring students to adhere to certain core values that might be called valence values, such as equality, non-discrimination, tolerance. These may be influenced by traditional cultural values and correspond to ideological approaches applied by governments. Implementation is weakly defined and tends to be passive rather than pedagogically active. The emphasis on knowledge and understanding in essence avoids a justice-oriented position. The English curriculum refers to 'skills to think critically and debate political questions' but the rationale in part for students is: 'to enable them to manage their money on a day-to-day basis, and plan for future financial needs', returning to the economic, rather than social justification of this behaviour (Department for Education, 2013). The Spanish reference to understanding codes of conduct and concepts of

equality and non-discrimination, justice and human rights, and communicating in a constructive way and showing solidarity, could lead to opportunities for reflection and 'justice-oriented' citizenship, but there was no evidence that this would be likely, as the implementation strategies were absent (Darnton & Kirk, 2012). The formal curriculum in each of the countries lacks values education that promotes in young people any sort of critically positioned, politically oriented citizenship.

Conclusions

This research has involved an on-going dialogue about the nature of values and citizenship education across four countries. We have looked at documents from different perspectives and considering socio-economic, historical and political variations to analyse the ways that values espoused through education promote certain kinds of citizens. The three points we made above about the primacy of knowledge, the absence of guidance about implementation and the emphasis on what could be termed contextually relevant values, allows us to develop an argument about the adherence to the characterisation of values education in the form of a desire for personally-responsible citizens. There is a need to discuss the role of the school in education of values and the particular framing of values education, given the absence of evidence in any of the countries of a critical approach to values or citizenship education.

We would like to go further by concluding that we need more comparative work in this field. We are aware of at least some of the vast comparative literature about citizenship education and related matters (e.g., http://www.iea.nl/iccs). But we suggest the need for more work in light of the apparently similar approach to official statements about teaching values across the four countries. Despite the obvious differences between, say, a post-colonial power and a Confucian heritage socialist state, much of what had been

written in respective documents was, in many ways, similar. There are several possible explanations for this. We must acknowledge the limitations to our work. Simplistically, given that our analytical procedure involved a search for overlap and commonality it was, perhaps, not surprising that we found ourselves drawing attention to the same or similar things across the sample. Indeed, a small sample of countries and the restricted nature of work that focused only on documentation means further research is needed. But we do have a good deal of a certain sort of evidence for our argument that similarity is occurring across very varied contexts.

The documentation we have examined is itself part of a political process in which different audiences must be persuaded about - and incorporated to - the dominant ideology. This means that policy makers may perceive that an overarching commitment to the personally responsible citizen needs to be framed in ways that allow for broad acceptance through varied contextualisation. This raises the possibility of two theoretical perspectives that each hold creative tensions. First, we may be witnessing in our analysis of these documents about values and citizenship, indications of subjection. The official statements may be used to recognize the validity of competing discourses in which a person is "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge" (Foucault, 1982, p. 781). In other words, these documents may be interpreted to indicate the intentions of the authors but also to secure acceptance from those to whom they are directed. A reader of these documents is perhaps better persuaded of the worth of the official statement if they are phrased similarly to those published in other contexts, contain valence values and lack explanation. But this position also allows for a range of responses to the documentation rather than simple acceptance. Whilst wishing to avoid a naively

optimistic view of the nature of power we do wish to recognise Bhabha's (2004) point that a subject may be empowered through interpretation. The question remains whether readers are able to project a critical as well as conservative interpretation of this material. In part, this point connects with our tentative references earlier in this article to our sense of being influenced by Foucauldian discourse analysis. As such, we must accept the possibility of an unhelpfully circular argument. Secondly, and more expansively and, so, even more tentatively, we wish to suggest the possibility of these documents being read as what have been termed floating signifiers (Johnson, 2003). In other words, the authorities that have produced them from particular social and cultural contexts are interested in being able to portray the guidance as having a particular meaning. The power of those in authority to claim the right to establish meaning, is a potentially significant instrument in educational contexts. We wish to suggest that these documents are establishing a particular position and that the similarities across wide social, cultural and political contexts may be explained by a deliberate openness to a real – or, more likely, supposed - capacity of diverse audiences to find something of value in them. Unless these documents are researched in relation to the authors' intentions, the readers' interpretations and the impact on the education provided in specific contexts then we are left with the potentially dangerous possibility of the documents meaning whatever those in power choose them to mean. Further research in the form of empirical work with teachers and students is required.

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